

TALISIK

AN UNDERGRADUATE JOURNAL OF PHILOSOPHY



VOLUME XI: ISSUE NO. 1 ISSN: 2362-9452

TALISIK

An Undergraduate Journal of Philosophy

Volume 11, Number 1
August 2024

ISSN 2362-9452



KRITIKE: An Online Journal of Philosophy
Department of Philosophy
Faculty of Arts and Letters
University of Santo Tomas



COPYRIGHTS



All the research articles published by TALISIK are licensed under a Creative Commons Attribution-NonCommercial-NoDerivatives 4.0 International License.

TALISIK supports the Open Access Movement. Those who intend to copy and redistribute the articles published by the journal are free upon the condition that they cite the journal article or acknowledge the author.

Articles in the journal are not eligible for commercial purposes.

© Copyright TALISIK | ISSN 2362-9452 | talisik.journal@gmail.com | www.talisik.kritike.org

ABOUT THE COVER

The cover illustrates the University Belt in Manila, Philippines. It visualizes the concentration of educational institutions within the city. Inspired by Sloterdijk's concept of spheres (e.g., bubbles, globes, and foams), the image portrays the University Belt as a self-contained, yet relational interior, that is, a sphere where identity, culture, and community are formed. More specifically, the red circle signifies the sphere of influence of education in the area, while the grid of streets and districts reflects the dynamic interaction between learning and urban life. Yet, this singular sphere invites introspection: can these educational institutions move beyond isolation to form new, connected spheres that resist fragmentation and instead, foster greater solidarity across diverse cultures?

TALISIK: An Undergraduate Journal of Philosophy, 11:1 (August 2024)

Cover design by Mr. Timothy John C. Santiago

ABOUT THE JOURNAL

TALISIK: An Undergraduate Journal of Philosophy is the laboratory undergraduate journal of *Kritike: An Online Journal of Philosophy* (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” [Keeness] and “Saliksik” [Search]. **TALISIK** then means “Katalasan ng isip na umunawa ng anuman” [Keeness 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.

EDITORIAL BOARD

Editor-in-Chief

Ms. Carla Jane C. Zitazate | University of Santo Tomas

Managing Editor

Mr. John Aaron Gabriel M. Borlas | University of Santo Tomas

Associate Editors

Mr. Aiverson Hans N. Gaffud | University of Santo Tomas

Ms. Christine Julianne Genovea | University of Santo Tomas

Ms. Mary Francine Denisse O. Lumantao | University of Santo Tomas

Mr. Sean Patrick G. Mercado | University of Santo Tomas

Mr. Joshua Andrei P. Pascua | University of Santo Tomas

Layout Editor

Mr. Christian James V. Tallud | University of Santo Tomas

Faculty Lead

Ms. Paula Nicole C. Eugenio, Ph.D. Cand. | University of Santo Tomas

ADVISORY BOARD

- † Dr. Romualdo E. Abulad | University of Santo Tomas
Mr. Ranier Carlo V. Abengaña, M.A. | University College Dublin
Dr. Jove Jim S. Aguas | University of Santo Tomas
Dr. Fleurdeliz Altez - Albela | University of Santo Tomas
Dr. Marella Ada Mancenido - Bolaños | University of Santo Tomas
Dr. Paolo A. Bolaños | University of Santo Tomas
Dr. Jovito V. Cariño | University of Santo Tomas
Mr. Jessie Joshua Z. Lino, M.A. | University of Santo Tomas
Dr. Roland Theuas D.S. Pada | University of Santo Tomas
Dr. Anton Heinrich L. Rennesland | University of Santo Tomas
Dr. Rainel S. Reyes | University of Santo Tomas

LETTER FROM THE EDITORIAL BOARD

Artificial Intelligence (AI) continues to advance rapidly, which has raised concerns about its potential to disrupt traditional practices and values. While AI has demonstrated its growing prominence across various industries (e.g., medicine, science, and finance), its role in academic institutions has sparked significant and often controversial debates. In particular, generative AI offers powerful tools in the humanities and social sciences, with the potential to significantly enrich learning experiences. However, its uncritical adoption risks the commodification of knowledge that undermines creative and critical dimensions of education. Thus, the use of generative AI in research presents pressing challenges, such as students using AI to generate essays without attribution, along with other new forms of academic dishonesty. This is why TALISIK reaffirms its commitment to human-centered philosophical engagement. Rooted in “Talas” (Keeness) and “Saliksik” (Search), the journal upholds its name as a call to the “keenness of the mind to understand anything” and the “in-depth and intelligent search for meaning.”

By fostering critical thinking and meaningful discourse, TALISIK seeks to promote a deeper, more reflective approach with a greater emphasis on human-centered philosophical engagement in philosophical inquiry. Therefore, the editorial team is pleased to announce that the present volume consists of ten journal articles, divided into two sections: the special section and the regular section. The special section features work submitted by alumni and published by students of philosophy from the University of Santo Tomas. Initially intended as a special issue for the 10th anniversary, the editorial board has decided to incorporate this special section in the 11th issue instead of publishing it as a separate special issue. The special section includes two alumni works that were written during their undergraduate studies and presented at various conferences. Additionally, student-written papers in this section revolve around pressing philosophical issues such as partisanship, absurdity, and the status of Filipino philosophy. All articles, with the exception of those by alumni, underwent the same editorial and review process. Meanwhile, the regular section presents the accepted manuscripts for the 11th issue. It covered a diverse range of philosophical themes, including ethics of technology, comedy and aesthetics, Husserlian Subjectivity, and two articles on the philosophy for/with children.

We, the Editorial Board of TALISIK 2024 – 2025, present this current volume as our contribution to the continuing commitment of the journal to cultivating a culture of research among undergraduate students of philosophy, especially in light of the recent challenges posed by AI use. To be more specific, we convey our sincerest gratitude to the guidance of our mentors, namely, Ms. Paula Nicole C. Eugenio, Ph.D. Cand. and Mr. Anton Heinrich L. Rennesland, Ph.D., for their unwavering support and encouragement throughout all of the editorial board’s endeavors. Likewise, we are indebted to Prof. Marella Ada Mancenido-Bolaños, Ph.D., the Chair of the Department of Philosophy, for her solicitude and generosity, which she has extended to the editors in various ways. We extend our heartfelt thanks to all the reviewers for their time and expertise in ensuring the quality of the manuscripts. We also wish to congratulate all the contributors whose works are featured in this issue. Lastly, marking the end of her final year with TALISIK, the Editor-in-Chief would like to personally thank the students who supported the journal over the past three years through their submissions and

participation in the activities organized by TALISIK. Special thanks are extended to the professors, especially those mentioned above, whose kindness and generosity provided stronger resolve and inspiration to persevere and continue her work. Most importantly, the Editor-in-Chief expresses gratitude to the editorial team, whose hard work, despite the limited time, filled this small group with excitement, and whose shared laughter will remain a cherished memory in her heart.

While TALISIK does not reject the possible role of AI in philosophical discourse, it firmly advocates for its transparent, ethical, and critically informed use. The recently organized *Dalumataan 2025* roundtable discussions echo this concern: AI may support certain aspects of scholarly work, such as organizing sources, checking grammar, or generating content, but it must never substitute the intellectual labor, creative thinking, and reflective inquiry that are essential to philosophical writing. As the journal upholds, meaningful scholarship arises from the collaboration between author, reviewer, and editor, and not from the use of AI to enhance accuracy and efficiency. The very heart of research and academic publishing is this human collaboration grounded in dialogue, critique, and care. While the journal upholds the importance of research quality, it values honest research even more. With this, TALISIK also questions the broader academic emphasis on perfection, precision, and efficiency that drives the misuse of technological tools. In a system that equates flawless writing with intellectual value, we risk losing sight of the philosophical endeavor as one of ongoing questioning and dialectical exchange among peers. In this light, TALISIK champions a research culture that values integrity over automation, and depth over convenience—where the imperfections of human thought are not weaknesses to be corrected, but invitations for dialogue and discovery.

The Editorial Board 2024 – 2025

ABOUT THE CONTRIBUTORS

JOSEPH VINCENT A. CASTA recently obtained his degree in Bachelor of Arts in Philosophy at Bicol University - College of Social Sciences and Philosophy. He also dedicates himself to writing. Inspired by the Philosophy of St. Thomas Aquinas introduced during his Secondary and Tertiary Education, he sought its revival in modern-day contexts, particularly in the technological revolution. One of his pursuits to such aim is the collaboration of this undergraduate synthesis paper “Conscientious Co-determination: A Heideggerian and Wojtyla's Ethics of Technology.”

JUSTIN ANJELO A. CLEMENTE is a senior BA Philosophy student at the University of the Philippines Los Baños. His philosophical interests include feminist social epistemology, philosophy for children, and popular culture. He presented his papers “‘Namimilosopo ka nal’: Filipino Children as Victims of Testimonial Quieting” at the 1st Philippine Society of Education and Philosophy Conference and “Community of Inquiry Must Not Be Impartial: A Proposal for the Partiality to the Culturally Marginalized” at the 2024 International Conference on Philosophy of Education and Values Education. During his sophomore year, he served as the Vice President of the UPLB Sophia Circle, the premier socio-academic philosophy organization at UPLB. Currently, he is writing his undergraduate thesis on children suffering from epistemic oppression using Kristie Dotson’s framework.

RICKY M. DALISAY III finished his undergraduate degree in Philosophy at the University of Santo Tomas in 2024 and is currently pursuing his juris doctor degree at the Ateneo de Manila University. His research interests include existentialism, especially that of Camus and Nietzsche, as well as ethics and political philosophy. Outside philosophy and law, his interest revolves around automobiles, motorcycles, mechanical watches, food, and outdoor activities.

JOHN AUSTIN L. GAN is an undergraduate philosophy student in the University of Santo Thomas. His research interests include: Stoicism, Existentialism, Ethics, Virtue Ethics, and Critical Theory. Mr. Gan is currently working on his undergraduate thesis entitled “Embracing the Mundane: The Simple Life in light of Epictetus’ Stoicism.” He was a varsity debater of the Thomasian Debate Council, the president of Parthenon Debate Society, the Vice-President of the PAMIDKAN: HUMSS alliance of Oriental Mindoro National High School. Currently, he is the current president of the UST Concilium Philosophiae.

DOMINIC BAUTISTA GONZALES is a graduating student at Adamson University–St. Vincent School of Theology, where he earned distinction for his thesis entitled “*From Panopticon to Artificial Intelligence: Examining the Normalizing Role of AI Technology in Contemporary Society through Michel Foucault's Philosophy.*” He also served in various leadership roles within the student councils. Prior to this, he

studied at Immaculate Conception Seminary and Immaculate Conception Major Seminary in Guiguinto, Bulacan. He is a major contributor to *The Mabini Review*, the official journal of the Polytechnic University of the Philippines. Currently, he serves as an Administrator and Teacher at Mary the Queen School of Malolos.

EMMANUELLE O. JASARENO recently finished her Bachelor of Arts in Philosophy as Summa Cum Laude at the University of the Philippines-Diliman. She was a UP Philosophy for Children Society member for four years, three of which were as a part of the Executive Committee. Emmanuelle is now the Learning and Development Manager of Philosophical Inquiry in Schools Initiative Philippines, Inc. She has facilitated and organized multiple programs and projects that include Communities of Inquiry with students and children of different ages in different communities. Her research interests include Philosophy for Children, Values Education, Ethics, Philosophy of Law, and Community of Inquiry.

JOVITO M. MANRIQUE V recently obtained his degree in Bachelor of Arts in Philosophy at Bicol University - College of Social Sciences and Philosophy. Once undergoing intellectual and spiritual formation under the guidance of the Dominicans through the Dominican Lay Fraternities of the Philippine Province, he sought to advocate faith and reason in his college academic pursuit. Inspired by the Scholastic Tradition, he sought to dedicate his research interest as a potential contribution to the Creative Revival of Neothomistic Philosophy in the Modern times to which one of them is this abstract from his undergraduate synthesis paper. The same paper received recognitions, specifically being 2nd place in the College Research and Development Forum.

PATRICK ANDRE C. MENCIAS, M.A. is currently an Instructor at the Department of Language and Literature, Far Eastern University, Manila, Philippines. He is a graduate of AB Philosophy from the University of Santo Tomas (2019), his MA in Philosophy Cum Laude (2022) in the Graduate School of the same university. His research interests include Phenomenology, Emmanuel Levinas, Florentino Hornedo. Patrick Andre can be contacted at andre.mencias@gmail.com or patrickandre.mencias.gs@ust.edu.ph

SEAN PATRICK G. MERCADO began his philosophical studies when he pursued his education at the Mother of Good Counsel Seminary in 2020 until 2023. It was here where he was greatly influenced by the works and thoughts of Fr. Roque Ferriols. In 2023, he transferred to the University of Santo Tomas to continue his philosophical endeavors. Currently, he is a senior undergraduate student in the said university finishing his degree in Bachelor of Arts in Philosophy. His research interests focus on Bertrand Russell, Filipino Philosophy, Ethics, Fr. Roque Ferriols, and Feminism.

JOSHUA ANDREI P. PASCUA is a second-year undergraduate student at the University of Santo Tomas – Manila in the AB Philosophy Program. He is currently an Associate Editor of TALISIK: An Undergraduate Journal of Philosophy. Recently, he has presented a paper at the *Dalumataan 2025*. His research interests include phenomenology, Filipino Philosophy, social and political philosophy, and ethics.

ANTON HEINRICH L. RENNESLAND, Ph.D. teaches at the Department of Philosophy and the Ecclesiastical Faculty of Philosophy of the University of Santo Tomas (UST), Manila. Besides teaching, he serves as the Director of the Research Center of Culture, Arts, and the Humanities, as one of the managing editors of *Kritike: An Online Journal of Philosophy* of UST Department of Philosophy, and as the associate editor of *Unitas: An Online Journal of Advanced Research in Literature, Culture, and Society* of the UST Faculty of Arts and Letters. He has presented at numerous conferences in Europe, Asia, and Australia, and has a publication list ranging from articles in various local and international journals to book chapters with Routledge and Cambridge Scholars on his fields of interest: Friedrich Nietzsche, Peter Sloterdijk, Urbanism, and Comparative/Multicultural Philosophy.

FRANZ JOSEPH C. YOSHIY, M.A. II finished his Bachelor of Arts in Philosophy (*Magna Cum Laude*, 2017) at the University of Santo Tomas in Manila, where he also completed his Master of Arts in Philosophy (*Cum Laude*, 2023). At present, he is an Assistant Professor of Philosophy at the Department of History and Philosophy of the College of Social Sciences of the University of the Philippines Baguio. He also served as one of the Associate Editors of *Talisik: An Undergraduate Journal of Philosophy* (ISSN) 2362-9452 from A.Y. 2016-2017, 2019-2020. Among his publications include: “Fresh Hope for a Broken World: Gabriel Marcel’s Phenomenology of Liberation” in *Talisik: An Undergraduate Journal of Philosophy* Vol. II, No. 1 (2015): 112-119. “Levinas on Socio-Political Responsibility and Beyond: An Interview with Dr. Leovino Ma. Garcia” in *Talisik: An Undergraduate Journal of Philosophy* Vol. IV, No. 1 (May 2017): 133-135.; and “Discerning Différance in Jacques Derrida’s Ethics of Hospitality” in *Kritike: An Online Journal of Philosophy* Vol. 11, No. 2 (December 2017): 198-221. He is also a student-member at the *Internationale Erich-Fromm-Gesellschaft* (International Erich Fromm Society) based in Tübingen, Germany.

TALISIK: An Undergraduate Journal of Philosophy

Volume 11, Number 1 August 2024

Special Section

Thomasian Alumni – Undergraduate Works

- 1** RICKY M. DALISAY III
A Camusian Archetype: Embracing Absurdity with Meursault
- 12** PATRICK ANDRE C. MENCIAS
Responsibility and *Pagmamahal*: Relating Levinas' Ethical Responsibility to Florentino Hornedo's *Pagmamahal* and *Pagmumura*
- 26** ANTON HEINRICH L. RENNESLAND
***Ren* as *Pouvoir* in *Wu Lun*: The Five Power-Relations**
- 36** FRANZ JOSEPH C. YOSHIY II
Using Useless Words: Zhuang Zi on the Problem of Language

Thomasian Students – Undergraduate Works

- 43** JOHN AUSTIN L. GAN
Partisanship as Moral Duty: An Agent-Centered Deontological Analysis
- 58** SEAN PATRICK G. MERCADO
From Theory to Activity: Revisiting the Status of Filipino Philosophy
- 69** JOSHUA ANDREI P. PASCUA
From Naivety to Transcendence: The Bracketing of Life-World and Subjectivity

Regular Section

- 83** JOSEPH VINCENT A. CASTA & JOVITO M. MANRIQUE V
Conscientious Co-Determination: A Heideggerian and Wojtylan Ethics of Technology
- 107** JUSTIN ANJELO A. CLEMENTE
“Namimilosopo ka na!”: Filipino Children as Victims of Testimonial Quieting

- 118** DOMINIC BAUTISTA GONZALES
Contemporary Comedy on Trial: A Perennial Question on Aesthetics
- 136** EMMANUELLE O. JASARENO
The Lipman-Sharp Model of Community of Philosophical Inquiry and the 2022 Philippine Elections

A Camusian Archetype: Embracing Absurdity with Meursault

Ricky M. Dalisay III

Ateneo de Manila University | ricky3dalisay@gmail.com

Abstract: This paper aims to expound on Camus' progressive philosophy through Meursault's power as an archetype emphasizing Camus' engagement with the absurd. The analysis focuses on Camus' specific works *The Myth of Sisyphus* and *The Stranger*. The selection of books is based on the internal relationship of the outputs, as the works resonate with Camus' philosophical development. This paper will be guided by the question, "How does Meursault display the individualistic approach to the absurd in a world that seeks meaning?" Specifically, the paper aims to uncover the reasons behind Meursault's persistence amidst the nonsense. The discussion is organized into three parts: First, the introduction discusses Camus from his first troika, particularly by exploring Meursault's attitude toward the world, establishing a foundation for interpreting his character. Second, the paper compares Meursault to Sisyphus, the embodiment of an absurd hero, to highlight the differences in their embrace of the absurd. This comparison sheds light on what defines a Camusian archetype and the significance of Camus' series of the absurd. Through these discussions, the paper elucidates a description and/or interpretation of the cycle of resolve in Meursault's character, thereby responding to the challenge of the absurd. Finally, the conclusion argues that Meursault, as a Camusian archetype, symbolizes an individualistic embrace of the absurd and happiness.

Keywords: *absurd, ethics of quantity, pessimism, solipsism, transcendence*

Introduction

Is there any meaning in this world? If there is, how can I find it? If there is none, should I create it or should I just embrace the meaninglessness of this world? Alternatively, should I attempt to take my own existence if living has no meaning or point? These questions have likely troubled the minds of some or may soon set foot on others, yet these questions are not ordinary, even if they arise in the typical day-to-day reflections of individuals. Rather, these are the fundamental existential questions that probe into the very nature of life and meaning. Albert Camus offers a unique perspective on these questions. However, it is important to note that while Camus is often associated with the existentialist movement, Camus did not see himself as an existentialist—often expressing surprise at being linked with the movement. Nevertheless, those associations are based in Camus' philosophy of the absurd. However, Camus does not offer a sense of comfort to these existential questions; he does not offer a blanket of text that we can hide.¹ Instead, I argue that Camus advocates for an engaging and "active" approach to life. His philosophy calls for confrontation rather than

¹ Louis Hudon, "The Stranger and the Critics," *Yale French Studies*, no. 25 (1960): 59–64.

escape, a battle with the absurd even when the result may be futile—a continuous rebellion against meaninglessness. For Camus, the act of resisting, even in the face of inevitable loss, is itself a victory.

Camus asserts that individuals would go far beyond in search of meaning. At the end of it, the world will not respond nor cater to our desire for meaning. Life inherently has no meaning to give or is indifferent to this search. Indeed, the meaninglessness of the world has profound consequences on a person's quality of life. For example, the act of imposing meaning upon an indifferent world is not just a common but fundamental aspect of human existence. This, in turn, affects one's motivation and plays a significant factor in how one lives and how one may want to continue living. With this, Camus offers a perspective in encountering an “existential crisis” or traversing the absurdity of existence. He believes that people must confront life and its uncertainties head-on by continuously pursuing the things that ignite passion and curiosity, without the need to impose meaning on all of those things. This act of defiance, which Camus calls “rebellion,” is not a rejection of absurdity but an acceptance of it—living in full awareness of the world's indifference yet choosing to persist.² For Camus, the meaninglessness of life does not warrant surrender but rather demands active engagement. He believes that when we focus on giving meaning to everything, we risk being the persecutors of our own lives.

Moreover, for Camus, it is neither a leap of faith nor physical suicide that is the solution to overcoming the absurd life. Both, in his view, are forms of escapism—ways of avoiding rather than confronting the problem. Instead of seeking an escape, Camus challenges individuals to face absurdity directly. Thus, he presents two choices: either embrace the absurd and live despite it or escape from it. Camus extensively advocates for the former. His works suggest that humans must actively rebel against the absurd by living with full awareness of its presence, rather than retreating into illusions or despair. Life becomes truly fulfilling when a person, despite the absurdities of life, chooses to rebel against it—not by seeking an ultimate meaning but by asserting one's existence through action. Camus' method asserts that people can grasp suffering, uncertainty, and absurdity in their rawest form and genuinely overcome them. To illustrate this philosophy, Camus introduces the character of Meursault in *The Stranger*, a figure through whom he explores his early existential thought. Meursault's journey reflects Camus' evolving ideas on absurdity, morality, and the confrontation with death: “This man, gentlemen, this man is intelligent... He knows how to answer. Knows the value of words. And no one can say that he acted without realizing what he was doing.”³ This line, spoken by the prosecutor during Meursault's trial, reveals how society perceives him. He is not judged merely for his crime but for his detachment from societal norms. Meanwhile, Meursault himself states: “He said the truth was that I didn't have a soul and that nothing human, not one of the moral principles that govern men's hearts, was within my reach.”⁴ Here, Meursault similarly acknowledges his alienation from conventional morality, reinforcing his role as an archetype of the absurd hero. These two quotations above can be found in the latter part of *The Stranger*, where Meursault is on trial for murder. Yet, more than his crime, he is condemned for his refusal to conform—to feign grief, to show remorse, to abide by society's expectations of meaning and morality.

Therefore, to fully grasp how Meursault embraces absurdity and what his character represents in Camus' philosophy in *The Stranger*, I will explore his attitude toward the world, allowing to showcase Meursault's personality and reasoning. However, it is crucial to note that Meursault's confrontation

² Albert Camus, *The Rebel: An Essay on Man in Revolt* (New York: Vintage, 2012), 22.

³ Albert Camus, *The Stranger* (New York: Vintage, 1988), 100.

⁴ *Ibid.*, 101.

with the absurd is not static but develops throughout the novel. Just as Camus underwent intellectual growth, evident in the evolution of his works, so too does Meursault's perception of death, the value of life, and the experience of absurdity shift as the plot unfolds. Most importantly, this paper will focus on what Meursault signifies as an archetype within Camus' first series of philosophical works, establishing what it means to embrace the absurd. To situate this discussion further, I will discuss Meursault within the broader dilemma Camus grapples with in his first series, namely, the problem of solipsism. I argue that Meursault embodies this philosophical tension, offering a lens through which we can examine both the limitations and the potential of an absurdist worldview. Understanding this context is essential, as it will be explored in the following sections of this paper.

Meursault's Attitude Toward the World

This part of the paper serves as an introduction as well as an analysis of Meursault's character. It aims to provide insight into how Meursault embodies Camus' notion of the absurd hero and offers readers a foundation for understanding what a Camusian archetype is—although this paper is limited to the character of Meursault. Meursault's early attitude can be expressed even before the readers truly get to know him; they can quickly judge him from the novel's iconic opening lines in *The Stranger*: "Maman died today. Or yesterday maybe, I don't know."⁵ As Meursault addresses her, his detached tone immediately signals his unconventional outlook on life. It is as if he does not pay enough attention to how or when his mother died. His indifference is not limited to his words; his actions—both before and after the burial—underscore his emotional detachment. Unlike those around him, who are visibly grieving, Meursault's attitude triggers others at his mother's wake, and this discomfort will only intensify as the story goes on. This explains Meursault's detached attitude from socially held norms and values; he is unbothered by them.

This attitude extends to his relationship with Marie, whom he meets shortly after his mother's death. For many, pursuing romance so soon after bereavement might seem inappropriate, but Meursault's unpretentious personality and indifference to social expectations allow him to act without such considerations. Therefore, it is not surprising that he got into this situation with Marie, even if others might think that he should still be grieving. At face value, his relationship with Marie appears to be founded on physical pleasure rather than emotional depth. However, when Marie asked him about marriage, he responds: "I explained to her that it didn't really matter and that if she wanted to, we could get married. Besides, she was the one who was doing the asking and all I was saying was yes. Then she pointed out that marriage was a serious thing. I said, 'No.'"⁶ At first glance, this exchange might suggest that Meursault is careless or indifferent toward commitment, but a deeper reading reveals that he simply does not subscribe to the same values as others. For him, the societal weight of marriage is arbitrary, another construct without inherent meaning.

Meursault lives with a sense of expediency, that is, he lived his life to experience everything in the world and not bound by societal expectations. His purpose was to try and uncover everything the world has to offer, not to be the best on everything. This might seem ironic given his reluctance to be

⁵ Camus, *The Stranger*, 101.

⁶ *Ibid.*, 41.

assigned to a better job.⁷ At this point, however, Meursault is still open to anything as his character evolves throughout the novel, encountering situations that gradually expand his awareness of the absurd. Some argue that Meursault's character is seen as detached from socially held norms and values that may seem important to an individual's life, like love, friendship, family, and the value of life itself.⁸ While I agree with their characterization, I contend that Meursault is not like any other nor tries to be like others; in his own way, he is free yet still trapped in an absurd society—and we have trapped him. Meursault was trapped in the judgmental gaze and unfair decision of those who did not understand him. Kumar and Dr. Pandey observe that:

Meursault being an existential hero to the core, observes the world through his five senses. He enjoys all those things which are connected with senses. So the abstract ideas like love, sympathy, compassion and attachment has no place in his life. And typical of an existential character, he is a detached observer and he seldom has an interaction with others.⁹

This observation reinforces the idea that Meursault is a stranger in society, not simply because he is indifferent but because there are no others who behave and think like him. Meursault's attitude is unapologetic and unbothered; societal norms do not pressure him, rather it is society that feels pressured by his existence. His presence challenges their deeply held values, and in response, they attempt to contain him, to bind him to their moral framework. In this sense, Meursault knows that the moment he embraces the absurdity of life, it is him against the world.

Furthermore, Meursault had lost his ambition due to the struggles of his past and his early concept of the inevitability of Death. This makes him have an accepting attitude about his situation, not because he is comforted by the situation he is in, but because he is contented with what he has. Meursault believed that at the end of the day, whether he got a better job or not, he would still suffer, and nothing significant would change. Part of this attitude is his inclination to focus on the present and not mind the future. This follows his absurdist view, that regardless of his choices, the world will remain indifferent to human needs. As Hornedo puts it, Meursault disregards both the past and the future because he recognizes the world's fundamental indifference to human needs.¹⁰

Moreover, for Meursault, transcendence is an illusion, nor should people believe and hope that there is. For him, it is unreasonable to believe in the value of faith. He states: "Since we're all going to die, it's obvious that when and how does not matter."¹¹ This means that he was ready to die. He did not fear death. As a result, he had no regard for being converted or having faith in the afterlife. This relationship brings out his non-conformity to the mode of transcendence or having faith in the afterlife and divine beings. In the journal written by Macharia, she concludes that Meursault's rejection of the transcendence stems primarily from those who submit to philosophical suicide or leap of faith. They waste their lives trying to relieve themselves of the responsibility to tackle the absurd and in this compromise, they lived their lives submitting to socially held norms that lead to the persecution of

⁷ Riley Keaton Imlay, "The Importance of Perspective in The Stranger and The Myth of Sisyphus: The Absurdist's Need for Conscious Rebellion," *Capstones and Honors Theses*, West Virginia University 7, no. 1 (2018): 10-12.

⁸ Rakesh Kumar and Dr. Sanjay Pandey, "The Stranger's Meursault: An Epitome of an Existential Hero," *Turkish Online Journal of Qualitative Inquiry* 12, no. 3 (May 2021): 4848-4849.

⁹ *Ibid.*

¹⁰ See Florentino H. Hornedo, "Albert Camus's Literary Perception of Contemporary Philosophic Problems," in *Pagpapakatao and Other Essays in Contemporary Philosophy and Literature of Ideas* (UST Publishing House, 2002).

¹¹ Camus, *The Stranger*, 114.

others.¹² Shobeiri further expands on this by stating that Meursault represents a man who fully lives within the absurd, one who believes in what is already known and can be felt. In fact, in the earlier part of his story, he does not submit to socially held ideas and acts mainly based on his senses.¹³

On the topic of his attitude towards his trial, if we are basing morality on the motivation or intent of a person, then it is difficult to say that all of his actions are good or bad since he lacks motive in everything that he does. For Meursault, these actions either seem insignificant to his life or simply do not evoke any feeling in him. This means that things or events will not significantly affect him or change his course of life such as his marriage with Marie, his lack of ambition when he was offered better work, and when he killed the Arab. This follows his absurdist view that no matter what choice he makes in his life, the world will still be indifferent to it. Alternatively, he lacks the consciousness that some of his acts are immoral or will lead to catastrophe, like when he helps Raymond and does not defend himself during his trial. So, when he was on trial, Meursault chose not to defend himself against the unfair trial and judgment of society, even if he had the urge to do so since it would mean submitting to those who persecute him. He could have lied during the cross-examination and saved himself, but he remained silent rather than cater to a court that was more interested in its own narrative than in the truth—that silence is his way of revolting against the absurd. In their study, Saadanm asserts that: “Meursault refuses to lie, thus he doesn’t take part in the game... *The Stranger* tells the story of a person who, without any heroic pretensions, is willing to die in the service of the truth without hesitation.”¹⁴ This supports the idea that Meursault’s attachment to the truth makes those who are jealous or bitter about him. In another journal written by Heiji Li, Li suggests that Meursault’s attitude is more of an Anti-Hero in its modern-day definition because he does not want to get involved in the beliefs of others about transcendence, nor could he put himself into pessimism.¹⁵ The simple fact that he is honest about what he wants and what he thinks is beyond people’s comprehension. As an anti-hero, he displeases what others please; he does not desire to satisfy the ego of others, as compared to heroes who please the people. Meursault is the symbol that the people need in his story in order to realize that not all that society dictates is the truth, yet they reject him.

Equally important is that when Meursault is on trial and in prison, he is able to reflect on his life and the mundane routines that people subject themselves to, which initiates his consciousness toward his embrace of the absurd. He accepts that life must be lived in revolt against the meaninglessness of the world, which, even if humans cannot completely overcome it, should still be challenged without resorting to transcendence or pessimism. If it gets the best of him, this mundaneness will cause anguish and frustration, leading to an unhappy life. Nonetheless, his attitude is not like others. Meursault was able to grasp the nature of living in an absurd world. That is why he was like that towards the world. Meursault’s outlook on the world helps him embrace the absurdity of life, and for him, it is necessary to live in the present moment, for there is no afterlife—the only certainty is death. Thus, for Meursault, what truly matters is our immediate experiences. However,

¹² Milkah N. Macharia, “The Incomprehensibility of Life: An Analysis of Albert Camus's the Stranger,” *International Journal of Philosophy* 1, no. 1 (2022): 69-77.

¹³ See Ashkan Shobeiri, “Meursault, an Absurd Happy Man,” *Australian Journal of Basic and Applied Sciences* 7, no. 2 (2013): 838-839.

¹⁴ Hayder Saadanm and Al-Hasani, Hayder, “Existentialism and Absurdity in Albert Camus’s “The Stranger”, Psychological Study,” *American Research Journal of Humanities & Social Science* 6, no. 5 (2023): 17.

¹⁵ Hejie Li, “Analysis of the “anti-hero” image of Camus's characters,” *Journal of Education, Humanities and Social Sciences* 7 (2023): 280-283.

what does ‘essential’ mean for Meursault? If he has a detached attitude towards those that society commonly hold as necessary, then what does he value? What is essential for Meursault is his realization of the absurdity of life and his belief that only happiness can alleviate it. Meursault does not mind the struggle that he faces as long as he does not submit himself to philosophical suicide because, for him, it is just a form of comfort to those who cannot embrace the absurdity of life.

Camus problematizes the concept of solipsism in the first series, which is embodied by the character of Meursault. Solipsism in philosophy is linked to the idea that a person lives only by themselves and can only know themselves.¹⁶ Others have tried to argue that in their analysis, Meursault is driven more by his sense of pleasure than by rationalizing a meaningless world.¹⁷ However, this paper proceeds using Camus’ ethics of quantity. Camus asserts that it is because of the absurdity of life that our existence remains uncertain. When our life is uncertain, we may die randomly; what matters is not the quality but the quantity of living. However, this is not a form of hedonism that advocates doing all things that pleasure someone. As Hochberg explains it:

The lucid man will not kill himself or another, since the maintaining of the absurd condition weighs equally against suicide and murder. This imposes a limitation on the enjoyment of life and avoids the nihilism implicit in the ethic of quantity. Likewise, one’s freedom is limited by the absolute value of life. Hence, this second value, freedom, is subordinate to the first, life. Even so, it, in turn, provides a further limitation on the way one lives one’s life. The lucid man does not interfere with the “legitimate” freedom of others. Thus, the lucid man becomes the moral man, and out of absurdity emerges morality.¹⁸

This means that because of our consciousness about the lives of others, our actions are naturally limited by moral considerations, that is, there are certain boundaries that cannot be crossed. In Meursault’s case, his criminal case is a representation of what can happen if someone is not conscious enough of others’ existence. This does not mean he should be acquitted, but it offers a lens through which we can interpret his behavior.

In Ruan’s paper, Camus backs that the absurdity of life takes away the things we qualify as necessary; however, it does not take away the number of things or experiences that we have had.¹⁹ In the same paper, Ruan also mentions that

This explains how at the end of *The Stranger*, Meursault can feel “ready to start life all over again,” even though his execution is imminent. By being acutely aware of the absurdity of his unfolding existence, he affirms his freedom, the fact that he determines the quantity of his own duration. He does all of this, in spite of that fact that he does not have much time left.²⁰

This ethical framework does not prioritize who has the most achievements or who is the best among the rest in terms of numbers or statistics. As Sadler describes it, using a sports metaphor, his philosophy is not about “career points” or “home runs” but rather about how one engages with life

¹⁶ Encyclopedia Britannica Online, s.v. “Existentialism,” accessed October 24, 2024, <https://www.britannica.com/topic/existentialism>.

¹⁷ Riley Keaton Imlay, “The Importance of Perspective in The Stranger and The Myth of Sisyphus: The Absurdist’s Need for Conscious Rebellion,” *Capstones and Honors Theses, West Virginia University* 7, no. 1 (2018): 18.

¹⁸ Herbert Hochberg, “Albert Camus and the Ethic of Absurdity,” *Ethics* 75, no. 2 (1965): 87–102.

¹⁹ Thomas Ruan, “Absurd Time: Understanding Camus’ Quantitative Ethics Through Bergsonian Duration,” *Episteme* 26 (2015): 7.

²⁰ *Ibid.*, 12.

itself.²¹ It is unlike any other ethical system where the holiest in society gets to be crowned and sanctified. Needless to say, this ethics of quantity is one perspective that best represents Meursault's attitude in *The Stranger*, which reflects Camus' philosophy. Camus' discussion of the ethics of quantity appears in *The Myth of Sisyphus*, and the reason it resonates closely with Meursault is that it is still within the same philosophical trajectory as that of *The Stranger*. Finally, Meursault does not know when he will die. As a matter of fact, he views the "when" of his death as irrelevant. So, he lives to experience things, and that is one aspect that was also displayed in his relationship with others. Camus' idea of "lucidity" plays a crucial role here; it refers to an individual's ability to grasp their own life and make choices based on that understanding. Now, if we measure Meursault's philosophy only based on his relationship with others, we belong to what Camus criticizes about a society that focuses on material, standardized, and social norms.

Meursault Compared to Sisyphus

This section of the paper showcases what Meursault symbolizes in his story. It is also necessary that Meursault's character is compared to the figure commonly referred to as the "Absurd Hero," which is no other than Sisyphus himself. This comparison would lead to a more established understanding of Meursault as a Camusian archetype as opposed to the association of Sisyphus's character as the pinnacle of overcoming the absurd. In *The Myth of Sisyphus*, Camus discusses Sisyphus as the ultimate embodiment of the absurd condition. Sisyphus, condemned by the gods for his defiance, is sentenced to push a boulder up a mountain only for it to roll back down each time he reaches the summit.²² However, rather than resigning to despair, he accepts his fate and continues the task, embracing the struggle itself. Camus famously concludes that "one must imagine Sisyphus happy," highlighting that his defiance against the gods lies in his conscious acceptance of his fate.

Analyzing both of their characters in terms of their "embrace of the absurd," I argue that one is complete while the other is still progressing. Even if they both achieve the conclusion that acceptance is critical to happiness, their means and prior attitudes are different. On the one hand, Sisyphus's embrace of the absurd is unlike Meursault's; it is a level higher because Sisyphus' revolt against the Gods was seen and is observable at the peak of the story—where it matters the most—this exemplifies his commitment to live in accordance with his own values, affirming life despite its futility. On the other hand, Meursault was late in realizing the absurdity, that is, humans tend to submit and do nothing for the sake of persecuting others. Meursault embrace of the absurd is individualistic; he fails to communicate it in a way that others understand, which leads to his alienation and persecution. It is not his fault for acting that way, but his detachment from others hinders him from actively demonstrating what it means to embrace the absurdity of life, which is why people never understand him.

Moreover, his passivity towards the meaninglessness of the world is something that people in his story hate and something that we, too, the readers, must not follow. This passivity is contrary to the life-affirming value that Camus promotes. Unlike Sisyphus, who consciously revolts against his punishment, Meursault initially submits to his circumstances without resistance. It is only at the end

²¹ "Albert Camus, The Myth of Sisyphus | An Ethics of Quantity | Philosophy Core Concepts," YouTube video, posted by Gregory B. Sadler, November 20, 2020, accessed October 24, 2024, <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=Ye2qdtPHAz0>.

²² Albert Camus, *The Myth of Sisyphus* (New York: Vintage, 2018), 123.

of *The Stranger*, when he faces his execution, that he achieves a similar sense of acceptance. One piece of evidence that could sustain this disparity between the two characters in the same series is their chronology. *The Stranger* was published earlier than *The Myth of Sisyphus*. So even if they are in the same cycle, it might be that although their embrace of the absurd is both individualistic, they were not able to share it with others in their stories. For instance, Sisyphus is much closer in personality, mainly his life-affirming attitude, to Dr. Rieux from *The Plague* who will come after him and Meursault, if we are basing it in the series they belong. By that lens, Meursault and Sisyphus are very different at face value, from the way they handle the circumstances of their lives, how they want others to see them. Their means might be different, but they both showcase what Camus means to live in an absurd world or to be in a state of absurd living. With this, we can provide some of the similarities in their attitude and in their embrace of the absurd: Both Sisyphus and Meursault do not believe in a divine being. In the case of Sisyphus, he rejects the judgments of the gods. He also shies away from the idea of transcendence. Also, they both reject external sources of meaning such as myths. As a result, Meursault is hated by the people around him and Sisyphus is hated by the Gods. Furthermore, they experienced being judged; they are both judged, but the gods judge one, and the make-believe gods judge the other. Most importantly, they believe that they are the masters of their lives and that no one else can affect their lives more than their own acts. This is important because even if the people and the gods persecuted them, they were able to realize and accept the absurdity of life, which, for Camus, is the pinnacle of one's life. Their embrace of the absurd was the reason why they overcame their existential crisis during their time of torment, mainly when Meursault was in prison and when Sisyphus was sentenced to push a rock for eternity.

Lastly, they were able to find happiness at the end of their story. Meursault and Sisyphus lived in the “perpetual tension of rebellion,” and they were both in pursuit of happiness, which they found in the journey.²³ Meursault achieves a sense of peace before his execution, much like Sisyphus finds contentment in his eternal struggle. Meursault's embrace of the absurd made him realize that this world is indifferent, but that does not mean that people stay passive and just wait for their deaths. During his time in prison, he self-reflects on his current situation; a testament to this is Shobeiri's analysis of Meursault, in which it was stated in their work that “Therefore, a change gradually appears in a man who has got used to living in the present... He gradually learns to live without any physical stimulation. He is changing and is no longer captured by sensational factors. In this way, lack of freedom is no longer a problem for him. He admits that he is not unhappy.”²⁴ Life is meant to be lived; its absurdity is supposed to be experienced and embraced. At the same time, Sisyphus realizes that his suffering is enough to make him happy. He chose to be happy and accept that this is his life after all. No one can control its outcome but himself, even in the face of suffering.

Like Sisyphus, whose fate is grim as long as he hopes for something better, Meursault too cannot be happy if he hopes for an alternative. He must learn to accept his current situation in order to overcome his deep despair. Meursault, who symbolizes an absurd man, is able to find happiness, even in his cell, and to be stronger than his fate. According to AviSagi, Meursault, unlike alienated characters who suffer deeply, is at peace with himself.²⁵

²³ Thomas Marcellus Coskren, O.P., “Albert Camus and the Pursuit of Happiness,” *Dominicana Journal*. (2016): 202.

²⁴ Shobeiri, “Meursault, an Absurd Happy Man,” 841.

²⁵ *Ibid.*, 840.

The significance of this comparison and why it is worth adding to this paper is that *The Stranger* and *The Myth of Sisyphus* are under the same series, which Camus calls the cycle of the absurd. These two characters are the foundation of Camus' Philosophy about the absurdity of life; their contrast highlights the different situations in which a person can be subjected to the absurd and their unique response to it. Both Meursault's and Sisyphus's embrace of the absurd prevents them from resorting to either transcendence or pessimism, which is valid for every character that will be discussed in this paper. The difference only lies in their approach and the stages of that "embrace in the absurd" they were. Moreover, this comparison also proves that Sisyphus' embrace is more fortified than Meursault's embrace, which further proves that Meursault is the beginning of a series of characters that will tackle and embrace the absurdity of life. Sisyphus, in a way, represents the fully realized absurd hero, while Meursault's journey marks the initial steps toward this realization. In addition, there is also the play that belongs in the first series on Camus entitled *Caligula*, in which the plot portrays the wrong embrace in the absurd. Through this first series, Camus may be illustrating different ways individuals respond to the absurd—some, like Sisyphus, embracing it fully; others, like Meursault, only realizing it too late; and still others, like *Caligula*, distorting it into something destructive.

Conclusion

Meursault's philosophical self-examination leads him to reject societal conventions and instead embraces the world as it is regardless of the struggles. By the end of his journey, he is not unhappy; he had come to terms with himself. So, like Camus, Meursault undergoes intellectual development, but his transformation remains incomplete. Had he reached his realization earlier—before the weight of societal judgment bore down on him—he might have fought for his life. Yet, his story is meant to end where it does. He was not the absurd hero that some might expect, nor does he wholly embody Camus' doctrine of absurdism in life—or maybe he never had the chance.

I would like to state, not as a prescription, it is not necessary for anyone to become an "absurd hero" like Sisyphus or as honest as Meursault. Rather, what matters is recognizing how they personify the "embrace of the absurd." Their struggles are fictional, yet they reflect profound existential challenges. Meursault's realization of the absurd makes him unafraid of its inherent consequences. In *The Stranger*, living in the absurd does not guarantee that people will acknowledge someone like Meursault. Instead, they might try to persecute someone like him for their peculiar yet free attitude. His disinterest in conventional emotions and values makes him an enigma to society: some see him as a threat, while others might view his indifference as liberating. This means that either one will be persecuted like Meursault, or it will help someone realize the importance of such values which they kept themselves at a distance. Meursault navigates the absurdity of life by directing himself to a state where he was able to evaluate or re-evaluate his life. Due to that, he was able to realize the absurdity of everything while the importance of his life and the truth he clings to remain. Meursault's rebellion against the unfair and unreasonable society led to his death. However, his embrace of the absurd leads to the realization that his life is something to be valued in an absurd world—something that he does not do earlier in his story. In his words, I felt that I was happy and that I was happy again. For everything to be consummated, for me to feel less alone, I had only to wish that there be a large crowd of spectators the day of my execution and that they greet me with cries of hate.

With this, I assert that what Meursault projects as an archetype is an imagination of Camus of what it means to live in absurdity alone. His journey is a solitary one, but it highlights the significance of individual self-discovery in an indifferent world. As Camus' philosophy seems relatable, Meursault's

personality is not guaranteed to apply to the majority, and nothing is wrong with that. I would even argue that in our own reality, we might be the same person who tries to persecute Meursault. Nevertheless, the value that Meursault offers is crucial in understanding what embracing the absurd on an individual level signifies. Camus does not suggest that we should live like Meursault, nor do I argue that we should follow his example. Rather, Meursault serves as a mirror, forcing us to question whether we would condemn him or, perhaps, find echoes of ourselves in him.

Finally, Meursault, as a Camusian archetype, symbolizes happiness. This happiness is defined by the journey itself, not as an endpoint, but as a process. As such, in the pursuit of what will make him happy, he found his happiness. As cliché as it sounds, Meursault was able to find his happiness as his story was narrated. It is as essential as the air he breathes in his prison cell. This is what kept him sane in an insane world. His resolve at the end of the novel is not resignation but an affirmation: he is not unhappy. This sense of happiness sustains him in his embrace of the absurd, and vice versa; embracing the absurdity of life leads to his happiness. Meursault's character reminds us that to truly embrace absurdity, that one ought to live in the present moment, be true to oneself, and realize that relationships with others are crucial, as well as the virtues – even if they are, ultimately, meaningless – must still matter for someone to embrace the absurdity of life entirely. Even if such values are absurd concepts, knowing them will help someone not to resort to either transcendence or pessimism. What Meursault lacks in fully embracing the absurd is that he more than makes it up by being himself in a world that makes him forget who he is and dictates what he should be. He is neither a hero nor an anti-hero. He is Meursault, a Camusian Archetype who symbolizes the development of one's embrace in the absurd.

Bibliography

- Abbagnano, Nicola. "Existentialism." In Encyclopedia Britannica Online. Accessed October 24, 2024. <https://www.britannica.com/topic/existentialism>.
- Camus, Albert. *The Myth of Sisyphus*. New York: Vintage, 2018.
- . *The Stranger*. New York: Vintage, 1988.
- . *The Rebel: An Essay on Man in Revolt*. New York: Vintage, 2012.
- Gregory B. Sadler. "Albert Camus, The Myth of Sisyphus | An Ethics of Quantity | Philosophy Core Concepts." YouTube video, November 30, 2020. Accessed October 24, 2024. <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=Ye2qdtpHAz0>.
- Hochberg, Herbert. "Albert Camus and the Ethic of Absurdity." *Ethics* 75, no. 2 (1965): 87–102.
- Hornedo, Florentino H. "Albert Camus's Literary Perception of Contemporary Philosophic Problems." In *Pagpapakatao and Other Essays in Contemporary Philosophy and Literature of Ideas*. UST Publishing House, 2002.
- Hudon, Louis. "The Stranger and the Critics." *Yale French Studies*, no. 25 (1960): 59–64.
- Imlay, Riley Keaton. "The Importance of Perspective in The Stranger and The Myth of Sisyphus: The Absurdist's Need for Conscious Rebellion." *Capstones and Honors Theses, West Virginia University* 7, no. 1 (2018): 1-24.
- Kumar, Rakesh, and Dr. Sanjay Pandey. "The Stranger's Meursault: An Epitome of an Existential Hero." *Turkish Online Journal of Qualitative Inquiry* 12, no. 3 (May 2021): 4845-4850.
- Li, Hejie. "Analysis of the "anti-hero" image of Camus's characters." *Journal of Education, Humanities and Social Sciences* 7, no. 1 (2023): 280-283.
- Macharia, Milkah N. "The Incomprehensibility of Life: An Analysis of Albert Camus's the Stranger." *International Journal of Philosophy* 1, no. 1 (2022): 69-77.
- Ruan, Thomas. "Absurd Time: Understanding Camus' Quantitative Ethics Through Bergsonian Duration." *Episteme* 26, no. 1 (2015): 6-14.
- Saadann, Hayder & Al-Hasani, Hayder. "Existentialism and Absurdity in Albert Camus's "The Stranger," Psychological Study." *American Research Journal of Humanities & Social Science* 6, no. 5 (2023): 12-18.
- Shobeiri, Ashkan. "Meursault, an Absurd Happy Man." *Australian Journal of Basic and Applied Sciences* 7, no. 2 (2013): 838-845.
- Thomas Marcellus Coskren, O.P. "Albert Camus and the Pursuit of Happiness." *Dominicana Journal*. (2016): 199-205.

Responsibility and *Pagmamahal*: Relating Levinas' Ethical Responsibility to Florentino Hornedo's *Pagmamahal* and *Pagmumura*¹

Patrick Andre C. Mencias

Far Eastern University | pmencias@feu.edu.ph

Abstract: This paper aims to establish a potential connection between Emmanuel Levinas' Ethical Responsibility and Florentino Hornedo's reading on *pagmamahal* and *pagmumura*. Responsibility in Levinas is what gives a disposition of man towards to the Other due to his unique Otherness, while *pagmamahal* and *pagmumura*, as Hornedo explains, pertains to how one can either add or demean the value of oneself and others. The discussion will provide a foundation for understanding the disposition of man toward the Other. The discussion on Levinas will begin with his metaphysical standpoint of the "Il y a" and progresses to the opening of intersubjective relation through the Face and ultimately leading to Responsibility as Substitution. In discussing Responsibility, the paper will reemphasize the concepts of Totality and Infinity to articulate the Other's unique Otherness and its implication for the subject's responsibility. These concepts will provide the foundation to Levinas' ethical philosophy. The paper will then proceed with a reading of Hornedo's essay, which elaborates on how he arrived at his understanding of *pagmamahal* and *pagmumura* through its historical roots and his philosophical analysis. In this regard, his analysis will also explain various concepts related to *pagmamahal* and its application towards others in the light of Filipino culture. By examining these concepts, the paper will demonstrate the interconnection between them by relating similarities in terms of self-becoming of man and its ethical implication towards other people. Ultimately, the discussion will show how *pagmamahal*, as a concept, can be understood as an act towards the Other. As such, the analysis of these concepts will illustrate how one can understand part of Levinas' philosophy through Hornedo and demonstrate that *pagmamahal* can indeed be considered ethical.

Keywords: *responsibility, violence, pagmamahal, pagmumura*

Introduction

The paper aims to relate the Levinasian concept of Responsibility for the Other to Florentino Hornedo's *pagmamahal* and *pagmumura*. It exposes a dialogue in which both Hornedo and Levinas might agree on certain concepts. The paper answers the problem of how these concepts could be compatible with one another insofar the theories are concerned to how one must act towards another due to his capability of self-becoming. Such actions toward other people would seem to be elusive insofar that one's understanding would be in various interpretations and ways. In

¹ This paper was presented during the International Conference on the Philosophy of Emmanuel Levinas, hosted by the UST Department of Philosophy, at the Buenaventura Garcia Paredes, O.P. Building, University of Santo Tomas, España, Manila, 13–15 July 2017.

this regard, these philosophers have given their account on ethical theories. Their theories stress the importance of the self-becoming of man that will give a reason for the disposition towards people. With this being said, the paper shall also give a possibility of how *pagmamahal* can also be an act towards the *Other* as an implication of such relation if it permits to be valid.

Infinity and Totality towards Ethical Responsibility

In discussing the Levinasian concepts of Totality and Infinity, it is important to start from his metaphysical notions from the “*Il y a*” or “*There Is*” up to his theory of Ethical Responsibility as he concludes that Ethics is First Philosophy. This chapter shall discuss the concepts of the “*Il y a*”, *Jouissance* or Enjoyment, Separation until it reaches to the encounter to the Other through the Face until the Responsibility as Substitution. It is important to discuss such concepts as to give a comprehensive understanding of the concepts of Totality and Infinity in the light of his applicative notion.

Levinas explains his metaphysical standpoint of the “*Il y a*” or “*There Is*” as something that goes a step backward from the Heideggerian notion of *seiendes* (existents) and *Sein* (existence)² before nothingness. In a commentary by Roger Burggraeve, he reiterates how Levinas also opposes the tradition of Western Metaphysics insofar that Being’s characteristic of Essence can be reduced to the same. This is because the act of being deprives the Being’s radical dynamism insofar that everything that being does is because of the Essence in which all actions should be in accordance to it, and this is said to unescapable thus constituting the Levinasian concept of Totality.³ In Levinas’ book entitled *On Escape*, indicates a movement of being that there is a need to escape the ontological totality of for the subject to be allowed to multiple possibilities.⁴ He further critiques the traditional western metaphysics that due to essence, it creates a possibility of conceptualizing being to an idea that will be explained in the latter as an act of violence.

Returning to the discussion of the *Il y a*, he describes it as rumbling silence of nothingness that its sound could be likened to the sound of a hollow shell heard when close to the ear.⁵ Such a sound gives a terrifying feeling that one does not understand what it is. The phrase “*There Is*” would always presuppose something as one could say that “There is a chair” that would connote the existence of a chair. However, “*There Is*” alone would not necessarily mean nothing but it is something that is yet to be determined, thus it is void of its identity that constitutes its anonymity as Levinas discusses about the *Il y a* in his short work of *Existents to Existence*.⁶ “*Il y a*” is also a bridge from the nothingness to something. To escape such anonymity through the act of hypostasis that he is to be conscious and to be the master of his being.⁷

² Martin Heidegger, *Being and Time*, trans. John Macquarrie and Edward Robinson, (Oxford: Blackwell Publishers, 1962): 22-27. For Heidegger there is a need to differentiate the ontological difference of being insofar the *seiendes* refers to “something that is” that is often used to refer to entities in general while contrast to *Sein* connotes the existence of something.

³ Roger Burggraeve, *Proximity with the Other: A Multidimensional Ethic of Responsibility in Levinas* (India: Dharmaram Publications, 2009), 8.

⁴ Emmanuel Levinas, *On Escape*, trans. Bettina Bergo (Stanford, California: Stanford University Press, 2003), 55.

⁵ Emmanuel Levinas, *Ethics and Infinity: Conversations with Philippe Nemo*, trans. Richard Cohen (Pittsburgh: Duquesne University Press, 1982), 48.

⁶ Emmanuel Levinas, *Existents and Existence*, trans. Alphonso Lingis (Netherlands, The Hague: Martinus Nijhoff Press, 1978), 57.

⁷ *Ibid.*, 60 and 82-83.

In creating one's identity, a Being dwells into the world and uses the things in it with things that bring enjoyment to him. Levinas thoroughly explains this as *Jouissance* or Enjoyment in Totality and Infinity.⁸ *Jouissance* would entail one's understanding that life is indeed beautiful as he enjoys things such as sleep, eating, dancing, etc. He enjoys such things that he assimilates these from the world towards himself as he builds his own identity through his need. In the state of *Jouissance*, Levinas recognizes the necessity of being part of the world in such a way as it emphasizes the concept of Totality.

Following such creation of one's identity follows a concretized act of enjoyment and the end of his participation in "*Il y a*" called Separation. Levinas explains Separation as a phenomenon where Being is in the process of self-identification, thus opening the possibility of the I for transcendence. This is how Levinas explains transcendence as a way of existing of its exteriority that prevents itself from being totalized or reduced to the same.⁹ Such transcendence would imply the idea of the Infinity, insofar as he continually creates himself through a continuous hypostasis. Burggraeve articulates the cause of the continuous hypostasis is still due to the dread of *Il y a*, or anonymity, which persists in creeping into one's being, creating an internal struggle to continually create oneself.¹⁰

Separation, in another sense, is one's separation from the Other through distance. Such distance would mean that the Other is also capable of self-creating himself that would constitute his distinct character through an accomplished enjoyment. Thus, it is in separation that the subjectivity of the I arises, creating a distinction between the I and the Other as it avoids being reduced to the Same. The Self further creates himself due to his radical dynamism in relation to his transcendental notion that totalization of his interiority cannot be permitted because of the idea of the Infinity that he possesses. With this, the self is distinct from the Other that makes him a host that welcomes the Other.¹¹

The intersubjective encounter with the Other starts with the subject having a character of Desire. For Levinas, Desire is not a condition for one to be satisfied, just like how one has a desire to be full when one is hungry. It is a "desire that cannot be satisfied," in which to desire can also be a feeling of self-hallowing. If such is the reality of desire, then the subject longs for something that could not satisfy him, hence he longs for something that is infinite. Infinity is something a being is in the state of due to his transcendental notion.¹² Concretely, the encounter with the Infinite is best exemplified through the meeting of the subject with the Other, through the Epiphany of the Face. Levinas describes the Face not from its usual definitions or through an example of a usual human face that consists of the eyes, the nose etc. The Face is the manifestation of the Infinity of the Other of which he desires. Such Infinity that both the I and the Other possess would disturb one another's being, compelling them to each other as it opens a face-to-face encounter with the Other. It is through this encounter that would involve how the I of its Ontology of Being would resemble a home wherein the Other intrudes upon me like a "Stranger"¹³ that surprises and disturbs me to welcome him.

⁸ Emmanuel Levinas, *Totality Infinity: An Essay on Exteriority*, trans. Alphonso Lingis, (Pittsburgh: Duquesne University Press, 2007), 111.

⁹ *Ibid.*, 35 and 40.

¹⁰ Burggraeve, *Proximity with the Other*, 9-12.

¹¹ Levinas, *Totality and Infinity*, 299.

¹² *Ibid.*, 33-34.

¹³ *Ibid.*, 39.

The Face has the attributes of a destituteness and essential poverty that expresses itself with the command of “*Thou shall not kill*,”¹⁴ as it invites the Other to an act of murder or to not killing it at the same time. The Face already involves the ethical implications of the I towards the Other insofar as his disposition would either kill or welcome the Other. The act of murder would consequently mean the violence that it conceptualizes the Other through knowledge, removing the alterity of the Other. To know is to grasp an idea, and in grasping creates a notion of power thus, to grasp or to know the Other is to have power over him. As Burggraeve would presume that having the power over the Other would be a reduction to the Same, which would eventually pave way to other forms of violence that bring terror to people, either physical or social.¹⁵ Therefore, the relation of the I to the Other is through Desire, which seeks the Infinity that the being possesses due to his transcendence that would not necessarily presume knowledge nor intentionality towards the Other. To be ethical is to respect Infinity, the capability of transcendence, which the Other possesses that will eventually lead towards goodness. Totalization, however, would mean to him as an act of violence, as it removes its alterity, making him possible to comprehend.

The concept of Substitution is another dynamic of responsibility in Levinas’ thought. In *Otherwise than Being or Beyond Essence*, Levinas describes the phenomena of being responsible for the Other, and “being responsible even for the Other’s responsibility but one cannot take his place.”¹⁶ This explains two things. First, the subject’s responsibility is doubled, or the weight of responsibility becomes heavier, since one must be also become responsible even for the Other’s responsibilities. Second, the saying that one cannot take his own place means that responsibility falls under his charge alone. The responsible subject does not expect that people will cover for him despite mentioning that any responsible subject takes into consideration even towards the Other’s responsibilities.

In another light, Responsibility as Substitution, as Paul Marcus comments, is the decentralization of the I, where the subject shifts from being the center to being “*the-one-for-the-other*.”¹⁷ Leovino Garcia also explains the shift of the I towards the Other by examining how the “Law of the I” involves how the subject begins thinking from himself towards the Other and returns to him. The “Law of I” would then constitute totality towards the Other. Therefore, Garcia proposes the “Law of the Other” in which the subject does not return to himself when he is thinking towards the Other.¹⁸ This then explains the notion of the I or the subject, being at home, where the Other surprises him. Then the I, being surprised by the arrival of the Other, places his freedom into question, and welcomes him unconditionally. This is what Levinas meant by meeting the Other as a form of hostage. The subject becomes a hostage to the Other, insofar as his freedom is in question, and the Other surprises him that forces him to respond. In this situation, there is no opportunity to evade responsibility. One is perhaps condemned to be responsible. The Subject welcomes the Other’s destituteness and the poverty that the Face expresses.

However, to do otherwise would already mean the act of violence committed by the subject towards the Other. Violence, here, is illustrated in how the subject can decline or ignore the Other.

¹⁴ Levinas, *Totality and Infinity*, 199.

¹⁵ Burggraeve, *Proximity with the Other*, 35.

¹⁶ Levinas, *Otherwise than Being or Beyond Essence*, 158.

¹⁷ Paul Marcus, *Being for The Other: Emmanuel Levinas, Ethical Living and Psychoanalysis* (Milwaukee: Marquette University Press, 1953), 28.

¹⁸ Leovino Garcia, “Philosophically Speaking: What it means to be human,” *The Sunday Chronicle* (July 13, 1987): 25.

One of the factors that lead to this non-response to the Other is knowledge, wherein the subject may judge the Other with prejudice. Substitution is void of deliberating about whether to act or not because, in doing so, there is the tendency to act selectively that one might act for one but not somebody else.

To recap this discussion is to conclude how Ethics is indeed First Philosophy for Levinas. He insists that such Responsibility for the Other is in the act of existing for the Other, which is beyond Being, towards an *excedence*¹⁹ to which the movement of Being is transcendent towards the Good. This responsibility is realized through how the Face from the Other pleads with the I not to commit an act of violence, thereby constituting a relation that enables the I to be responsible for the Other through Substitution.

Earlier parts of the paper have explained that Desire is what attracts beings towards Infinity, and that to access such is only through the Other, who is in the state of Infinity due to his transcendence. As a being accesses the Other, who is void of knowledge, he encounters the Face in its straightforwardness, thus revealing its exterior characteristic. With encounters that are void of knowledge, this would mean the encounter is pre-rational. As the Face appeals to the I, it is up to the I to decide upon an action towards the Other. And it is through the I that his freedom is put into question, such that he welcomes the Other as he indeed embodies the characteristic of being “For the Other,” in line with his Responsibility towards the Other as Substitution. If a being is indeed oriented towards Good due to his transcendence, then his action to the Other promises goodness. Levinas, thus, concludes that man exists to be good; thus, ethics is indeed first philosophy.

Pagmamahal and Pagmumura

To understand the study of *pagmamahal* and *pagmumura*, it is important to know the intellectual prowess of its ideas, which stems from the scholarly background of Florentino Hornedo. Regarded as a Renaissance man for his contributions to the human sciences and his efforts in reminding the academe to give great emphasis to such, the man behind the title is given to Florentino Hornedo. After finishing high school, Hornedo initially pursued the sciences, particularly biology, due to his love for animal life. However, economic constraints prevented him from pursuing such a path, which eventually brought him instead to study education at University Santo Tomas in 1957. This decision opened and led him to discover the realm of the humanities.

His reputation as Renaissance man was evident in his diverse interests in the humanities. Roland Theuas Pada describes him as “an intellectual tangled with a caboodle of disciplines in the humanities,”²⁰ or simply, a person who delved in the different paths in understanding the very nature of one’s humanity. The studies he pursued in the academe spanned across history, philosophy, literature and anthropology. Hornedo’s commitment to the humanities was shaped by his Ivatan heritage, which inspired him to advocate for the recognition of his cultural traditions. In fact, his 1977 dissertation *Laji: An Ivatan Folk Lyric Tradition*,²¹ presented at the University of Santo Tomas, was a

¹⁹ Levinas, *On Escape*, 54.

²⁰ Roland Theuas DS. Pada, “The Humanity of Florentino Hornedo in the Humanities,” *Kritike* 9, no. 2 (December 2015): 1.

²¹ Lloyd Rivera, et. al., *Florentino Hornedo* (2016, an exhibit material presented in the UST Graduate School in honor of Florentino Hornedo)

call for the preservation of his heritage and practices of his culture in Batanes.²² This rendered him being a pioneer in ethno-history and cultural studies in the Philippines.

In the field of philosophy, Hornedo was particularly drawn to phenomenology as a method. His master's thesis, written in 1972, was regarding the notion of freedom with the title, *Philosophy of Freedom*. This work was later republished by the UST Publishing House in 2000 under the title *The Power to Be: The Phenomenology of Freedom*.²³ In this thesis, Hornedo redefined the notion of freedom in the logical and metaphysical sense.²⁴ He particularly included a number of literary works and philosophical theories that led to his conclusion of how freedom is a faculty that empowers both the self and others. This notion was closely tied to his advocacy for the development of his hometown in Batanes. Hornedo's notion of freedom extended to the making of one's value through work that involves the use of creativity for self-building. Fleurdeliz Altez-Albela further explains that it was through phenomenology that led Hornedo to explore the answer to the question: "What does it mean to be human?"²⁵ Therefore, in this context, Hornedo defines freedom as intertwined with strength, self-creation, and ultimately, the empowerment of others.²⁶ With the background being established, it is then important to utilize the knowledge of his scholarly expertise in history, literature, and philosophy that will give a great context in reading his essay "*Pagmamabal at Pagmumura*."

In his essay, "*Pagmamabal at Pagmumura*," Hornedo first cites the world of the pre-literature society. The society he recalls demonstrates a cognition of value that is separate from knowledge. Such cognition of value shapes their disposition in assessing at things to whether they are good or bad, associating them with the light or darkness based on myths of struggles they have known.²⁷ With this in mind, the reality they face is structured vertically, distinguished by what is considered as high-priced or low-priced, a perception of value that corresponds to the concepts of *mabal* and *mura*, respectively.²⁸ Therefore, for Hornedo, a society structured vertically describes social relationships, where people are analogous to commodities. Hornedo references definitions of these words from Father Pedro de San Buenaventura's *Vocabulario* (1613)²⁹ and Jose Villa Panganiban's *Diksiyunaryo – Tesouro: Pilipino-Ingles*,³⁰ comparing their meanings to one another:

²² Pada, *The Humanity of Florentino Hornedo in the Humanities*, 3.

²³ *Ibid.*, 2.

²⁴ Fleurdeliz Altez-Albela, "Phenomenologizing Filipino Organic Thought: Florentino H. Hornedo's Philosophical Anthropology," *Kritike* 10, no. 2 (December 2016): 62.

²⁵ Hornedo primarily adheres to Husserlian phenomenology where the body is able to have a consciousness or *Kamalayan* of the things around him and the people he interacts with coinciding with Cartesian dualism of the body and spirit. In the light of Husserl, he defines it with the *Malay tao* and its content that is *nilalaman ng malay tao*. Fleurdeliz Altez-Albela, *Phenomenologizing Filipino Organic Thought: Florentino H. Hornedo's Philosophical Anthropology*: 63. See also Florentino Hornedo, *Pagpapakatao and Other Essays in Contemporary Philosophy and Literature of Ideas*, (Manila: University of Santo Tomas Publishing House, 2002): 1-3.

²⁶ Altez-Albela, *Phenomenologizing Filipino Organic Thought*, 64.

²⁷ Florentino Hornedo, *Pagmamabal at Pagmumura: Essays* (Quezon City: Office of Research and Publication, School of Arts and Sciences, Ateneo de Manila University, 2002), 143.

²⁸ *Ibid.*, 146.

²⁹ *Ibid.* Cf. Pedro de San Buenaventura, *Vocabulario de la Lengua Tagala; el Romance Castellano Puesto Primero*, (Laguna: Pila, 1613).

³⁰ *Ibid.* Cf. Jose Villa Panganiban, *Diksiyunaryo–Tesouro: Pilipino – Ingles*, (Quezon City: Manlapaz Publishing Co., 1973).

Fr. P. de San Buenaventura ³¹		Jose Villa Panganiban ³²	
<i>Mahal</i>	- noble	<i>Mahal</i>	- expensive
	- enoblecer		- high-priced
	- estima		- beloved
	-preciado		- held highly in great esteem
	-preciosa		- noble
	-honroso	- highly born	
	-grave	<i>Mura</i>	- cheap
	- tenerse		- inexpensive
	- lactarse		- low-priced
	- entonarse		- scolding
- valor	- reproach		
<i>Mora</i>	- afrenta		- young and unripe fruit, etc.
	- deshonra		- very young coconut fruit
	- vituperio		- immature
	- abaratar		- undeveloped
	- barato		- fresh and young
		- light, as in <i>asul na mura</i> (light blue)	

A way to access such society, as Hornedo explains, is through hermeneutics, particularly in the light of Paul Ricouer’s *Techne Hermenutike*. This method explains how a person from the present may understand and interpret words from the past through the ontology of understanding. Thus, this method explains how the person of the present grows in self-understanding as it assimilates itself with the past by making itself contemporary with the text and appropriate the meaning of the text to himself.³³

In line with the theoretical framework established, the understanding of *pagmamahal* and *pagmumura* is possible through historical references, such as the earlier linguistic records Hornedo cites. As such, the words are understood through their practical application, how they are used and perceived in behavior. In this sense, words do not merely refer to an individual but also to the essence of their being.³⁴ Hornedo further cites another historical document to highlight how the words *mahal* and *mura*, as root words from *pagmamahal* and *pagmumura*, were seen in “Declaracion de los Mandamientos de la Ley de Dios,” a text written by the Franciscan Venerable Juan de Oliver between 1585 and 1590. In Hornedo’s translation and interpretation of the text from Spanish to Ivatan, the passage states:

Ang tauong may baet, may vasto, ybinobocodniya sa caniyang loob, ang magaling sa masama, minamahal niya ang mahal at ang moray minomora rin, di may vasto pa ang tauo cun pauain niya ang lahat, masaman man, magaling man, cun yhalimbawa ang mahal sa mora, at ang

The reasonable man, who has discernment distinguishes within his heart what is good and what is evil; he esteems the precious and the worthless he treats as worthless. Would a man be considered right if he treats equally everything, both good and the evil as if they were the same, and if he regards as equal both that which is

³¹ Hornedo, *Pagmamahal at Pagmumura*, 146. Cf. Buenaventura, *Vocabulario de la Lengua Tagala*, 673, 677.

³² *Ibid.* Cf. Panganiban, *Diksyunaryo-Tesouro*, 683, 717.

³³ *Ibid.*, 145.

³⁴ Hornedo, *Pagmamahal at Pagmumura*, 148-149.

mora sa mahal, di bulag ang tauo cun paputiin and maytim? Ang maytim naman ay paputiin niya?... Tapat bagang ypara ang mora sa mahal? Ang Demo sa Dios?

Cun baga lalo ang D.s at mahal sa lahat, anot di niyo mahalín, at ybiguin, at di sintahing lalo sa lahat?

Ang Demonio, ang Anito, cun para mora sa lahat, masamang anyo, masamang loob, opasalain sa caniyang Dios, anot di morahin sa lahat, di calupitan, at di limutin ang walang baet sang saga;

precious and that which is worthless, or that which is worthless with that which is precious? Would not the person be blind if he treats that which is black as if it were white, and that which is white as if it were black?... Is it correct to treat the cheap and the costly as if they were equal? The devil and God?

If God is greater and most precious of all, why do you not esteem and love and cherish him above all?

The Devil, the *anito*, if the most worthless, ugly, evil-minded, a murmurer against his God, why is he not treated as the most worthless of all, why not shown cruelty, why not forgotten as worth nothing?³⁵

Evident in the passage, the words *pagmamahal* and *pagmumura* are exemplified by the use of commandment of love by God.

This sense of value is then inherent in human beings, insofar as his perception of value is exemplified through his subjectivity; whereas a piece of silver does not possess inherent value; rather its value is assigned by the person who receives and acknowledges it. Such separation of value is a form of violence against the being's subjectivity.³⁶ The measure of one's value is, thus, in being, that is, words *mahal* and *mura* are in regard to the human being that attempts to quantify its level of worth insofar that it has also become the measure of one being against another being. Consequently, the understanding of *pagmamahal* reflects the being's disposition to another being, which expresses their degree of value; whereas *pagmumura*, on the other hand, represents a person's inclination to consider another as valueless or cheap.³⁷

Its phenomenological aspects entail how *pagmamahal* and *pagmumura* are expressed evidently. Hornedo cites different empirical notions of how both *pagmamahal* and *pagmumura*, as an act towards other people. He firstly reemphasizes that something is considered *mahal* because it is *mahalaga*; therefore, when one obtains or earns something that is valuable like jewelry, he is likely to take care of it so that its value may never be tarnished. Thus, the act of *pagmamahal* and the act of *pagpapahalaga* have a certain connection: the person who loves recognizes the worth or *halaga* of something, in which *pagpapahalaga* is bound to an act of preserving and maintaining the value of such. *Pagmumura*, on the other hand, according to the text of the *Declaracion*, is an act of demeaning a person's value, either through words by slander or deeds. Hornedo stresses on deeds by an example of a parent that loves his children but treats his servants with abuse demonstrates a form of hypocrisy in the act *pagmamahal*, which entails injustice. Thus, *pagmamahal* is closely tied to justice, as one should be able to distribute and provide access to such resources with equity.³⁸

³⁵ Hornedo, *Pagmamahal at Pagmumura*, 148-149.

³⁶ *Ibid.*, 150.

³⁷ *Ibid.*, 150-151.

³⁸ *Ibid.*, 152-154.

Katapatan, pagkamagalang, pagkamaalabananin, pagkamapagbigay, pagkabukas-palad, pagka-mapagkalinga, and pagkamalambing are among the virtues Hornedo associates with *pagmamahal* in the light of Filipino culture.

Katapatan is defined as *tapat* or uprightness, expressing loyalty and single-mindedness. Sincerity, as another definition, is said to will one thing, as *katapatan* is a form of purity of heart;³⁹ therefore, *matapat na pagmamahal* is one's act of loving without ulterior motives and whose sole end is to value the beloved. *Pagkamagalang* entails the recognition of the value-in-itself of the person being respected and to honor their liberty. *Pagkamaalabananin* is described through the example of *pasalubong*, that is, the manifestation of the one who acknowledges the habitual presence of another in one's consciousness. It involves a capacity to provide for the needs of the loved one and a thoughtful anticipation of the person. *Pagkamapagbigay* is a form of tolerance that endures and continually understands the person's behavior, even if it that can be peculiar or ordinarily unacceptable. *Pagkabukas-palad* is a form of generosity. It is giving while one has the capacity to do, even to the extent of being left with nothing—a deed that can be deemed heroic. *Pagkamapagkalinga* is related to being "solicitous," which means taking care of anyone who is needy.⁴⁰ *Pagkamalambing* is a form of *pagmamahal* expressed bodily through delicate and gentle gestures that do not harm.⁴¹

Hornedo, then, recognizes how *pagmamahal* is devoid of the sexual expression of *eros*, which is contrasted to the physical expression of *lambing*, which is delicate and gentle. He refers to Buenaventura's *Vocabulario*, noting that such words would have the translation into love but not necessarily into *eros*.⁴²

Giliu	– <i>aficion</i> (fond, inclination) – <i>amar</i> (to love) – <i>querer</i> (to want, to wish, to love, to be fond of)
Hilig	– <i>trama</i> (plot, scheme)
Hirang	– <i>escoger</i> (to select, to choose) – <i>entresacar</i> (to pick out, to cull)
Ibig	– <i>amar</i> – <i>charidad</i> (plot, scheme) – <i>antojo</i> (whim, caprice, fancy) – <i>apetecer</i> (to crave, to desire) – <i>querer</i>
Nasa	– <i>codiciar</i> (to covet) – <i>Desear</i> (to desire, to want, to wish, to crave) – <i>Deseo</i> (desire, wish)
Sinta	– <i>amar</i> – <i>Aficion</i> – <i>deseo</i>

³⁹ Hornedo, *Pagmamahal at Pagmumura*, 155. Hornedo alludes to Soren Kierkegaard's Purity of Heart as "to will one thing" in line with *Katapatan*.

⁴⁰ *Ibid.*, 156. Hornedo cited other Filipino words compatible with Solicitude such as *aruga, kandili, ingat, inwi* etc. These words as Hornedo would be related to Solicitude that his definition of such principle that is to be moved, disturbed, anxious, careful over something.

⁴¹ *Ibid.*, 154-157.

⁴² *Ibid.*, 158.

Hornedo examines words such as *hilig*, *ibig*, *sinta*, *gilin*, *hirang* and re-evaluates its definitions. These words are evident in Filipino literature and music. Some words, such as *hirang*, indicate selectiveness. For example, Hornedo uses the phrase “*nabirang na president*,” which would mean a president who is chosen rather than loved. Hornedo returns to the definition of *ibig* that can be univocal to charity, citing Father Oliver’s treatise on the Ten Commandments: “*ybigin mo ang Dios (nang) lalo sa labat*.” In examining this document, he contrasts *ibig* with *mahal*. The former is affective, while the latter is cognitive, as *mahal* in regard to one’s value. Meanwhile, *hilig* and *nasa* convey a tendency or propensity, suggesting a selfish quality of it, and such definition may also include a plot or scheme one has a desire to obtain something. *Nasa* by itself signifies desire in the sense of greed, a character which can be associated with *eros*.⁴³

To sum up this discussion, *pagmamahal* is the act of recognizing the value of someone and promoting its value in growth by preserving its value. It is an act performed by the *nagmamahal* (the loving subject) toward the *minamahal* (the beloved) with the sole purpose of elevating their value, making them to be *mabalaga* and more worthy of *pagmamahal*. *Pagmumura*, however, is the demeaning of the value of the person that he either takes it away or destroys the value that the person possesses.

It is indeed that Hornedo’s intellectual background as a historian, a literary artist, and a philosopher in the humanities that have contributed to the understanding of his essay. He interweaves these three different disciplines to create an understanding of the words *pagmamahal* and *pagmumura* through historical documents and philosophical analysis that aid the interpretation of the facts and data these documents provide. It is the humanity of Florentino Hornedo that is evident in the article, as he provides a new perspective on human nature in the light of Filipino culture and its exemplification.

Responsibility and *Pagmamahal*

The concepts aforementioned above shall be connected in two ways. First, through the notion of the subject in terms of his capability of self-becoming. Second, through the applicative notion of how the concepts play a role in the encounter with other people. This will be the grounds of the relation that would make the connection possible.

Levinas’ self-becoming explains how the I create itself through its transcendence. His transcendence exists since the idea of the Infinity that he possesses describes the radical dynamism of his being that cannot be totalized. The subject that undergoes the process of Separation creates his own identity that he continually escapes the terror of anonymity through hypostasis and the assimilation of the things he enjoys in the world that creates a distance from the I to the Other in which transcendence is possible to avoid being reduced to the same. His self-becoming is made possible by the *Jonissance* that he enjoys things from the world and the Separation of himself towards the Other, which creates his own alterity, his form of self-identification. Totality would mean that the subject is comprehended by knowledge, enclosed with a concept that objectifies him and removes him from his alterity. This is the reason why Levinas emphasizes a movement out of being, because being can be comprehended, enclosing him within ontological totality, where he is unable to create his way of existing.

⁴³ Hornedo, *Pagmamahal at Pagmumura*, 157-160.

For Hornedo, *mahal* would define the subject due to his worth and his capability of self-building because of the freedom he possesses that empowers him. This self-becoming is due to the fact that the Subject is a creative project that expresses one's value through work that gives an exposition of the self of what he can do or what he can offer. This is realized in the freedom that empowers him to do so within himself and for others.⁴⁴ Thus, in relating to *mahal*, the subject is a meaningful project that expresses value of himself making him *mahalaga*. However, when the quantified value is measured against another, to compare against another as something that is cheap and valueless, that will be as Hornedo describes as *mura*.

What we can notice in the concepts explained, Infinity and *mahal*, is that they both signify the self-becoming of a person. Infinity is the idea of transcendence that allows the subject to continually create himself and his way of existing. *Mahal*, on the other hand, expresses his value through his freedom, which empowers him to deem himself as *mahalaga*, insofar as he considers himself as a meaningful and creative project. *Pagmamahal* is an act of preserving and further enhancing the value upward of what he expresses. Totality, in the form of grasping the Other in knowledge, would mean he would enclose the being into a concept that would soon be a form of violence that strips him out of his possibility of transcendence, the idea of Infinity within him. For Hornedo, *mura* describes a person that is lowly and cheap, which defames the value of the subject.

In relating this to the applicative notion, we connect Levinas' concepts of his ethical relation towards the Other as Responsibility to *pagmamahal* and *pagmumura* as an act towards people. As one can see, the subject, who is a host for the Other, surprises himself by being responsible. His responsibility always involves The Face that pleads to him to not kill it. The act of murder towards the Other, in Levinas, would presuppose how one's disposition towards the Other involved the factor of knowledge. In this case, he avoids such responsibility insofar as the factors, including who the person is, involve knowledge, thus deviating away from the responsibility since the person who seeks him is known to the subject through knowledge. It would indeed be a disrespect towards the Infinity of the Other, as he is totalized within a concept that made him disregard the responsibility. To respect the Infinity of the Other, therefore, is the disposition of the I that respects the Other's capability of self-becoming due to his transcendence and to avoid totalization, an avoidance of murder. To totalize would be the opening of the graver forms of violence, where one kills or inflicts suffering on a person due to the knowledge towards one has of them.

Hornedo's *pagmamahal* involves acknowledging the value of the person as something highly as it enhances his value. His value, which he expresses due to the freedom that empowers him to continually build himself as self-project through work, should always be deemed something as *mahalaga*. *Pagmamahal*, therefore, as an act towards other people, is a disposition of recognition of his value that he expresses through his work in the intention to raise such value, higher. This act is done by the *nagmamahal* towards the *minamahal*, who deems the person as *mahalaga* and worthy of *Pagmamahal*. *Pagmumura*, however, is the defamation or the destruction of the value of the person he possesses that deems him being valueless or cheap.

What we can synthesize in both theories is how the disposition of the subject is always in respect of the self-becoming of the other person. If one respects the Infinity of the Other it is because the Other has a characteristic of something great due to his transcendence, which should be respected,

⁴⁴ Altez-Albela, *Phenomenologizing Filipino Organic Thought*, 64.

to do otherwise is to totalize the Other into a concept. *Pagmamahal* recognizes the value of the person highly due to his self-becoming from his freedom. *Pagmumura*, however, is to treat his value as cheap and valueless. Totality, as a form of violence, is also capable of treating someone as lowly insofar as he encloses the Other to a concept, grasping and wielding power over him. Here, we can see a connection in regard to the disposition of the subject to the Other, which aims to foster self-becoming.

One could notice that Responsibility as Substitution means acting towards the Other regardless of who the person is, to act that is void of knowledge of the Other. This would imply how the I or the subject is responsible despite the identity of the Other. *Pagmamahal*, on the other hand, has a notion of justice that one should always show an act of *pagmamahal* to all people regardless of who they are. This is illustrated by Hornedo's example of a person loving their children yet despising servants.⁴⁵ This similarity invokes the disposition of the I to treat the Other with goodness regardless of who they are.

Other concepts related to *pagmamahal* can be related to Levinas, such as *katapatan*, *pagkamagalang* and *pagkamapagkalinga*. *Matapat na pagmamahal* or *katapatan*, in Hornedo, can be related to Levinas' theory on grounds that *katapatan* is void of any end of the act of *pagmamahal*, just as Responsibility is pre-rational, void of any knowledge. Thus, the notion of being responsible to the Other or to act towards the Other is something done naturally. *Pagkamagalang*, or respect, as mentioned earlier, is to let the other person "be", thus his subjectivity and recognizes his value-in-itself of the person and his liberty. *Pagkamapagkalinga* can also be a form of putting oneself into the suffering of the Other in Substitution. In regard to the Face having an essential poverty and destituteness, a person who possesses solicitude can take on the responsibility towards the Other, to take care of him. Solicitude will also mean how the person is disturbed and anxious so that, in relation to Levinas, he is moved by the plea of the Face, he is disturbed by the happenings surrounding him that make him responsible. Thus, what we can conclude in here is that some concepts related to *pagmamahal* can be compatible in Levinas' theory.

Levinas' concept of Fecundity can also be related to *pagmamahal* in Hornedo as to contributes how one to help increase oneself becoming in the terms of the Father and child relation. Paul Marcus comments on how Paternity resembles the relationship of the I to the Other with a parental attitude with the Other that Fecundity allows such parent-child relation to be because one's capability of offspring. Such an attitude allows the child to be transcendent and the relation with the child is not factored with the aspects of biology and time.⁴⁶ The Paternal attitude is how Father is to create possibilities for the child to create his own possibilities that does not necessarily control the child but to realize his capabilities to see such possibilities for himself.⁴⁷

Hornedo emphasizes in his article how he actively promotes the child's growth into mature individuals by providing them with food, shelter, and education. Hornedo realizes that the paternal relation is only a factor, however important. He gives an example of how the child enters school at the age of seven until he graduates from medical school. During the duration of those years spent on learning and working, he underwent existential growth that expresses his personhood. His value then

⁴⁵ Hornedo, *Pagmamahal at Pagmumura*, 152-154.

⁴⁶ Marcus, *Being for the Other*, 142. Levinas does not use the usual definition of time. He explains the relation in terms of "Infinite Time" that one exists without the limits of mortality that allows all kinds of possibilities to happen. Perhaps an opening to transcendence, unto goodness.

⁴⁷ *Ibid.*, 142-146.

is the fulfillment of the other investments in his value that because of his parents that values him, they indeed increased the value of the child.⁴⁸ Thus, the analogy with the Father-child relationship from both philosophers depict how one is meant to let be of the Other and to treat him in a way that allows for his possibility of self-becoming—a point that stresses its importance.

Conclusion: Possibility of *Pagmamahal* to the Other

If the relation of the concepts may be compatible, one can, therefore, imply that *pagmamahal* can indeed be an act towards the Other. While Levinas and Hornedo can agree in terms of allowing the Other to continuously self-create or enable him of self-becoming, their ethical notions can give us an understanding on the human disposition towards the Other. Their ethical notions explained earlier give us a guide in understanding knowing the importance of one's capability of self-becoming and to do otherwise, to speak, to disrespect such is a form of violence towards him. The other concepts related to *pagmamahal* exhibit different ways of interaction towards the other that can be compatible as how the I interact with the Other in his responsibility. This analogy will give a contribution to philosophy in terms of how one can understand Levinas in the light of Hornedo and how *pagmamahal* is grounded on an ethical notion that is towards the Other. By synthesizing their accounts on ethics, they would conclude their humanistic approach in philosophy.

⁴⁸ Hornedo, *Pagmamahal at Pagmumura*, 152.

Bibliography

- Altez-Albela, Fleurdeliz. "Phenomenologizing Filipino Organic Thought: Florentino H. Hornedo's Philosophical Anthropology." *Kritike* 10, no. 2 (December 2016): 61-67.
- Burggraeve, Roger. *Proximity with the Other: A Multidimensional Ethic of Responsibility in Levinas*. India: Dharmaram Publications, 2009.
- Garcia, Leovino. "Philosophically Speaking: What it Means to be Human." *The Sunday Chronicle*, July 13, 1987.
- Heidegger, Martin. *Being and Time*. Translated by John Macquarrie and Edward Robinson. Oxford: Blackwell Publishers, 1962.
- Hornedo, Florentino. *Pagkakatao and Other Essays in Contemporary Philosophy and Literature of Ideas*. Manila: University of Santo Tomas Publishing House, 2002.
- . *Pagmamahal at Pagmumura: Essays*. Quezon City: Office of Research and Publication, School of Arts and Sciences, Ateneo de Manila University, 1977.
- Levinas, Emmanuel. *Ethics and Infinity: Conversations with Philippe Nemo*. Translated by Richard A. Cohen. Pittsburgh: Duquesne University Press, 1982.
- . *Existents and Existence*. Translated by Alphonso Lingis. The Hague: Martinus Nijhoff Press, 1978.
- . *On Escape*. Translated by Bettina Bergo. Stanford: Stanford University Press, 2003.
- . *Otherwise Than Being or Beyond Essence*. Translated by Alphonso Lingis. Pittsburgh: Duquesne University Press, 1981.
- . *Totality and Infinity: An Essay on Exteriority*. Translated by Alphonso Lingis. Pittsburgh: Duquesne University Press, 2007.
- Marcus, Paul. *Being For The Other: Emmanuel Levinas, Ethical Living and Psychoanalysis*. Milwaukee: Marquette University Press, 1953.
- Pada, Roland Theaus DS. "The Humanity of Florentino Hornedo in the Humanities." *Kritike* 9, no. 2 (2015): 1-4.
- Panganiban, Jose Villa. *Diksiyunaryo-Tesaurus: Pilipino-Ingles*. Quezon City: Manlapaz Publishing Co., 1973.
- San Buenaventura, Pedro de. *Vocabulario de la Lengua Tagala; el Romance Castellano Puesto Primero*. Laguna: Pila, 1613.

*Ren as Pouvoir in Wu Lun: The Five Power-Relations*¹

Anton Heinrich L. Rennesland

University of Santo Tomas | alrennesland@ust.edu.ph

Abstract: *Kong Zi's* prescription of *Zheng Ming* entails *Wu Lun*. The Rectification of Names outlines the duties and corresponding responsibilities attached to *Ming* unto the *Yi* of the individual. The essence of this rectification is in the ideal; a dialectical-anthropological consideration of the conditions of the individuals presents conflicts to this inkling: What is seemingly whitewashed in the apparent utopic presentation of *Wu Lun* is an interplay of forces—of the individual's *Ren*—present in the respective relations. Through this, *Wu Lun* becomes power-relations through the understanding of the interplay between the greater and smaller figures. This paper seeks to redefine *Ren* as *power (pouvoir)* insofar as it—as constituted by *Yi*—is exemplified by each individual situated in *Wu Lun*. What this analysis provides is another way of considering relations by maintaining the essential balance. It is a dialectical engagement with the presented social order; by striking the balance in the on-going movement within the power-relations, that *Lun* is totally realized.

Keywords: *Wu Lun, Ren, power (pouvoir), power-relations*

Introduction

“When *Zi Lu* said, ‘The Prince of *Wei* is awaiting you to take his government. What will be your first measure?’ *Kong Zi* replied, ‘It would be *Zheng Ming*.’”² Here, *Kong Zi* idealizes this return to the proper order of relations. He does not directly answer with a particular form of government but, in general, “was all about social order.”³ This is guided by the principle: “A *Ming* or a social title defines one’s relationship with others as well as his duty towards them. Everyone in society requires responsibility by virtue of *Yi*.”⁴ *Zheng Ming* stems from *Yi*, which in turn finds its root in *Ren*. The basic idea is of humanity, the “consciousness-of-human-other,” while *Yi*, therefore, is having responsibility for one’s neighbours, “consciousness-of-one’s-moral-oughtness.”⁵ Through this, an exemplification of one’s moral imperative is found in living in society,

¹ This paper was written on September 29, 2017, in partial fulfillment of the requirements for the course Chinese Philosophy, under the guidance of The Venerable Master, Professor Emeritus Alfredo P. Co, Ph.D. It seeks to answer the following question: In translating *Ren* as *pouvoir*, how are the Five Relations (*Wu Lun*) better understood on the anthropological level as power-relations?

² Kong Zi, *Lun Yu*, Bk. 12, Pt. 11, As quoted in Alfredo P. Co, *The Blooming of a Hundred Flowers: Philosophy of Ancient China*, vol. 1 of *Across the Philosophical Silk Road: A Festschrift in Honor of Alfredo P. Co* (Manila: UST Publishing House, 2009), 115.

³ Kai Vogelsang, “Beyond Confucius: A Socio-historical Reading of the ‘Lunyu,’” *Oriens Extremus*, Vol. 49 (Harrassowitz Verlag, 2010): 33.

⁴ Co, *The Blooming of a Hundred Flowers: Philosophy of Ancient China*, 115.

⁵ *Ibid.*, 112 and 115.

acting in proper accordance; *Ming* is attached, each categorized throughout *Wu Lun. Kong Zi*, therefore, ascribes to the notion one ought to be directed by one's name, by his *Ming* in relation to others.

The point of interest for this paper is directed against the seemingly assumed ideal carried by the *Wu Lun. Kong Zi* appears to speak in ideal terms, devoid of the individual's historicity. This paper brings this to a more anthropological level: the dialectical aspect of this Confucian thought enables the individual's dynamism; the characters are unique, and hence, to understand the five relations as a whole demands an understanding of the conditions of those individuals. However, this does not disprove *Wu Lun* but recognizes the dialectics within. *Wu Lun* is understood more concretely through the interplay of forces or by the notion of power-relations. *Wu Lun* is the manifestation of one's *Ren* through *Yi*. In this sense, this paper argues for translating *Ren* into *power (pouvoir)* as a characterization of each individual's capacity to enact being truly human.

Yi and Zheng Ming

"The Master answered, 'It would be, of course, to assure that *Ming*, (names), were being applied *Zheng* (correctly!)"⁶ The Rectification of Names stems from *Kong Zi*'s vision for social order. This is in junction with *Yi*: "*Yi* makes social structure and social control possible."⁷ The emphasis he places on *Ming* is that there is an equivalent and corresponding practical mode of being; thus, specific names, proper distinctions and associated actions are expected. *Kong Zi*'s *Zheng Ming* provides an internal movement within the individuals in the form of an introspection regarding their social statuses. What is blatant in this is the exterior adherence to one's primal character assigned: each is expected to act in light of his own *Ming*. What results is an ontological necessity: the *Yi* prescribes—and demands—action according to its intrinsic edict found in relation to the other, and according to one's situation, *Ming*. The ontological necessity is understood not as an ideal prescription but as a practical instruction for daily living.

"*Yi* is the very principle which should make a person's conduct morally acceptable to others and which should justify the morality of human action."⁸ *Yi* is thus the basis of one's judgements in relations. "At its most fundamental level, *Yi* is the importation of moral significance to personal action in the world [from where *Yi*] as 'meaning' or 'significance' arises."⁹ In being able to signify oneself, one, therefore, expresses its distinct features and characteristics through one's being (be it in the metaphysical understanding or as a nominal basis or title). "*Yi* means appropriateness to one's own person. [...] Thus, it is said that to realize *Yi* in one's actions is called attaining it in oneself; to neglect *Yi* [is] called self-negligence."¹⁰ It is in this exact way that self-realization occurs, that is, by acting in accordance with one's *Ming*, one discovers more of oneself:

The normative force of *Yi* exists in spite of its inchoate character at the beginning of *Yi* acts. The articulation of *Yi* with respect to a given situation involves the emerging awareness of what is or is

⁶ Kong Zi, "Analects," Edward Gilman Slingerland, tr., *Readings in Classical Chinese Philosophy*, Philip J. Ivanhoe and Bryan W. Van Norden, Eds. (Cambridge: Hackett Publishing Company, Inc., 2001), 13.3, 34.

⁷ Co, *The Blooming of a Hundred Flowers: Philosophy of Ancient China*, 115.

⁸ Chung-ying Cheng, "On *Yi* as a Universal Principle of Specific Application in Confucian Morality," *Philosophy East and West*, Vol. 22, No. 3 (University of Hawai'i Press, July 1972): 269.

⁹ David L. Hall and Roger T. Ames, "Getting It Right: On Saving Confucius from the Confucians," *Philosophy East and West*, Vol. 34, No. 1 (University of Hawai'i Press, January 1984): 8.

¹⁰ *Ch'un-ch'iu fan-lu*, 8/8b, as quoted in David L. Hall and Roger T. Ames, *Thinking Through Confucius* (New York: State University of New York Press, 1987), 92.

not appropriate in that situation and how one might act so as to realize this appropriateness in its highest degree. [...] Neither determined nor determining, *Yi* is actualized in the interplay between decision and circumstance; in this manner it achieves its appropriateness.¹¹

The development of the normative force behind the *Yi* is evident even from the beginning. “*Yi* has normative force without itself constituting a ‘norm.’”¹² It is an interplay between the individual and their surroundings. It is an imperative without actual content. This prescription, therefore, entails a certain historical ground for the individual to fill in; it is through one’s social context of *Ming* that *Yi* gains its imperative. Consequently, it becomes a practical imperative, eliciting a moral response.

“Confucius emphasized human-heartedness and righteousness[.] Righteousness (*Yi*) means the ‘oughtness’ of a situation.”¹³ The intrinsic self-determination of the individual is his *Yi*, the capacity for action in accordance with a certain principle: righteousness. “[T]hings in actual fact should be made to accord with the implication attached to them by names.”¹⁴ The necessity that *Yi* is efficacious is seen in concrete terms through *Ming*, how one aligns with society. With this, another aspect of *Yi* is understood: it is not a static idea but contains “a reflective morality[.]”¹⁵ Hence, in declaring the necessity of actions because of *Ming*, recognizes the reflective morality it presupposes—the ability to self-critique in the dialectic situation the character is in.

“If names be not correct, language is not in accordance with the truth of things. If language be not in accordance with the truth of things, affairs cannot be carried on to success.”¹⁶ *Kong Zi*’s emphasis on *Ming* reveals a deeper concern for certain aspects of practical living. This truth of reality is actuality; contra any arbitrariness does the man of virtue speak. “*Ming* is often translated as Fate, Destiny, or Decree. To Confucius, it meant the Decree [or] Will of Heaven; [it] was conceived of as a purposeful force; [eventually] the total existent conditions and forces of the whole universe.”¹⁷ The drive behind practical imperative is the destined order of being—and the conditions and eventual position arising in one’s situation are manifestations of this order. “*Yi* is a unique personal contribution which serves to define a ‘human becoming’ in the world. [Despite his independence,] his environment is in some sense contributing to and determining his emergence as a person.”¹⁸ It is thus a continual dialectic between the individual and the universe, the self and the other.¹⁹ What is left for the individual

¹¹ Hall and Ames, *Thinking Through Confucius*, 102.

¹² Hall and Ames, “Getting It Right: On Saving Confucius from the Confucians,” *Philosophy East and West* 34, no. 1 (January 1984): 15.

¹³ Fung Yu-Lan, *A Short History of Chinese Philosophy*, Derk Bodde, ed. (New York: The Free Press, 1948), 42.

¹⁴ *Ibid.*, 41.

¹⁵ Thomé H. Fang, *Chinese Philosophy: Its Spirit and Its Development* (Taipei: Linking Publishing Co. Ltd, 1981), 101

¹⁶ Kong Zi, *Analects of Confucius*, James Legge, tr., from the original *Lun Yu*, 13.3; available from <http://china.usc.edu/confucius-analects-13>; Internet; accessed 24 September 2017.

¹⁷ Yu-Lan, *A Short History of Chinese Philosophy*, 45.

¹⁸ Hall and Ames, “Getting It Right,” 9.

¹⁹ Hall and Ames demarcate the difference between two characters that both translate as *Yi*. “At a very basic level, these two characters are congruent in their meaning of ‘appropriateness, rightness, propriety.’ They diverge, however, in that whereas *yi(a)* denotes appropriateness to one’s own person, *yi(z)* refers to appropriateness to one’s context. [Tung Chung-shu] defines *yi(a)* explicitly as ‘appropriateness to one’s own person’ (*yi tsai wo che*). It is the active and contributory integrating of self with circumstances, where self originates unique moral activity and construes itself on its own terms in a novel and creative way. It is the articulation and contribution of the moral self to the organism. [...] *yi(a)* is on personal self (that is, *person-in-context*), the focus of *yi(z)* is on the environment (that is, *person-in-context*); where *yi(a)* is fundamentally self-assertive and meaning-bestowing, *yi(z)* is self-sacrificing and meaning-deriving.” *Ibid.*, 9. The difference

to do is to exemplify the order of *Ming* in a particular fashion—*Zheng*. To live out one’s *Ming*, thus, enables the continuity or cycle of being that balances existence.

Ming and Wu Lun

The move toward a rectification brings about the centrality of the Five Relations. Let it be clear, however, that “Confucius never spoke of ‘five relations’ [as] far as we can tell from the *Analects*. The first mention of the ‘five relations’ occurs in the *Mencius*.”²⁰ However, it is in *Kong Zi* that these relations find root. Retuning to the idea, in living out this particular rectification, an individual becomes aware of his *Yi* and finds himself in the respective relations: “[M]an has the ability to cultivate *Ren* (Benevolence) that could empower him to live a life of *Yi* (Rectitude-Duty) with a right sense of *Li* (Propriety), and with a cultivated *Zhi* (Wisdom)[.]”²¹ The interconnectedness of the virtues points to a holistic development rooted in his human-ness (*Ren*). *Yi*’s translation as rectitude-duty stresses the consequence of interdependence, of how one is constantly in a relation to others:

“By properly calibrating the human sense of *Yi*, a father will be benevolent to his family, a son will be filial to his father, a husband will be providing for his wife, a wife will be submissive to her husband, a senior brother will be kind to his younger brother, a junior brother will be deferential to his senior brother, a sovereign will be benevolent to his subjects and the subjects will be loyal to his sovereign.”²²

The Five Relations exhibit particular associations within a society, the arrangement between two individuals, generally one superior and the other inferior. It is through *Zheng Ming* that an individual realizes his position in these relations—whether as a father, son, brother, friend, or a stranger. It is a practical consciousness of one’s situated-ness in present society.

Power and the right to rule belong to superiors over subordinates[.] Each person has to give obedience and respect to “superiors” [.] The “superior,” however, owes loving responsibility to the inferior.²³

It is also because of this consciousness that one realizes one’s power and responsibilities. In a more classical understanding of the relationships, power is regarded as belonging to the superior and as a proper manifestation of his *Yi*. The superior character, in dominating the relation, carries within himself a particular responsibility in caring for the inferior. It is a continual association between the two characters, each embodying a necessary practicality in their existence.

Ren and Power-Relations

“*Ren* is a plurisignificative character [etymologically] referring to two people in a harmonious relationship.”²⁴ The compound character prefigures a kind of equality shared by between individuals,

highlights the unitary principle that make *Yi* a profound character: the diversion between both the static and the dynamic. It encompasses appropriateness in the sense of the individual and his locality.

²⁰ Hsü Dau-Lin, “The Myth of the ‘Five Human Relations’ of Confucius,” *Monumenta Serica*, Vol. 29 (Taylor & Francis, Ltd., 1970-1971), 28.

²¹ Alfredo P. Co, “At the Agora, in the Wilderness, Across the Warring States: Landscapes and Travel Across the Ancient Philosophical Discourses,” in *Across the Philosophical World: Essays in Comparative Philosophy* (Manila: UST Publishing House, 2009), 12.

²² *Ibid.*

²³ Global Education, “Confucianism: The Birth of a New Type of Binary Trading?”; available from <http://www.globaled.org/chinaproject/confucian/reading1.html>, accessed 25 September 2017.

²⁴ Richard G. Ang, O.P., *The Concept of Ren*, Dissertation presented to the Ecclesiastical Faculty of Philosophy of the University of Santo Tomas (Manila: UST Publishing House, 2011), Abstract.

the mark of humanity that “transcends race, creed, [and] time.”²⁵ As a “consciousness-of-human-other,”²⁶ what *Ren* brings to light is an awareness of both one’s own and of another’s existence, of the human-other. It is not simply a consciousness of a distinct being, but a recognition of one’s humanity in the (humanity of the) other. The manner of illustrating *Ren* “consists in consideration for others[,]”²⁷ not limited to merely an awareness of the other, but also involves taking them into practical consideration both prior to and during action.

The Master said, “Zengzi! All that I teach is unified by one guiding principle.” [...] Zengzi said, “All of what the Master teaches amounts to nothing more than *zhong*, ‘loyalty,’ tempered by *shu*, ‘sympathetic understanding.’”²⁸

“Teach,” in this respect, is translated as *Dao*, meaning both “to teach” and “the Way.” The *Dao* that *Kong Zi* prescribes could be understood as bounded together by a single thread; hence, it is through *Zhong* and *Shu* that the *Dao* of *Kong Zi* is understood. “*Zhong* therefore is the positive aspect of practice of *Ren*. [...] *Shu* on the other hand signifies a cautious and prohibitive advice.”²⁹ What the Master teaches is the way he guides his pupils. These instructions are not abstract ideals, but “practical insights of a cultivated person, permeated with a sense of purpose and a passionate concern for the welfare of his fellow human beings.”³⁰ What *Kong Zi* points to is practical living of and in civil society. It is *the way* of life—in accordance with one’s reality, a multifarious amalgamation of individuals, concepts and ideas, and power-relations.

Furthermore, in understanding *Ren*, *Kong Zi* did not offer a clear definition to it. One that brings it to greater clarity, however, is that it is “the process whereby [the] quality of humanity is realized.”³¹ Thus, to set oneself in the path of the *Dao*, then, means to realize one’s potentialities: to probe the depths of being; a task of consistently evaluating quality rather than quantity;³² a lifetime process of sublation, integration, realization, and most importantly, of exercising one’s *Ren*.

Ren, as this essay argues, is translatable as *power (pouvoir)*— not as something exploitive or authoritarian, but as something expressed productively in social relations, even in the most miniscule interactions.³³ *Ren* is the exemplification of what it means to be truly human, stressing the presence of moral principles and expecting action accordingly. *Yi* is associated to this: “[T]he practice of *Chung* and *Shu* means the practice of *Ren* [and leads to] the carrying out of one’s responsibilities and duties in society, in which is comprised the quality of *Yi* or righteousness.”³⁴ To be conscious of the other is to act through *Zhong* and *Shu*, which effectuates change in the social sphere—one acts according to one’s role in society, fulfilling responsibilities and duties as a manifestation of power.

²⁵ Magdalena Alonso-Villaba, *Philosophy of the East* (Manila: UST Publishing House, 1996), 133.

²⁶ Co, *The Blooming of a Hundred Flowers*, 112.

²⁷ Yu-Lan, *A Short History of Chinese Philosophy*, 43.

²⁸ Kong Zi, “Analects,” *Readings in Classical Chinese Philosophy*, 4.15, p. 11.

²⁹ Co, *The Blooming of a Hundred Flowers*, 108.

³⁰ Ang, O.P., *The Concept of Ren*, 7.

³¹ Nylan and Wilsom, *Lives of Confucius: Civilization’s Greatest Sage Through the Ages*, 114.

Through this, it can be viewed in several ways: “1. as a particular virtue, 2. As a general virtue, 3. As an innate moral principle, 4. As an ethical ideal, and 5. As a practice.” (Ang, O.P., *The Concept of Ren*, 24.)

³² Cf. Alonso-Villaba, *Philosophy of the East*, 136.

³³ Cf. Clare O’Farrell, “Key Concepts,” (2007) Available from <http://www.michel-foucault.com/concepts/>; Internet; accessed 24 September 2017.

³⁴ Yu-Lan, *A Short History of Chinese Philosophy*, 44.

The event ontology that is presupposed in our analysis requires that we not consider *Yi* as a static "virtue," but as dispositional. *Yi* involves persons disposing themselves in this or that manner within particular contexts.³⁵

This marks a shift from a strictly traditional understanding of power framed in one-sided perspective to a more anthropological dimension that this paper evokes. The necessity that arises from *Yi*, rooted in one's *Ren*, reveals *Yi* as a dynamic, situational virtue. It enables the individual to act according to certain principles—in relation to another, particularly to the direct relation he is in, such as father to son, husband to wife, and ruler to subject.

*"Mais ce n'est pas tout: car ce n'est pas seulement l'homme qui a peur du Pouvoir, le sujet qui a peur du maître, c'est encore le maître qui a peur de l'esclave, le Pouvoir qui a peur des sujets auxquels il commande."*³⁶ What, then, is power? Power evokes fear, but it is not one-sided. Fear is multifarious in meaning: fear in relation to a threat and fear as a venerated form of respect. The former is fear of the unknown, while the latter is in constant dialogue with the known. Power, therefore, evokes a certain understanding and knowing of the other that conjures fear, e.g., the subject fearing the master, the son to the father, and the wife to the husband—and also of having the intimate relationship with that other, e.g., the wife to the husband, the brothers, and the friends. It is also a stirring of the consciousness of the superior character toward the capabilities of the inferior: that the master and the father (and the husband) are fully aware of what the exercise of independence by the inferior may result to.

Ren is that principle of efficacious change. "[W]hile the human subject is placed in relations of production and of signification, he is equally placed in power relations that are very complex."³⁷ The multiple aspects at play in these relations refer to the various spheres or relations the character finds himself in (as, at the same time, the individual may be both father and son, ruler and subject, friend, brother, spouse). These give rise to complexities in the relation that, at moments, might even demand a compromise of one over the other. "We need a historical awareness of our present circumstance." This highlights the importance of understanding the multiple presences of a single character, as seen from different angles within the power-relations. The argument of this paper is thus that the individual is aware of his capacity in light of his relation; this, though, is also in conjunction with the other various relations he is in, and with the manifestation of his *Ren*—his power. "The reference to the root of practicing *Ren* [...] lies at the heart of the Analects."³⁸ *Kong Zi's* central idea is that of *Wei Ren*—practicing *Ren*. The embodiment of one's *Ren* takes the form of his *Yi*, of how he conducts himself according to his *Ming*. The adjective of *Zheng* stresses how he must conduct in the relations—how his entitled position in the relation is not solely one of dominance, but one that carries an expected responsibility akin to duties.

³⁵ Hall and Ames, *Thinking Through Confucius*, 105.

³⁶ Alexandre Koyré, "Pouvoir," *Revue Philosophique de la France et de l'Étranger*, Vol. 136, No. 4/6 (Presses Universitaires de France, Avril-Juin 1946): 232.

³⁷ Michel Foucault, "The Subject and Power," *The Essential Foucault: Selections from the Essential Works of Foucault 1954-1984*, Paul Rabinow and Nikolas Rose, eds. (New York: The New Press, 2003), 127

³⁸ Kim-Chong Chong, "The Practice of Jen," *Philosophy East and West*, Vol. 49, No. 3, Human "Nature" in Chinese Philosophy: A Panel of the 1995 Annual Meeting of the Association for Asian Studies (University of Hawai'i Press, July 1999): 300.

“*Le pouvoir assujettit en déterminant des conduites.*”³⁹ The emphasis on *Ren* as *pouvoir* lies in the idea that power creates individuals. Through the weight by which *Ren* determines the individuals, as he comes to know himself through the relations and others, dynamic forces are at play through this exemplification of power. “Power exists only as exercised by some on others, only when it is put into action[.]”⁴⁰ Thus, a full understanding of one’s *Ren* exists only insofar as the relation remains dynamic; when the relation ceases, the power dissipates. However, the question of whether it can truly cease and disappear is rhetorical for the individual is continually embedded in such relations. “Neither the newly emerging public roles nor the time-honored familial roles could claim self-evident validity, everything had to be re considered and re-defined.”⁴¹ The individual is inextricably part of these relations, but an anthropological re-understanding of *Wu Lun* reveals the internal movement of power within. The traditional roles and values upheld by this principle find renewed meaning in acknowledging the power of each individual. It is precisely in seeing the continual shifts in power-relations that *Wu Lun* is acknowledged.

Conclusion

“*L’homme – à moins de voir des catastrophes révolutionnaires et guerrières se renouveler toujours plus profondes et toujours plus violentes – devra apprendre à se gouverner lui-même.*”⁴² In response to the prince’s inquiry about the art of governance, the insight is simple: man must learn to govern himself. The social order, as exhibited by the power-relations, in fact, establishes the individual in junction with the other. “The Master said, ‘By nature people are similar; they diverge as the result’ of practice.”⁴³ The idea of man’s fundamental equality is *Ren*; the difference is the manifest through the relations he is in. Each person possesses *pouvoir*, the capacity for the divergences of principles. The *Wu Lun* prescribed does not sufficiently probe into the depths of *Ren* and the individuals’ capacities. This attempt has sought to approximate the individual’s exemplification of *Ren*, that is, to unearth his essential power: how he exists in relation to others. The superior-inferior dichotomy is an understanding of what the individual is—by means of his *Ming*—but this does not limit his capacity. The idea of power-relations as the anthropological understanding of *Wu Lun* asserts that the dimensions of the individual’s experience

³⁹ Jacques Rollet, “Michel Foucault et la Question du Pouvoir,” *Archives de Philosophie*, Vol. 51, No. 4 (Centre Sèvres – Facultés jésuites de Paris, Octobre-Décembre 1988): 1.

⁴⁰ Foucault, *The Subject and Power*, 137.

⁴¹ Vogelsang, “Beyond Confucius: A Socio-historical Reading of the ‘Lunyu,’” *Oriens Extremus*, 41. I also include what Vogelsang notes in this: “[André Kieserling in *Kommunikation unter Anwesenden: Studien über Interaktionssysteme (english translation)* (Frankfurt : Suhrkamp, 1999),] 454, points out ‘the oft-repeated anthropological observation that under these circumstances [i.e., in segmentary societies] there is no or hardly any privacy.’ It seems that a real private sphere appeared only as a counterpart of an emerging of a public sphere: this means that both spheres were new and had to be organized.” The dichotomy that Kieserling identifies in regard to the private spaces of individuals is not inessential in undertaking the implications of translation *Ren* as *power*. Vogelsang strengthens the idea of the movement between standards and that of a holistic perspective, noting that both spheres indeed have to be organized. They exist in continual dialectics—the novelty of both arises from the distinction laid out by the (power) relations encapsulated by the *Wu Lun*. Though not longer encompassed within this essay, I wish to further extend my redefinition of *Ren* toward its emancipatory impulse. *Kong Zi* may not have been fully aware, but there are traces of a better order (as seen in the direction of his answer towards a social order rather than a form of government.) “An elite society in which all men are brothers: this thought would have been unthinkable.” (Vogelsang, 44) This utopic vision of everyone acting accordingly is, therefore, a truly remarkable idea that—as is often the case with many utopic postulations—lacks anthropological dimensions, ergo lacking a possible applicability (sans totalitarian regimes).

⁴² Koyré, “Pouvoir,” *Revue Philosophique de la France et de l’Étranger*, 239.

⁴³ Confucius, “Analects,” *Readings in Classical Chinese Philosophy*, 17.1, p. 48.

are vital to his holistic development and realization. The imperative of conduct (*Yi*) is the primal source of the divergence from idea to subject: the anthropological effect is that the relations are not purely one-sided; power is not solely of the superior character. In seeing the close connection between the key terms have with one another, one is able to identify the flow and subjectification of *Ren*,⁴⁴ the power of the individual as externalized through the *Wu Lun* as power-relations.

⁴⁴ The subjectification of the *Ren* (power) centers on the importance of the historicity and the anthropological dimension of the individual. He is not merely a white-washed idea or a reproduced copy of another, but a dynamic individual constituting his own historicity and unique marks. The movement, therefore, is a personal, interior movement that recognizes the individual's capacity and power, particularly as expressed in his relations.

Bibliography

- Alonso-Villaba, Magdalena. *Philosophy of the East*. Manila: UST Publishing House, 1996.
- Ang, Richard G. *The Concept of Ren*. Presented to the Ecclesiastical Faculty of Philosophy, University of Santo Tomas. Manila: UST Publishing House, 2011.
- Cheng, Chung-ying. "On Yi as a Universal Principle of Specific Application in Confucian Morality." *Philosophy East and West* 22, no. 3. (July 1972): 269-280.
- Chong, Kim-Chong. "The Practice of Jen." *Philosophy East and West* 49, no. 3, (July 1999): 298-316.
- Co, Alfredo P. *The Blooming of a Hundred Flowers: Philosophy of Ancient China*. Vol. 1 of *Across the Philosophical Silk Road: A Festschrift in Honor of Alfredo P. Co*. Manila: UST Publishing House, 2009.
- . "At the Agora, in the Wilderness, Across the Warring States: Landscapes and Travel Across the Ancient Philosophical Discourses." In *Across the Philosophical World: Essays in Comparative Philosophy*. Manila: UST Publishing House, 2009.
- Fang, Thomé H. *Chinese Philosophy: Its Spirit and Its Development*. Taipei: Linking Publishing Co. Ltd, 1981.
- Foucault, Michel. "The Subject and Power." *The Essential Foucault: Selections from the Essential Works of Foucault 1954-1984*. Edited by Paul Rabinow and Nikolas Rose. New York: The New Press, 2003.
- Global Education. "Confucianism: The Birth of a New Type of Binary Trading?" Available from <http://www.globaled.org/chinaproject/confucian/reading1.html>. Accessed 25 September 2017.
- Hall, David L. and Roger T. Ames. *Thinking Through Confucius*. New York: State University of New York Press, 1987.
- . "Getting It Right: On Saving Confucius from the Confucians." *Philosophy East and West* 34, no. 1 (January 1984): 3-23.
- Hsü, Dau-Lin. "The Myth of the 'Five Human Relations' of Confucius." *Monumenta Serica* 29 (1970-1971): 27-37.
- Kieserling, André. *Kommunikation unter Anwesenden: Studien über Interaktionssysteme*. Frankfurt: Suhrkamp, 1999.
- Kong Zi. "Analects." Translated by Edward Gilman Slingerland from the original Lun Yu. Readings in Classical Chinese Philosophy. Edited by Ivanhoe, Philip J. and Bryan W. Van Norden. Cambridge: Hackett Publishing Company, Inc., 2001.
- Kong Zi. *Analects of Confucius*. Translated by James Legge from the original Lun Yu. Available from <http://china.usc.edu/confucius-analects>. Accessed 24 September 2017.
- Koyré, Alexandre. "Pouvoir." *Revue Philosophique de la France et de l'Étranger* 136, no. 4/6. (Avril-Juin 1946): 230-239.
- Nylan, Michael and Thomas Wilson. *Lives of Confucius: Civilization's Greatest Sage Through the Ages*. New York: Double day, 2010.

- O'Farrell, Clare. "Key Concepts." 2007. Available from <https://michel-foucault.com/key-concepts/>. Accessed 24 September 2017.
- Rollet, Jacques. "Michel Foucault et la Question du Pouvoir." *Archives de Philosophie* 51, no. 4. (Octobre-Décembre 1988): 647-663.
- Vogelsang, Kai. "Beyond Confucius: A Socio-historical Reading of the 'Lunyu'." *Oriens Extremus* 49 (2010): 29-61. Harrassowitz Verlag.
- Yu-Lan, Fung. *A Short History of Chinese Philosophy*. Edited by Derk Bodde. New York: The Free Press, 1948.

Using Useless Words: Zhuang Zi on the Problem of Language¹

Franz Joseph C. Yoshiy II

University of the Philippines - Baguio | fcyoshiy@up.edu.ph

Abstract: Despite the seeming absence of a systematic discussion on the problem of language, we find occasional instances in the *Book of Zhuang Zi* where words became the very locus of Zhuang Zi's discourse. My initial sense is that the problem of language, for Zhuang Zi, may be framed as a problem concerning the nature of words. This paper examines those passages wherein Zhuang Zi offers his perspective on the value and nature of words, then tried to analyze them against the backdrop of his entire philosophy. For Zhuang Zi, the problem of language is framed in such a way that inquiries into the perplexities concerning that nature and use of words: words (1) produce distinctions that need to be transcended; (2) are inadequate to express the most intimate reality of things or The Way (the *Dao*); (3) are relative depending on the individual using it; (4) may be used in one's pursuit of the Way, but must eventually abandon it; and, (5) may be expressed in three forms: *yuyan*, *chongyan*, and *zhiyan*. Ultimately, we find that words for Zhuang Zi bear the paradox of being useful and useless at the same time.

Keywords: *Zhuang Zi, language, words, Daoism, Chinese Philosophy*

Introduction

Language is a quintessential part of our everyday lives. It allows us to communicate and interact with other human beings. It allows us to express our thoughts and feelings, whether spoken or written. Likewise, language is also used to transmit certain truths and knowledge about nature and the world we live in. For the Chinese, language bears a prominent place in the way they think. This is clearly exhibited by the fact that they equate “civilization,” or *Wenhua*, with the cultivation of their written language.² Imagine, then, if someone were to tell you that words are insufficient to express and transmit reality—that language itself is always inadequate to represent the truth. This is a position strongly held by the *Dao Jia* (Daoist School), particularly by one of its prominent sages, Zhuang Zi.

Zhuang Zi (or Chuang Tzu) lived between c. 369 BCE and c. 286 BCE. Little is known about the life of this important sage except that he was from the “little state of Meng on the border between the present Shantung and Honan provinces, where he lived a hermit's life, but was nevertheless

¹ This paper was delivered during the Undergraduate Philosophy Conference 2017, hosted by the Concilium Philosophiae, at the Beato Angelico Auditorium and St. Raymund's Building, University of Santo Tomas, España, Manila, 6 April 2017.

² The Chinese equivalent for the word “civilization” is *Wenhua*. “*Wen* literally signifies language, more specifically the written form. *Hua* on the other hand signifies development, a flowering. It can be said that while in essence, the world civilization for the West is urbanization, and for the Chinese it is the development and propagation of the written language.” Alfredo P. Co, *The Blooming of a Hundred Flowers: Philosophy of Ancient China*, vol. I of *Across the Philosophical Silk Road: A Festschrift in Honor of Alfredo P. Co* (Manila: University of Santo Tomas Publishing House, 2009), 10.

famous for his ideas and writings.”³ Han Dynasty’s Grand Historian, Sima Qian, offers us a vivid picture of this man with a short anecdote: when Prince Wei of Chu heard of Zhuang Zi, he sent his messengers to the latter to bring him gifts and invite him to become prime minister. Zhuang Zi rebuked the messengers by saying that he would rather enjoy his own free will than to be a slave to the ruler.⁴ Aside from these, accounts also mention that he and Meng Zi were contemporaries and that he was a good friend of Hui Shi.⁵

The Book of Zhuang Zi is the literature commonly attributed to Zhuang Zi. Fung Yu-lan states that this may have been compiled by Zhuang Zi’s foremost commentator, Kuo Hsiang.⁶ This book is a collection thirty-three chapters of parables and tales where “[m]any of his [Zhuang Zi] characters are ordinary people on the streets, in the mountains, and on the fields, who lived so closely to nature.”⁷

In the above-mentioned book, Zhuang Zi discussed timeless issues of human concern. Topics revolved around the relativity and equality of things, critique of Confucianism and Mohism, meditation on life and death, and so on. In fact, the problem of language was not a central concern for him.⁸ Despite the seeming absence of a systematic discussion on such problem, we find occasional instances in the *Book of Zhuang Zi* where words became the very locus of Zhuang Zi’s discourse. My initial sense is that the problem of language, for Zhuang Zi, may be framed as a problem concerning the nature of words. This paper examines those passages wherein Zhuang Zi offers his perspective on the value and nature of words, then analyzes them against the backdrop of his entire philosophy.

Zhuang Zi on The Problem of Words

In the second chapter of the *Book of Zhuang Zi*, he tells us:

Words are not just wind. Words have something to say. But if what they have to say is not fixed, then do they really say something? Or do they say nothing? People suppose that words are different from the peeps of baby birds, but is there any difference, or isn’t there? What does the Way rely on, that we have true and false? What do words rely on, that we have right and wrong? How can the Way go away and not exist? How can words exist and not be acceptable? When the Way relies on little accomplishments and words rely on vain show, then we have the rights and wrongs of the Confucians and the Mohists. What one calls right, the other calls wrong; what one calls wrong, the other calls right. But if we want to right their wrongs and wrong their rights, then the best thing to use is clarity.⁹

It is evident from the passage that words, although they may convey something, are always in the state of flux because they depend on our notions of right and wrong. If this is so, how can words convey something? To demonstrate, one may exclaim that he is right and the other is wrong, and vice-versa. Here, Zhuang Zi forwards his criticism against Confucianism and Mohism. Kuo Hsiang remarks that these two schools of thought affirm the distinction between right and wrong, while denying that

³ Fung Yu-lan, *A Short History of Chinese Philosophy*, trans. by, Derek Bodde (New York: The Free Press, 1948), 104.

⁴ Cf. Co, *The Blooming of a Hundred Flowers*, 286. See also *Ibid*.

⁵ Cf. Fung Yu-lan, *A Short History of Chinese Philosophy*, 104. N.B. Meng Zi (Mencius), who lived between 372 B.C. and 238 B.C., was one of the major philosophers of the *Ru Jia* or the School of Literati. On the other hand, Hui Shi lived around 350 B.C.-260 B.C. He is affiliated with the *Ming Jia* of the School of Names.

⁶ Fung Yu-lan, *A Short History of Chinese Philosophy*, 104.

⁷ Co, *The Blooming of a Hundred Flowers*, 287.

⁸ Cf. *Ibid.*, 285.

⁹ *The Complete Works of Chuang Tzu*, trans. by Burton Watson (New York: Columbia University Press, 2013), 10.

there is no distinction between the two; hence, affirming what they deny and denying what they affirm demonstrates that there is really no distinction.¹⁰ Note that one of Zhuang Zi's primary advocacy in the second chapter is "the equality of all things," which echoes his abhorrence for distinctions.

Chapter 13 of the *Book of Zhuang Zi* provides us with a more succinct yet complex take on language as conceived in the written form, i.e., books. The passage goes as follows:

Men of the world who value the Way all turn to books. But books are nothing more than words. Words have value; what is of value in words is meaning. Meaning has something it is pursuing, but the thing that it is pursuing cannot be put into words and handed down. The world values words and hands down books, but although the world values them, I do not think them worth valuing. What the world takes to be value is not real value. What you can look at and see are forms and colors; what you can listen to and hear are names and sounds. What a pity!—that the men of the world should suppose that form and color, name and sound, are sufficient to convey the truth of a thing. It is because in the end, they are not sufficient to convey truth that "those who know do not speak, those who speak do not know." But how can the world understand this!¹¹

This is a very important selection as it clearly demonstrates Zhuang Zi's position on the inadequacy of words to express the truth and reality of the Way or the *Dao*. His criticism is hurled towards those who turn to the ancient classics in their search for the Way.¹² Remember that the Way, which is the principal philosophical concept of the Daoist school, itself is "unnamable".¹³ Zhuang Zi points out that words, since they are empirical in nature i.e., they appeal to our senses, are not enough to present the truth and that those who persistently speak of the Way are the ones who are really ignorant of the truth. On the contrary, those who pursue the Way in silence—those who understand its ineffability are the ones who are indeed wise. In a later chapter, this is simply expressed as follows: "the sage practices the teaching that has no words."¹⁴

In Chapter 26, we find an interesting conversation between *Ming Jia* (School of Names) philosopher, Hui Zi (or Hui Shih), and Zhuang Zi himself:

Huizi said to Zhuangzi, "Your words are useless!" Zhuangzi said, "A man has to understand the useless before you can talk to him about the useful. The earth is certainly vast and broad, though a man uses no more of it than the area he puts his feet on. If, however, you were to dig away all the earth from around his feet until you reached the Yellow Springs, then would the man still be able to make use of it?" "No, it would be useless," said Huizi. "It is obvious, then," said Zhuangzi, "that the useless has its use."¹⁵

¹⁰ Cf. Fung Yu-lan and Chuang Tzu, *Chuang-Tzu: A New Selected Translation with an Exposition of the Philosophy of Kuo Hsiang* (Berlin and Heidelberg: Foreign Language Teaching and Research Publishing Co., Ltd and Springer-Verlag, 2016), 12.

¹¹ *The Complete Works of Chuang Tzu*, 106.

¹² In the subsequent passage, Zhuang Zi tells us the story of an old wheelwright who criticized the Duke for reading the literature written by the sages. Cf. *Ibid.*, 106-107.

¹³ In the famous classic of the Daoists, *Tao Te Ching* (or *Dao De Jing*), it is said that "The Tao (Way) that can be told of is not the eternal Tao." Chinese scholar, Wing-Tsit Chan remarks that while other schools regard the Way as a moral truth, for the Daoists "it is the One, which is natural, eternal, spontaneous, nameless, and indescribable." Cf. Wing-Tsit Chan (trans. and comp.), *A Source Book in Chinese Philosophy* (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 1963), 136-139.

¹⁴ This is from Chapter 22. *The Complete Works of Chuang Tzu*, 177.

¹⁵ *Ibid.*, 231.

The “usefulness of the useful” is one of the major motifs found in Zhuang Zi’s philosophy. This short selection, among other parables that carries the same theme, provides us with his continuous abhorrence for distinctions. “Distinctions between the useful and the useless cannot and should not be made, for no correct basis for predication can be discovered.”¹⁶ Similarly, if someone beats you in an argument, does that mean he is right, and you are wrong? Or, if you beat him, does that entail you are right and he is wrong?¹⁷ Our notions of “right” and “wrong”; “useful” and “useless” are shaped by our own perspectives hence, they are relative. Words, then, “are not static but always changing relative to their usage by individuals.”¹⁸

Still from Chapter 26, we find a short but insightful section about words and their meaning:

The fish trap exists because of the fish; once you’ve gotten the fish, you can forget the trap. The rabbit snare exists because of the rabbit; once you’ve gotten the rabbit, you can forget the snare. Words exist because of meaning; once you’ve gotten the meaning, you can forget the words. Where can I find a man who has forgotten words so I can have a word with him?¹⁹

Words are dependent upon meaning, as implied in the passage. Hence, once someone grasps the meaning of the word, one can leave the word behind. Bryan Van Norden relates this to Zhuang Zi’s mysticism. He says that for mystics, like Zhuang Zi, words are not enough to express mystical knowledge. He acknowledges, nevertheless, the utility of words in attaining this kind of knowledge. In addition, he remarks “[w]ords can also gesture toward the Way, to help those struggling to grasp it, as long as they do not become fixated on these words.”²⁰ In short, Zhuang Zi exhorts us to abandon our attachment to mundane words and focus ourselves towards the transcendental way.

As for our last example, this is taken from Chapter 27. Here Zhuang Zi gives us three types of words: *yuyan* (imputed words), *chongyang* (repeated words) and *zhibian* (goblet words). For *yuyan* or “imputed words,” Zhuang Zi tells us:

are like persons brought in from outside for the purpose of exposition. A father does not act as go-between for his own son because the praises of the father would not be as effective as the praises of an outsider. It is the fault of other men, not mine, [that I must resort to such a device, for if I were to speak in my own words], then men would respond only to what agrees with their own views and reject what does not, would pronounce “right” what agrees with their own views and “wrong” what does not.²¹

On the other hand, *chongyan* or “repeated words”:

are intended to put an end to argument. They can do this because they are the words of the elders. If, however, one is ahead of others in age but does not have a grasp of the warp and woof, the root and branch of things, that is commensurate with his years, then he is not really ahead of others. An old man who is not in some way ahead of others has not grasped the Way of man, and if he has not grasped the Way of man, he deserves to be looked on as a mere stale remnant of the past.²²

¹⁶ John S. Major, “The Efficacy of Uselessness: A Chuang-tzu Motif” in *Philosophy East and West* 25, no. 3 (July 1975): 268.

¹⁷ Cf. *The Complete Works of Chuang Tzu*, 17.

¹⁸ Karyn L. Lai, *An Introduction to Chinese Philosophy* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2008), 166.

¹⁹ *The Complete Works of Chuang Tzu*, 233.

²⁰ Bryan W. Van Norden. *Introduction to Classical Chinese Philosophy* (Indianapolis/Cambridge: Hackett Publishing Company, 2011), 154.

²¹ *The Complete Works of Chuang Tzu*, 234.

²² *Ibid.*

And lastly, *zhibian* or “goblet words” are used to:

harmonize all things in the Heavenly Equality, leave them to their endless changes, and so live out my years. As long as I do not say anything about them, they are a unity. But the unity and what I say about it have ceased to be a unity; what I say and the unity have ceased to be a unity.²³

In a gist, “imputed words” are my words which I place in the tongue of other persons in order to avoid dividing the opinions of other men. “Repeated words” are words from the elders or wise old men that are used to stop a debate.²⁴ And, “goblet words” are words that go with the incessant flow and change of things, hence providing harmony in the world. Some have noted that these three were the literary/rhetorical devices used by Zhuang Zi in his book.²⁵ According to Shuen-fu Lin “[t]hese three modes of language are intimately related to Chuang Tzu's ideas about life, language, and the world he lived in.”²⁶ He adds “[w]hile *yuyan* and *zhongyan* [*chongyan*] seem to be primarily concerned with the practical aspects of expression of ideas and of winning an argument in debate or disputation, *zhibian*, the third rhetorical device, is concerned with the more philosophical aspect of Chuang Tzu's theory of language and self-expression.”²⁷ Hence, let us further analyze this third rhetorical device of Zhuang Zi.

Shuen-fu Lin offers us a very compelling exegesis of the term *zhibian*. Although this word has been interpreted in many ways, he emphasizes the relevance of two commonly used renderings of the term. Firstly, the word *zhibi*, as far as the Daoists, are concerned, refers to a particular object i.e., “a goblet for urging wine on a guest.” This goblet is designed to tip when full and remain balanced when empty. He sees this as a metaphor for the mind. Just as the goblet (mind) gets filled, it tips and loses its balance hence, one should empty the goblet right away. Similarly, “*Zhibian*... is speech that is natural, unpremeditated, always responding to the changing situations in the flow of discourse, and always returning the mind to its original state of emptiness as soon as a speech act is completed.”²⁸ Secondly, the word *Zhibi* for Shuen-fu Lin is a parodic rendering of another character pronounced as *zhibi* which means “uneven, irregular, and random.” Thus, *zhibian* may be taken as “irregular and random words.” He quips that while some of Zhuang Zi's fables and anecdotes follow the structure of *yuyan* and *chongyan*, discursive passages, which represent the random comments made by the “implied author” (to borrow a term from Wayne Booth) on the stories, are the first and clearest examples of *zhibian*.²⁹ He draws a connection between these two interpretations by saying that *zhibi* in the second sense “is the necessary result of the uniquely Taoist ideal way of speech as embodied in the metaphor of the “goblet words” [*zhibi* in the first sense].”³⁰

One could see the importance of *zhibian* in Zhuang Zi's take on language. The spontaneity, randomness, naturalness of *zhibian* made him exclaim “[i]f there were no goblet words coming forth

²³ *The Complete Works of Chuang Tzu*, 234.

²⁴ Burton Watson notes that another rendering for this type would be *zhongyan* or “weighty words.” *Ibid.* (see note 1).

²⁵ *Ibid.* (see note 1).

²⁶ Shuen-fu Lin, “Chuang Tzu” in *Masterworks of Asian Literature in Comparative Perspective: A Guide for Teaching*, ed. by Barbara Stone Miller (Armonk, New York: M.E. Sharpe, 1994), 248.

²⁷ *Ibid.*, 253.

²⁸ *Ibid.*, 254.

²⁹ *Ibid.*

³⁰ *Ibid.*, 255.

day after day to harmonize all by the Heavenly Equality, then how could I survive for long?”³¹ Therefore, it can be said, that in attempting to express the Way through words, one must remember *zhiyan*.

Conclusion

From these selections alone, one may realize the place of language in Zhuang Zi’s philosophy. For him, words (or language in general) (1) produce distinctions that needs to be transcended; (2) are inadequate to express the most intimate reality of things or The Way (the Dao); (3) are relative depending on the individual using them; (4) may be used in one’s pursuit of the Way, but must eventually abandon it; and (5) may be expressed in three forms: *yuyan*, *chongyan*, and *zhiyan*.

One can surmise the somewhat contradicting claims of Zhuang Zi on language. Sometimes, he acknowledges its usefulness. Likewise, at some point, he calls for its abandonment due to its inadequacy. Despite these conflicting claims, he is perhaps clear about one thing: that language needs to be transcended. In fact, one should not be bothered by these paradoxes as one must learn how to find usefulness in uselessness and uselessness in usefulness—a very ideal coming from Zhuang Zi’s philosophy. Indeed, his take on language may be summed up by his question: “[w]here can I find a man who has forgotten words so I can have a word with him?”³²

³¹ *The Complete Works of Chuang Tzu*, 235.

³² *Ibid.*, 233.

Bibliography

- Chan, Wing-Tsit. *A Source Book in Chinese Philosophy*. Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 1963.
- Co, Alfredo P. *The Blooming of a Hundred Flowers: Philosophy of Ancient China*, vol. I of *Across the Philosophical Silk Road: A Festschrift in Honor of Alfredo P. Co*. Manila: University of Santo Tomas Publishing House, 2009.
- Lai, Karyn L. *An Introduction to Chinese Philosophy*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2008.
- Lin, Shuen-fu. "Chuang Tzu" in *Masterworks of Asian Literature in Comparative Perspective: A Guide for Teaching*. Edited by Barbara Stone Miller. Armonk, New York: M.E. Sharpe, 1994.
- Major, John S. "The Efficacy of Uselessness: A Chuang-tzu Motif." *Philosophy East and West* 25, no. 3 (July 1975): 265-279.
- The Complete Works of Chuang Tzu*. Translated by Burton Watson. New York: Columbia University Press, 2013.
- Van Norden, Bryan W. *Introduction to Classical Chinese Philosophy*. Indianapolis/Cambridge: Hackett Publishing Company, 2011.
- Yu-lan, Fung and Chuang Tzu. *Chuang-Tzu: A New Selected Translation with an Exposition of the Philosophy of Kuo Hsiang*. Berlin and Heidelberg: Foreign Language Teaching and Research Publishing Co., Ltd and Springer-Verlag, 2016.
- Yu-lan, Fung. *A Short History of Chinese Philosophy*. Translated by Derek Bodde. New York: The Free Press

Partisanship as Moral Duty: An Agent-Centered Deontological Analysis

John Austin L. Gan

University of Santo Tomas - Manila | johnaustine.gan.ab@ust.edu.ph

Abstract: This paper sheds light on the ethical phenomenon of partisanship through the lens of agent-centered deontology. Specifically, it seeks to address the question whether individuals have genuine moral duty to engage in partisanship as part of societal participation. To address this, I first define the act of choosing and abstention to elaborate on its semantic and practical significance. Then, I dissect partisanship and choosing through several examples to highlight its key processes and technicalities. Second, I define agent-centered deontology to specify its ethical nuances in contrast to other branches of deontology. Third, I examine the unique interactions that occur between the agent, social movements, and society as a whole in the context of the moral duty of partisanship, locating both the sources of choosing and abstention. Lastly, I integrate the findings of the previous chapters to formulate a conclusion on the central question of this paper. In what follows, I argue that agent-centered deontology is compatible with the moral duty of partisanship, but only in cases where the agent deems it an important personal priority. This is of great relevance because it helps us navigate through a fundamental ethical dilemma that individuals face in traversing a world characterized by a multiplicity of contrasting, and often conflicting moral beliefs and narratives. Most importantly, it engages with the ongoing phenomenon of partisan decline, which has been an ongoing discussion in the past fifty decades.

Keywords: *partisanship, agent-centered deontology, choosing, abstention, moral obligation*

Introduction

Participation comes with the presupposition of individual and autonomous choice. Since time immemorial, society has recognized the act of participating as a *conditio sine qua non* to enable all social processes and interactions among individuals. Over time, this foundational principle of participation has been institutionalized through various systems (e.g., social, political, and economic), and otherwise, was designed to regulate and facilitate collective engagement *in toto*. However, one can observe the gradual, although subtle, intensification of the demand for participation in these systems. The concept, once primarily tied to personal identity, has become increasingly associated with our public identity and societal attachment so much so that in the 21st century, the very act of choosing between two polarizing options in public discourses have frequently become a catalyst for public outrage and social ostracization.¹ This is further supported by the exponential growth of systems in history that championed public consensus over more authoritative forms of civil regulation, i.e.,

¹ See Noam Lupu, "Party Polarization and Mass Partisanship: A Comparative Perspective," *Political Behavior* 37, no. 2 (2015): 332.

democracies, blockchain technology, and the dissolution of hierarchical systems such as the Apartheid and the Caste system. Simply put, partisanship has only amplified throughout the years.²

Having said this, it is essential to recognize that this phenomenon remains at an ocular and often intangible level. It primarily oscillates within the complexities of our everyday interactions whether with peers, family, and individuals extending beyond our proximate environment. This renders it challenging to identify and analyze the phenomenon at hand with precision.³ Whether a definitive name for this phenomenon can be coined is a question that falls outside the scope of this paper and will be left for other researchers to ponder. Thus, while the phenomenon's name is still up for debate, its spirit is not. To capture this spirit best, we can turn to three recent political conundrums that compel individuals to choose between varying sides, often between two opposites. First, the political tension between liberals and conservatives; second, the ongoing crisis between Israel and Palestine; and third, on a less binary, yet equally polarizing choice, the tension between which presidential candidate to support during elections. In these scenarios, the immediate question that arises is on the personal stance or choice of the individual. "Are *you* a liberal or a conservative," "Are *you* team Israel or Palestine," "Who will *you* vote for in the next elections?" Take note of the italicized word *you*, which subtly underscores the presumption of personal involvement and, by extension, an expectation of partisanship. As such, these questions often function as implicit demands of partisanship that steers the receiver of the question towards confessing a stance or making a choice. The normalcy of such inquiries is evident that many of us would not be surprised to encounter them in everyday discourse. Yet, this raises an important question: *Should this expectation of partisanship continue to be regarded as purely normal and without controversy?*⁴

Thus, this paper aims to advance the discussion on the moral duty of partisanship by examining its ethical implications both theoretically and, to some extent, practical implications. To fulfill this, I examine the issue through the lens of agent-centered deontology. The first section defines key terms and concepts before analyzing the ethical implications of the phenomenon. In analyzing the problem through the lens of agent-centered deontology, I adopt a first-person perspective to ensure efficiency in discussing the nuances of the deontological branch utilized similar to how deontological questions are engaged with. To further nuance the ideas on partisanship, I elaborate on the act of choosing and abstention by first contextualizing its causes and considerations on a societal level. This is done through the perspectives of W.D. Lamont, Ravi Dhar, Larry Alexander, and Michael Moore. Then, the second section of this paper focuses more on the structural process and the consequences of both moral partisanship and abstention on an agent-centered basis. Additionally, I further explore the causes of choosing and abstention by analyzing the nuances of intent, motive, commitments, and

² Noam Lupu, "Party Polarization and Mass Partisanship: A Comparative Perspective," *Political Behavior* 37, no. 2 (2015): 333-335.

³ Not only is it difficult to point at the phenomenon in isolation, but it is also difficult to measure its scale as it operates within the crevices of the socio-political fabric. In other words, the challenge at hand is not merely in identifying it exclusively but also in calculating its severity. For further insights on this, See Philip E. Converse, and Roy Pierce, "Measuring Partisanship." *Political Methodology* 11, no. 3/4 (1985): 143-146.

⁴ The prevalence of partisanship-based identification consequently results in the demand to seek for alternatives. While behavioral researchers currently attempt to seek the cause-and-effect relationship between identity-based issue engagement and socio-political issues, there yet remains to be a satisfying conclusion to the quest for a superior alternative. Perhaps this research will bear fruit in the near future, but for now it remains the case that a gap in such solutions prevails. See Benjamin Highton, and Cindy D. Kam, "The Long-Term Dynamics of Partisanship and Issue Orientations," *The Journal of Politics* 73, no. 1 (2011): 204-206.

even socio-political factors such as epistemological constrictions, and social norms. Crucially, this study does not endeavor to suggest that there is a singular, definitive moral side or narrative that individuals *must* choose, but rather simply to analyze whether a moral duty of partisanship exists under the purview of agent-centered deontology and whether the act of abstention is ethically valid when examined under the same philosophical viewpoint as the former. It simply attempts to extend on the discussion of agent-centered obligation particularly in contemporary time and setting. Moreover, this paper does not concern itself with justifying its conclusion in the face of other moral frameworks such as moral relativism, subjectivism, conventionalism, and so on; its scope is limited only to the agent-centered deontological model, as resolving each framework would require a significantly broader scope that extends beyond this paper and will likewise be left for others to ruminate on. Most importantly, this is of great relevance because it helps us navigate through the fundamental ethical dilemma that individuals face in traversing a world characterized by a multiplicity of contrasting and often conflicting moral beliefs and narratives. Most importantly, this paper engages with the ongoing phenomenon of partisan decline, which has been an ongoing discussion in the past 50 decades.⁵

Choosing, Partisanship, and Duty

What does it mean to 'choose'?

The crux of partisanship is the act of choosing, for choosing constitutes the willingness and deliberate decision of an individual to be a “part” of something, in this case, a social cause or specific social narrative. To understand how the moral obligation of partisanship, which fundamentally revolves around the act of choosing, interacts with agent-centered deontology, we must first define the act of choosing itself. While an agent is not required to respond to every call-to-action or engage with all the possible options to support a cause to be considered part of it, the minimum expectation is that they choose a cause and express that choice outwardly through actions, verbal speech, or similar manifestations. Therefore, the act of choosing being described is inherently human. It presupposes that decision-makers are rational beings with a general interest in maximizing utility and, thus, capable of comprehending the implications of their decisions.⁶ To put it simply, the alternative we choose must align with what we believe is best for us, a principle echoed by the philosophies of Socrates and Aristotle. Their dictum, often interpreted to mean that we choose with our best interests in mind, continues to resonate in contemporary ethical thought.⁷

Several studies similarly emphasize that the act of choosing is guided by personal preferences. For example, Edna Ullman-Margalit notes that “we speak of choosing among alternatives when the act of taking (doing) one of them is determined by the differences in one’s preferences over them.”⁸ It is for the same reason that Ullman-Margalit distinguishes between *choosing* and *picking*.⁹ For Ullman-Margalit, *choosing* involves decision-making based on specific aims or preferences, while *picking* means selecting one option over another without any specific aim or preference. For example, when we

⁵ Larry M. Bartels, “Partisanship and Voting Behavior, 1952-1996.” *American Journal of Political Science* 44, no. 1 (2000): 36.

⁶ Michael F. Altfeld and Bruce Bueno de Mesquita, “Choosing Sides in Wars,” *International Studies Quarterly* 23, no. 1 (1979): 89.

⁷ T.F. Daveney, “Choosing,” *Mind* 73, no. 292 (1964): 516.

⁸ Edna Ullmann-Margalit and Sidney Morgenbesser, “Picking and Choosing,” *Social Research* 44, no. 4 (1977): 758.

⁹ A key distinction must be made between a synonymous term with ‘picking, that is ‘selecting’. The latter will be utilized as a general term for the act of taking an option encompassing both ‘choosing’ and ‘picking.’

“choose” a political candidate, we may do so because we prefer their policies or personality over other candidates. In contrast, when we “pick” a bottle of Coca-Cola at the grocery store, we typically do so with minimal thought and opt for the nearest bottle instead. Although there may be a way to determine which specific bottle of Coca-Cola we prefer if we compare the bottles more carefully, most people find this unnecessary for such trivial decision. This distinction between *choosing* and *picking* highlights an important ethical point: some decisions lack significant moral relevance and, therefore, do not demand careful deliberation. Ethics, as a discipline, focuses on the decisions we actively engage with and consider meaningful as opposed to actions that are passive, almost involuntary. Thus, choice understood in an ethical discussion refers to the active and purposive act of selecting an option based on specific aims, personal preferences, and other similar determining factors.

Lastly, we define the act of non-choosing. Non-choosing or *abstention* is the conscious and informed decision not to choose, represent, and/or support a particular stance. In this context then, when one abstains, they actively choose not to support in any way, shape, or form any social movements or social narratives. In the later sections, we discuss the implications of abstention in this paper’s ethical case and distinguish it from the ethical implications of actively choosing a side. In either case, such choices are both an advantage and a disadvantage of any social formation, particularly when confronted with opposition. This raises the critical question: what role does choice truly play within the larger context of collective conflict?

How do we choose in a collective setting?

To begin, it is best to analyze moral partisanship within its most immediate application—in politics and community. Political and social partisanship can be understood as the public manifestation of an individual’s moral and personal beliefs, reflected in their tendency to favor one cause over another. Existing research such as W.D. Lamont’s “Politics and Culture,”¹⁰ as well as Ravi Dhar’s “Beyond Rationality: The Content of Preferences,”¹¹ demonstrates a direct correlation between partisanship and factors like moral judgment, culture, upbringing, and tradition significantly shape individual preferences. These political and social causes encompass societal issues that affect large populations worldwide, such as environmental concerns, decisions on war and peace, and debates on human rights. However, the specific social causes with which individuals align may also depend on their geographical location. For example, someone living in the Philippines may face issues unrelated to those living in Hawaii. Yet, the physical distance between individuals and certain social issues does not necessarily diminish the ethical importance of addressing these underlying causes. It does not prevent individuals from forming opinions on said issues. In fact, with the advent of modern technology and information exchange, people can now stay informed of social issues around the world, regardless of proximity.

Therefore, one cannot¹² dismiss social causes that affect individuals who are not geographically close to us as irrelevant or alienable. To say, “I have no opinion on the people dying in the war between Ukraine and Russia since I have no moral obligation to care about them nor to have an opinion in the first place,” or “I have no opinion about the prisoners of war that my government

¹⁰ W. D. Lamont, “Politics and Culture,” *Philosophy* 20, no. 75 (1945): 39.

¹¹ Ravi Dhar, and Nathan Novemsky, “Beyond Rationality: The Content of Preferences,” *Journal of Consumer Psychology* 18, no. 3 (2008): 175.

¹² “Cannot,” since this is realistically impossible for anyone that is a product of today’s time.

holds unlawfully since they are not citizens of my nation,” reflect a troubling moral detachment. Such an attitude negates the shared humanity regardless of our political affiliation or social status. Thus, when faced with multiple social and political causes, “partisanship” is the deliberate choice of only one among them. This choice reflects an individual’s values and priorities, engaging both their personal identity and their moral obligations within a shared social world.

On the question of our moral obligations to others

Philosophers like Locke have defined duty in terms of the consent that individuals give to the government they are governed by, which forms the basis of the social contract that builds up the body politic.¹³ Others, such as Hobbes, simply define duty more broadly as the collective consent of all subjects within any government.¹⁴ This paper, however, will focus on duty in a more ontological sense rather than a political one, which will be discussed more extensively in the succeeding sections. Thus, for the purpose of this discussion, “duty” is defined as a task created by a moral obligation, wherein the individual must act in a specific way or risk going against certain ethical principles. It is important to note, however, that not all decisions entail a moral duty. When it comes to decisions that are a matter of indifference, such as choosing between two very similar options, there is no moral obligation or “ought” to be attached with it. This is because the consequences of choosing one option over the other has no significant moral impact insofar as it hardly makes any difference at all. Since there is no sufficient moral bearing, a duty cannot be derived from the decision. A moral duty presupposes a decision with significant moral bearing, which requires adequate moral substance. Without this, a duty cannot arise, as it lacks the necessary moral substance.

Then, what does “moral duty” mean when it concerns taking a moral stance through a social cause, and how is it different from other forms of moral obligation? Arthur John Simmons in *Moral Principles and Political Obligations*, uses the terms “duty” and “obligation” interchangeably. For Simmons, moral duties are essentially the same as obligations, and vice versa.¹⁵ This paper will adopt a similar approach. Simmons identifies two forms of moral duties related to our political and social obligations as individuals under a state: “positional duties” and “natural duties,” which he sourced from John Rawls. Similar to Rawls, Simmons holds that positional duties are obligations tied to certain societal positions, while natural duties are duties that humans possess by their nature. For example, a security guard may have a positional moral duty to do midnight checks in a particular restaurant every night. Failing to do so would rightfully lead to the frustration of the restaurant owners, since the security guard accepted the position knowing this task was part of their responsibility. However, the same moral frustration would not be valid towards a regular restaurant customer, who has no special duties placed on them, unlike with the security guard.

In contrast, natural duties, as Rawls argues in a very similar fashion to Rousseau, are those that are binding on individuals without the performance of previous voluntary acts and are geared towards the common good.¹⁶ These duties are not contingent on prior voluntary acts but are aimed at promoting the common good. Hence, natural duties include actions such as helping others, respecting

¹³ Rex Martin, “Political Obligation,” in *Political Concepts*, eds. Richard Bellamy and Andrew Mason, (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 2003). 42.

¹⁴ *Ibid.*

¹⁵ John A. Simmons, “The Natural Duty of Justice,” in *Moral Principles and Political Obligations*, (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1979), 152.

¹⁶ Kent Greenawalt, “The Natural Duty to Obey the Law,” *Michigan Law Review* 84, no. 1 (1985): 9.

human dignity, being honest, and so on, all of which could produce valid moral distress from others in society if the duties were not fulfilled. Thus, this paper will focus primarily on the ethical case under the light of natural duties. Nonetheless, the question of whether a given duty should be considered a positional duty instead of a natural one will be addressed in later sections.

Abstention and the Moral Duty of Partisanship

Deontology is a moral and philosophical theory that emphasizes the inherent moral duty and obligation of individuals to act in specific and non-negotiable ways, irrespective of the consequences of said actions. This duty is based on universal ethical principles such as respect for persons, rational autonomy, and human dignity. It, therefore, presupposes an “ought” in man, which man cannot alter or influence since it is fundamentally outside his control, but that man must follow. The concept of choosing a moral belief among others is particularly evident within deontological philosophy. At its core, this theory presupposes that man, as a thinking and conscious being, must act rationally by universal laws designed to protect the welfare of everyone and promote the flourishing of mankind. Deontology outlines courses of action to achieve these ends through the principles it provides for its followers, such as non-maleficence (that individuals should not cause harm to others), beneficence (that individuals must promote the well-being of everyone), autonomy (that individuals should have the freedom and responsibility to make their own decisions based on personal moral reasoning), universalizability (that ethical rules must apply to everyone), and respect for persons (that individuals must always be treated as ends in themselves).¹⁷

More specifically, for agent-centered deontology, agents have “agent-relative” obligations and permissions that justify their actions. These obligations are relative to the agent and do not necessarily indicate for others to support the same action. However, it does not mean that other agents can’t hold similar obligations in their respect. Despite all this, it is crucial to note that agent-relative reasons remain objective, much like agent-neutral reasons, and should not be confused with relativistic reasons of relativist meta-ethics.¹⁸ The reasons are objective, albeit relative to the agent. Furthermore, agent-centered deontology can be categorized into three branches.¹⁹ First, it follows a similar thought pattern to Thomas Aquinas in that the determinant of our agency is our intended means and ends. The second kind of agent-centered deontology focuses on actions instead of mental states. This branch emphasizes the nature of specific actions such as killing, lying, helping, etc. The third and last kind of agent-centered deontology blends the previous two, resulting in the equal consideration of intent and action as determinants of moral agency. This paper adopts the third kind for the following reasons: (1) by requiring both intention and action, this view avoids the overextension of obligations that may arise if either intention or action alone determine moral agency; (2) in discussing moral partisanship, it is necessary to consider external variables that implicate an agent’s actions such as knowledge, geography, culture, and so on, which require both intent and action on the agent’s part for him to engage with said variables; and (3) the very act of abstention consists of a multiplicity of intents and reasonings on an agent’s part, which directly influence its causation, thus, to be substantial, it is imperative to cover both. In this chapter, we have defined all the pertinent terms underpinning agent-

¹⁷ Greenawalt, “The Natural Duty to Obey the Law,” 3-12.

¹⁸ *Ibid.*, 1-10.

¹⁹ Larry Alexander and Michael Moore, “Deontological Ethics,” *The Stanford Encyclopedia of Philosophy* (Winter 2021 Edition), ed. Edward N. Zalta, <https://plato.stanford.edu/archives/win2021/entries/ethics-deontological/>.

centered deontology. The subsequent sections will focus on the assessment of the central problem of this paper in light of these definitions.

What does it mean to choose in the moral duty of partisanship?

There exists a positional duty of partisanship within agent-centered deontology, particularly concerning abstention. Partisanship reflects a wide-scale manifestation of the universal principles upheld by deontology and the inherent binding principles argued for by ethicists like Rawls. This paper elaborates on how pre-existing dominant moral duties, established by current deontological norms within society, do not preclude the moral duty of partisanship in all instances. To begin, we must clarify whether partisanship can itself be considered a moral duty. If moral duty is agent-relative, then moral partisanship may manifest as a moral duty for some agents depending on their personal reasons. When one “chooses” a social stance, they do so because they believe there are sufficient, convincing reasons support it. Though the act of choosing a social stance that one believes is right and ought to be supported could be viewed as an a priori good, particularly under the assumption that all humans possess the capacity for reason and conscience in their decisions, at least under deontology, must act with cognizance of the society around them. However, within agent-centered deontology, it does not follow that every agent must subscribe to the same decision. Therefore, partisanship could constitute a moral duty for some, but this varies from agent to agent. It is equally valid for one individual to affirm partisanship as a matter of grave moral consideration, as it is for another to deny it. This apparent flexibility raises concerns about leniency in defining moral duty. Yet, this approach remains consistent with the principles of agent-centered deontology.

Regardless of positional or natural duties, an individual can freely determine the duties they choose to uphold, for reasons that are uniquely their own. Nevertheless, this does not negate the moral duty of partisanship as a legitimate possibility, even if it denies its universal imposition. The duty of partisanship may be regarded as morally binding for some agents while not obligatory for others, irrespective of societal consensus. Moreover, the extent to which an individual follows through with their decision to take a stance is also irrelevant to the paper’s central thesis. This is because matters beyond the act of choosing a stance and are either extensions of the initial decision taken or are entirely different decisions altogether with consequences that may affect the agent and others involved, but cannot reverse, affect, or contradict the initial act of taking a stance. The tangible implications of this subsequent actions will be explored through specific examples, wherein the decision to take a stance presents itself to an agent sheds light on how agent-centered deontology addresses the moral duty of partisanship

Notably, since any reasonable person would likely agree that there are a priori right and wrong actions, even if only to them, it means that they can be informed and convinced of their choice otherwise. This acknowledgment implies that individuals can be informed or persuaded to reconsider their stance. However, such persuasion influences the agent’s internal reasoning rather than the external circumstances they face. Therefore, we can conclude that the moral duty of partisanship can be observed in society, even under the generously flexible, albeit crude, limitations of agent-centered deontology.

What does it mean to abstain in the moral duty of partisanship?

Now, we turn to the general act of abstention in political voting during local, divisional, regional, and national elections. While this discussion will not focus on a singular real-world example of abstention, it will address a case common across democracies worldwide. This approach ensures the case study remains both broadly relevant and ethically representative. Furthermore, the discussion distinguishes between two types of abstention: 1.) Abstention from voting in political systems that are directly proximate to you; 2.) Abstention from voting in political systems that are distant to you. The reason for utilizing two variations of the ethical case of abstention is to exhaust the discussion, which can only be done by considering the factor most likely to influence the agent's decision. In this case, proximity, is due to how significant it is to an individual's feelings and sentiments on a particular object, idea, or person. Further elaboration on the details and implications of this distinction will be laid out in the following paragraphs.

At first glance, the notion of a moral duty of partisanship within the framework of agent-centered deontology may seem implausible. However, this branch of deontological ethics posits that the moral obligations of any agent, as per this deontological branch, are based on the relative personal obligations that they have towards other agents proximate to them.²⁰ Hence, a father may have a higher moral duty to his children than the children of other fathers because of the intimate and proximate relationship they share. If so, then it would be natural to assume that a moral duty of partisanship with distant social causes would be beyond the scope of agent-centered deontology as it contradicts the notion of autonomy that an agent is entitled to and is a right that other agents must duly respect. However, this interpretation is not a clear-cut case upon closer inspection. Simply, agent-centered deontology merely suggests that each agent has within them a personal right to prioritize specific moral duties over others by the nature of their relationships and circumstances in life. This does not, however, preclude an agent's moral duty to every other individual in society.²¹ In other words, agent-centered deontology does not reject the capacity for the coexistence of a moral duty of partisanship and other agent-relative obligations.

To illustrate this further, let us take the first ethical case. For this, imagine an agent who is a mother residing in China, with the opportunity to vote for her preferred candidates in an upcoming election. This mother has a personal history marked by significant environmental challenges: she lost a loved one to carbon monoxide poisoning, suffers from chronic pulmonary disease, and has experienced a stroke. Moreover, the mother was raised by a family that frequently participated in environmental protests locally and regionally, which massively influenced her views on the importance of ecological awareness and affirmative action. As such, she developed a strong belief that pollution is the nation's most pressing issue. In the upcoming elections, her choice is between two candidates: one advocating for the further construction of more factories within certain cities that will undoubtedly contribute to further environmental degradation and a candidate who conversely supports ecological sustainability and reduce carbon emissions.

The case provided presents two existing social stances: the first is economic driven, while the second is environmentally driven. Although simplified for the sake of analysis, this scenario suffices to explore the interplay of intentions and actions in ethical decision-making. Yet, it is unnecessary to

²⁰ Greenawalt, "The Natural Duty to Obey the Law," 4-5.

²¹ *Ibid.*

involve every potential context and detail that would compel the agent to act a certain way since it is enough to conclude by only recognizing an agent's intention and, consequently, the action resulting from it. It is more realistic to assume that people generally do not dive into exhaustive deliberation of their every decision and most likely act on sufficient convincing reasons that provide them with the desired outcome. Thus, focusing on a limited set of factors is adequate to analyze the agent's intentions and subsequent actions. In a real-world sense, even with the growing number of considerations a voter must make, they will all weigh the necessary considerations and align their votes with the candidates they think will champion their values. However, note that this context assumes that the agent has adequate knowledge about the political sphere they are voting in and a sufficient understanding of their justifications for who to vote. In a later portion of this chapter, we will ruminate on the instances where agents do not possess either.

In this case, the mother decides to vote for the environmentally driven candidate. Here, her personal obligations to her child did not deter her from making a choice; rather, they reinforced her decision to choose the latter over the former out of believing the need to protect her child from the dangers of pollution. This demonstrates that contrasting stances do not necessarily paralyze an agent from choosing, proving that partisanship is possible. Furthermore, her decision aligns with the first characteristic of partisanship in relation to deontology: the element of "good intent." In other words, assuming that the mother has good intent for choosing the latter over the former, that is, to protect her child, her action already satisfies one-half of the pre-requisites of a morally valid action under the third kind of agent-centered deontology. Conversely, suppose the mother was to choose the economically driven candidate to ensure greater national economic stability so that her family can live in a more stable economy. In that case, it will still lead to her intent of being "good." Remember that "others need not agree upon agent-relative" justifications to be valid. So, while another voter might disagree out of personal prejudices, this does not affect the moral quality of the other agent's intent. Thus, in this case, though some may disagree with the mother's intent, it does not invalidate it.

There is, however, an exception to this rule. Suppose the mother intended to vote for the former because she desired more carbon pollution in the nation so that more people would suffer. In that case, her intentions are inherently "evil" in their substance and are a priori immoral under the view of deontology. It is not the external judgment of others that challenge the intent of the mother but the nature of the intent itself. One could argue that this does not constitute "partisanship" per se since the mother's reasoning is rooted in personal interests rather than collective social improvement. To this, I say that (1) it is unreasonable to dismiss her motives entirely on the basis that human reasoning is diverse and acknowledges the validity of personal and communal motives even in collective settings (2) regardless of intent, the advocacy itself still benefits others involved in the same cause and will advance the environmental agenda which shows that intent is a subsidiary concern and harkens back to my previous claim that choices can uniquely transcend geographical and political barriers; (3) as was already explained in the preceding sections, the reason for performing an act is irrelevant as long as it is morally valid in both its intent and action. Thus, whether the mother votes out of personal interests or the interests of the cause as a whole, both are ethically valid under agent-centered deontology. Then, is it proper to suggest that the duty in these scenarios where the agent has relative obligations to others is merely positional instead of natural? At first glance, a mother has a positional obligation to her family and child insofar as she opted into that familial contract. I argue that this is not wholly the case since her duty to her family may not be merely positional. This is

because any mother, being a human, also has natural duties to other human beings regardless of whether they are distant from her.

Note that our inherent natural duties towards others are not necessarily dissolved under this branch of deontology; the agent's personal duties may overrule it concerning a higher emphasis on their agency. Thus, they still maintain their natural duties to others not proximate to them: to treat them well, to respect their dignity, and so on, even if, at any moment, these can be overruled by their duties. If this is the case, then they likewise maintain a moral duty of partisanship with any social cause since partisanship is simply the external manifestation of the upholding of their natural duties to other human beings, and it does not prevent them from choosing social stances and causes that are in favor to their personal and positional obligations. So, if the mother is confronted with social causes that do not gravely affect her proximate obligations, then choosing to support a social cause is merely her upholding her natural duties, i.e., being a decent human being. If at any point, however, she must confront social causes that pose a grave threat to her personal obligations, then she has every right to choose the stance that favors her. In other words, the ethical action valid in this first example of the case is for the mother to vote for her preferred cause, depending on the nature of her obligations.

Proceeding to the second case, the mother is nowhere proximate to two or more contending social stances and yet must choose between the two. Suppose that while watching the news, the mother finds out about the war between Ukraine and Russia. For the better part of her life, the mother has been a citizen of Ukraine and now retains her voting rights as a foreign Ukrainian. The question is whether the mother, under agent-centered deontology, can uphold a moral duty to choose which of the two countries she would feel inclined to support. Notice that the agent presented has no direct moral relationship with either nation by virtue of her or her loved one's migration to China, yet this does not preclude her from choosing which of the two she believes she ought to support, let alone choose to support someone in the first place. Peter Singer hits the mark on this when he says, "The fact that a person is physically near to us, so that we have personal contact with him, may make it more likely that we shall assist him, but this does not show that we ought to help him rather than another who happens to be farther away."²² This further eliminates doubts that coexistence between positional and natural duties is possible, even though one may overlap with the other. But what about her moral duty? Where does her moral duty to choose between the two originate in the first place? Since neither of the two is necessarily close to her per se, what makes it not a mere supererogation for the mother to still care for the social conflict as a whole? Here, concurring with the opinions of Singer, we can revert to the logic utilized in the previous example with the mother: since the agent does not have a direct relationship with either the Ukrainians or Russians, she does not necessarily have positional solid obligations towards them. Although this does not diminish her natural duties to other human beings, and choosing which side to support in the war does not infringe upon her own space and interests *ceteris paribus*.²³ In the instance that it does, however, she can choose the social stance that she prefers. This explains why social movements are often global in scope and scale: the members of such movements, i.e., political candidates, organizations, and even individual supporters, implore others to partake in their causes. In this example, the natural duty of partisanship is exemplified further since voting between Ukrainian candidates upholds one's moral duties to other human beings despite not having a direct relationship.

²² See Peter Singer, *Famine, Affluence, and Morality* (New York: Oxford Publishing Press, 2016), 16.

²³ *Ibid.*, 15.

What are the four causes of abstention?

In the scenarios above, we have discussed the implications of personal obligations, natural duties, and overlapping decisions. Moreover, we have determined through illustration and examples how partisanship works both in a proximate and distant sense, elaborating on the possible considerations when choosing which action to pursue. Lastly, we have also clarified the central concern of agent-centered deontology regarding our moral duty to partake: that it is expected of us but is not imposed against us. However, the discussion of abstention remains, i.e., choosing not to vote. First, we must distinguish between the different possible reasons for abstention. Here, I will employ some of the most vital and most widely prominent reasons for instances of abstention and discuss them individually: (1) lack of voter knowledge, (2) valuing neutrality, (3) political and social ignorance, (4) coercion. within the discussion of each segment. I will elaborate on the nuances of the act of abstention, i.e., its moral quality, its implication to agency, personal obligations, and its correlation with others in society. Although other reasons for abstention certainly exist, they are often niche or lie beyond deontological consideration. In most cases, it would be mainly pointless to include them in the discussion as the relevance of doing so would be swiftly questioned.

We shall begin by highlighting a crucial aspect of abstention: its neutral moral value. Simply put, neither abstention nor the act of voting in and of itself possesses inherent moral value, for shading circles in a paper that correspond to names has no moral effect. As such, voting, as a legal procedure, is not an inherently ethical matter.²⁴ It carries no direct moral consequence to anyone or anything. Thus, as far as deontological ethics is concerned, the act of not voting is not immoral in and of itself. Therefore, we will view abstention in this paper as the intended cause of choosing not to vote, or in other words, what an agent wanted to happen due to their abstention and why.

Lack of Voter Knowledge. The first cause of abstention is a lack of voter knowledge. It must be noted that this is a multifaceted issue. There may be multiple reasons for a lack of voter knowledge, such as a lack of reliable access to information, an insufficiency in informational awareness on the part of the government and news reporting bodies, or active ignorance on the part of the voter, which will be discussed separately later. Furthermore, the gradation of informational insufficiency also varies, and depending on how much knowledge a voter has while also considering the truthfulness of the information, a lack of voter knowledge becomes a concern that operates on a spectrum. For this paper, I operate on the assumption that the agent's voter knowledge is so inadequate, despite their efforts to obtain it, that the only reasonable option remains for them to abstain.

In the first cause, I argue that the decision to abstain is akin to being incapable of voting in general and that the act stems neither from ill intent nor ill action on the agent's part. As we have discussed earlier, not voting is not inherently an immoral action; hence, no further discussion is required. But with regards to intent, an agent that decides to abstain because they are unsure, overwhelmed, or feel estranged by the circumstances they find themselves in. As such, it is not out of a desire for something evil, but out of being paralyzed from doing anything in the first place. This argument is supported by the simple idea that voter knowledge is necessary because its epistemic value is pivotal and essential to forming a meaningful vote. In fact, voting blindly could be deemed more immoral than abstention, for the voter not only voted irresponsibly but did so with knowledge that

²⁴ Voting as in the activity of going to a voting center, taking a voting sheet, and shading circles corresponding to the candidate you chose. This is not to be confused with the societal value that results from voting.

their actions neglect the ethical implication of voting. An agent, in this case, is abstaining not because they have an immoral intended cause but because they cannot adequately determine and weigh where their obligations lie in; as such, they are doing nothing due to falling back to their other established obligations. As was previously explained, choosing refers to selecting an option out of one's preferences and desires; thus, one cannot "choose" when they first have no idea what their choices are. Therefore, it would seem that abstention, in this instance, is morally valid.

Valuing Neutrality. The second cause of abstention is valuing neutrality. While one would champion neutrality over affirmative participation for many reasons, we only need to establish a baseline for which kinds of reasons are valid under agent-centered deontology. First, let us analyze the act of neutrality. Here, a notable discussion may arise in the form of neutrality being akin to acts of omission. In other words, by remaining neutral, one fails, in a sense, to forward any change within the social issue. However, this is not a significant concern under agent-centered deontology, for obligations are often negative, i.e., we should not kill, steal, or rob. Choosing a stance that will end up in someone's death and remaining neutral about the conflict are two very different things. Even if one can take a stance, it is not an agent-relative obligation. Thus, remaining neutral is valid unless one has a special relationship with the others that will be affected by the stance taken. If one, however, were to remain neutral with the active intent of causing harm, either directly or indirectly, then it would be morally unethical and invalid. This is not to be confused with acts that may harm others but are done to preserve one's agent-relative obligations. At the same time, the former is inherently unethical, while the latter is not and would thus constitute a valid form of abstention.

Political and Social Negligence. On the third cause of abstention, we will highlight the phenomenon of political and social negligence. This kind of negligence is characterized by agents who deliberately, knowingly, and willingly decide not to care about external social issues. Notably, this is separate from ignorance, which stems from a lack of epistemic access, which would then be a concern with gaps in knowledge²⁵ as opposed to worries with intended causes. This is undoubtedly the kind of abstention seen as unethical at first sight. However, we must distinguish what kind of negligence we are discussing, for there are two kinds: (1) negligence by commission and (2) negligence by omission. When an agent is negligent by commission, it may be the same as disregarding the obligations around them, which is the same as neglecting their natural duties towards others in society. It would be rendered valid if this is done to preserve one's agent-relative obligations. For example, the actions of a husband who decides to speed through traffic to get his dying spouse to the hospital would be regarded as ethically valid. Negligence by omission, on the other hand, is when they fail to do something. Thus, a driver would be negligent by omission if they run over someone accidentally because of speeding.

With regard to partisanship, it is proper to say that negligence by commission may sometimes be morally invalid, whereas negligence by omissions is always valid. For the former, this is because acts of commission are essentially acts that may *cause* harm, but these may also be acts that do not intend to cause harm, which would mean that the intended cause associated is moral. However, what about cases where negligence indirectly results in harm? As we have discussed earlier, the result of an action, even if it is a byproduct, is not the measure of an action's moral quality under this deontological branch and thus has no bearing in its evaluation. For the latter, the rationale can be likened to the

²⁵ This kind of epistemic issue could evolve into a broader problem which we have covered in the first (1) reason for abstention.

rationale formed in the discussion on neutrality; we must differentiate acts of cause and acts of omission, for the former is a pursuance of ill intent, whereas the latter equates to non-action. Moreover, if an agent were to have agent-relative obligations that conflict with their capacity not to neglect an issue, they have every right to prioritize the former. Hence, if a voter were to decide between spending the next two hours attending a rally or playing with their children, their choice of the latter over the former is valid.

Coercion. Lastly, the fourth cause of abstention is coercion, which is described as the act of persuading someone to do something using force or threats. For this scenario, abstention is valid because one's agency takes utmost priority, as is clear under agent-centered deontology. As such, the desire to prioritize oneself and one's proximate relationships from outside danger is warranted, and so a person may abstain because they were threatened with their death and the death of their loved ones if they do not comply. Moreover, actions done due to coercion are acts not done with the agent's agency to begin with since that agency was taken away and manipulated by the agent coercing them; hence, no responsibility is found in the coerced doer. Thus, acts resulting from coercion are not the agent executor's fault but the person coercing. Notably, the act of abstention may also partially extend to the coercer since the responsibility for the act lies on them. However, in a legal sense, the person who abstained was the coerced agent; it would be much appreciated, though, if there were further insights about this on a philosophical level.²⁶

In any case, it is necessary to remember that the enormous power of the agent's obligations raises the question of whether the natural duty of partisanship is merely supererogatory and should not be considered as a natural duty. However, this is not a clear conclusion when it concerns social stances since the demand from these social movements and narratives is not merely that individuals know their existence but that they act on it and actively support it. The environmental movement does not say, "Look, the trees here are burning," and stop there. They, like every other social movement and cause, advocate for action that can be taken and supported in favor of their concerns. Hence, it cannot be said that social causes are merely supererogatory. Ironically, the very formula for deontological ethics is found here as well, for when we speak of ethically valid actions, we do not only refer to an agent's intent or knowledge, but the actions they correspond to these. This is why there are legitimate calls to action that one can opt into, such as international donations, fundraisers, or charity programs. This is not to say that every individual must participate in all calls to action, but that at the very least, one is morally expected to engage with the pending problem in any way they can, as is their natural duty of recognizing their obligations to others in society. However, the decision between choosing a stance or not will ultimately lie in the agent, and due to this, it seems that partisanship, while an expected natural duty, is flexible as with all other duties as per agent-centered deontology. If, for whatever reason, an individual finds themselves in any of the above-mentioned circumstances about choosing and abstaining, then there are appropriate actions for them to follow

²⁶ It becomes difficult, on a deontological level, to trace where accountability starts and ends within acts done from coercion. The lines that separate the agent from their actions, while possible to be detached from the agent due to the presence of a coercer, may be a controversial take due to the existence of an agent's capacity to disobey the coercer and still find ways to preserve their agent-relative obligations, among other possibilities. However, in most instances, the level of coercion that extends to extreme cases of danger would more than likely compel any average individual to comply to the coercer's demands.

when making ethical actions. If the prerequisites were satisfied, then the rest of society has no right to fault them for choosing otherwise.

Conclusion

Overall, the moral duty of partisanship can be considered a natural duty with the caveat that an agent's relative obligations can override the duty of partisanship. This entails that obligations concerning agent-relative priorities occupy a higher moral ground than expected natural duties generated by the external public, including the duty of partisanship. While this does not affect the dynamics of identity-based engagement, it suggests that the way in which we associate our identity with public affairs is elastic to the extent of an agent's personal priorities and interpretations of social issues. Simply put, the arbitrary expectation to choose a side cannot be absolute in its current state since it cannot penetrate the autonomy and self-sovereignty of an agent's will and beliefs. Moreover, the act of partisanship depends its moral quality upon the actions and intents they pursue concerning the circumstances they find themselves in. This finding coincides with the general assessment we conducted in the first section, wherein we pondered on the significance of autonomous choice to the manifestation of partisanship and identity-based engagement. Similarly, we find that the act of abstention is morally permissible under specific scenarios and does not necessarily conflict with the essence of agent-relative obligations, given that these obligations fall in favor of the decision to abstain. Furthermore, the paper finds that regardless of the natural moral duty of partisanship being secondary in priority compared to positional or agent-relative duties, neither necessarily erases the other. Most importantly, the findings of this paper were also able to expand on the philosophical study of ethics by further narrowing down the applications of moral duty beyond already established research, such as the moral duty to vote and natural and positional duties. Further improvements and expansions from this paper can be made by applying the concept of the moral duty of partisanship to other deontological theories, such as Kantianism, and by focusing on how this ethical case interacts with contrasting philosophical theories, such as classical liberalism, egoism, or Nozickian philosophy.

Bibliography

- Alexander, Larry, and Michael Moore. "Deontological Ethics." *The Stanford Encyclopedia of Philosophy* Winter 2021 Edition. Edited by Edward N. Zalta. Accessed <https://plato.stanford.edu/archives/win2021/entries/ethics-deontological/>.
- Altfeld, Michael F., and Bruce Bueno de Mesquita. "Choosing Sides in Wars." *International Studies Quarterly* 23, no. 1 (1979): 87–112.
- Bartels, Larry M. "Partisanship and Voting Behavior, 1952-1996." *American Journal of Political Science* 44, no. 1 (2000): 35-50.
- Converse, Philip E., and Roy Pierce. "Measuring Partisanship." *Political Methodology* 11, no. 3/4 (1985): 143–166.
- Daveney, T. F. "Choosing." *Mind* 73, no. 292 (1964): 515–526.
- Dhar, Ravi, and Nathan Novemsky. "Beyond Rationality: The Content of Preferences." *Journal of Consumer Psychology* 18, no. 3 (2008): 175-178.
- Greenawalt, Kent. "The Natural Duty to Obey the Law." *Michigan Law Review* 84, no. 1 (1985): 1–62.
- Highton, Benjamin, and Cindy D. Kam. "The Long-Term Dynamics of Partisanship and Issue Orientations." *The Journal of Politics* 73, no. 1 (2011): 202–215.
- Lamont, W. D. "Politics and Culture." *Philosophy* 20, no. 75 (1945): 39-58.
- Lupu, Noam. "Party Polarization and Mass Partisanship: A Comparative Perspective." *Political Behavior* 37, no. 2 (2015): 331–356.
- Martin, Rex. "Political Obligation." in *Political Concepts*. Edited by Richard Bellamy and Andrew Mason, Manchester University Press, 2003. 41-51.
- Simmons, A. John. *Moral Principles and Political Obligations*. Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1979.
- Singer, Peter. *Famine, Affluence, and Morality*. New York: Oxford Publishing Press, 2016.
- Ullman-Margalit, Edna, and Sidney Morgenbesser. "Picking and Choosing." *Social Research* 44, no. 4 (1977): 757–785.

From Theory to Activity: Revisiting the Status of Filipino Philosophy

Sean Patrick G. Mercado

University of Santo Tomas - Manila | seanpatrick.mercado.ab@ust.edu.ph

Abstract: Throughout the years, many Filipino philosophers have sought to define what constitutes Filipino philosophy. However, despite these efforts, it remains a contested notion—its foundations unsettled, its scope unclear, and its legitimacy often questioned both within and beyond academic circles. This paper is inspired by Alfredo P. Co’s work, “Doing Philosophy in the Philippines Fifty Years Ago and Fifty Years from Now.” It aims to contribute to the discovery of Filipino philosophy by arguing that the very search for it may, in fact, be unnecessary. Primarily, the issue of Filipino philosophy is explored through the lens of Filipino identity, which has been fundamentally influenced by colonization and intertwining of cultures and identities. The roots of the Filipino identity are traced alongside an inquiry into what constitutes Filipino philosophy, if such philosophy exists. This discussion is further heightened by considering the Filipino in the context of a global society. Furthermore, this article engages with the thoughts of previous Filipino philosophers who have sought to define and give clarity to the nature of Filipino philosophy and examines the progression of philosophical discourse in the Philippines. Ultimately, this paper mainly argues that defining Filipino philosophy is not the final aim, but to be a Filipino philosopher engaged in philosophical activity. It suggests that, amidst the seemingly impossible end of tracing a Filipino philosophy, hope remains as long as there exists a Filipino who philosophizes.

Keywords: *Filipino Philosophy, Filipino identity, philosophizing*

Introduction

Have we finally arrived at a definitive discovery of a Filipino philosophy? Decades have already passed since the question “What is a Filipino philosophy?” or “Is there a Filipino philosophy?” had been posed.¹ Consequently, numerous Filipino philosophers have challenged their philosophical experiences by venturing into an undiscovered path. They accepted the quest of seeking an answer that would shed light on this problem. Each of these Filipino philosophers adopted their own unique approaches in tackling the question that led to a variety of answers. Nevertheless, this variety does not imply failure but progress, as each attempt contributes another piece to the puzzle. These efforts have not ended the quest, rather acted as fuel, which set ablaze the desire for a distinct understanding of Filipino philosophy.

To contribute toward the question of Filipino philosophy, this article is grounded in a writing made by one of those who attempted to face the task. “Doing Philosophy in the Philippines Fifty

¹ See Emerita Quito, *The State of Philosophy in the Philippines* (Manila, Philippines: De La Salle University 1979); Leonardo Mercado, *Elements of Filipino Philosophy* (Manila: Divine World University Publications, 1976); and Florentino Timbreza, *Pilosopiyang Pilipino* (Manila: Rex Bookstore, 1982).

Years Ago and Fifty Years from Now” is an article written by Alfredo P. Co which can be seen as one of the works that aims to bring clarity to the ambiguity surrounding the problem of a Filipino philosophy. Thus, the paper sought to trace the presence of philosophy throughout Philippine history and presents the progress of philosophical activity, such as the formation of organizations and associations and the evolution of philosophical trends in the country overtime.²

Furthermore, this paper extends what Co initiated in his article. It seeks to understand the nature of Filipino philosophy, including its possibility, since the term Filipino is another problem on its own. To add, this undertaking will engage with Co’s perspective on Filipino philosophy or the Filipinization of philosophy, as fundamentally rooted in the lived experiences of a Filipino engaged in the act of philosophizing.³ All these will be perfected through the utilization of the diverse perspectives of various Filipino philosophers, whether they dedicate themselves to their endeavors of doing philosophy or to the rigorous attempt of seeking for a uniquely Filipino philosophy.

Ultimately, this paper goes beyond merely continuing what Co started in his article. It has been more than two decades since Co wrote his work, in which he attempted both to look back fifty years to retrace the status of Filipino philosophy before and to project fifty years in the future, outlining his hopes for the development of Filipino philosophy. This endeavor positions itself as a halfway checkpoint of Co’s prediction. In continuing his arguments, I will highlight the changes that unfolded between the time he wrote the article and the present situation of Filipino philosophy. With this, I attempt to depict the current status of philosophy in the Philippines and see whether there are any semblances to the arguments of Co.

Having this in mind, I contend that the challenge in the discovery of Filipino philosophy persists primarily due to the fluid and contested nature of Filipino identity. Moreover, in examining an event which was still very different twenty years ago, I contend that in the face of globalization, Filipino philosophy encounters additional challenges as it clashes with philosophies across the globe making it more difficult to continue tracing a certain thing that defines Filipino philosophy. Amidst this difficulty, this endeavor stands with the hope that there is a possibility for a Filipino philosophy to exist as long as there is a Filipino who is immersed with the very act of philosophizing itself. I argue that the focus must no longer be on the theory but on the activity.

Who is a Filipino?

The term ‘Filipino’ is essentially a contested concept. It is rich and overflowing with meaning yet with some not intertwined. For Co, the Filipino identity is tied with the history of the Philippines as a nation, which began during the Spanish colonization. In this view, the term ‘Filipino’ stemmed as a by-product of the Spanish colonization of the Philippines and would not have emerged otherwise.⁴ In fact, the possibility of having a national identity and the unification of the Philippine archipelago into a single country can be attributed to the arrival of the Spanish colonizers.⁵ However, to claim that a Filipino existed after the establishment of the nation raises the question of the historicity of the

² See Alfredo P. Co, “Doing Philosophy in the Philippines: Fifty Years Ago and Fifty Years from Now,” *Karunungan* 21 (2004): 1–18.

³ *Ibid.*, 17-18.

⁴ *Ibid.*, 12.

⁵ Josephine A. Pasricha, “Doing Philosophy in the Philippines: Rereading the Canon through Feminism,” *Karunungan* 21 (2004): 71-72.

'Filipino'; who they actually were before being labeled as such. Emerita Quito offers a different perspective by arguing that one cannot simply abandon his cultural identity even after being rebranded as a *Filipino*. Traces of pre-colonial heritage still persist in an individual's daily life. For Quito, to seek what is truly Filipino requires a return to these indigenous cultures since being a Filipino is intertwined with this pre-colonial heritage. Through this process, one might unravel the *Volksgeist* or the soul-identity of the Filipino.⁶ However, I argue that this approach is problematic since the cultural background of the Filipino people is highly influenced by its archipelagic nature. This means that the possibility of having a central notion of what it means to be a Filipino is challenging as there is the existence of variations in cultural practices across regions, brought by ethnic and geographical differences – the reference of the idea of who a Filipino is.⁷ The Philippines, being an archipelago, made each area's culture distinct from one another. In contrast, contemporary globalization bridged these divisions of culture through technological aid, making these separations insignificant.

At first glance, defining a *Filipino* might seem straightforward since it could simply be understood as citizenship in the Philippines. However, even this legalistic view is insufficient. There are those who are not born as a Filipino but are naturalized to be Filipino, while others renounce their Filipino citizenship to adopt a different nationality. Additionally, many claim that being a Filipino is not a matter of legal classification but rather a question of personal disposition toward his love for his country and fellowmen. Simply, it is a question of nationalistic views. Meanwhile, others define Filipino identity through shared traits, traditions, and practices, yet these too remain difficult to pin down. Thus, the answer to the question, "Who is a Filipino" will not be the focus of the discussion and remains unclear throughout the paper. What is clear, however, it has been established that Filipino identity is in itself difficult to figure out where there may be different meanings of the term but is not inherently distinct from one another. The time before the Philippines, from the colonial period up to today, are all part of the country's historicity. Being attuned with this fact, then being Filipino is not an essentialist category but rather a historical outcome: it is what became of the people after colonization and nation-building.⁸ However, this recognition also leads to an unsettling reality, there is no *authentic* Filipino identity.

This *inauthenticity* is evident in the persistence of indigenous tribal groups, such as the Aetas, Ifugaos, and Lumads, who maintain their distinct customs, religious beliefs, rituals, and oral traditions. The Filipino identity, then, is largely a colonial construct: in the absence of the presence of a definite Filipino culture since there were only scattered islands and groups before the Spanish colonization.⁹ What were once merely separated islands became known as a single archipelago and what were once individual groups became collectively known as a single national identity all because the Spaniards arrived and imposed political and cultural unification. In addition, this Filipino identity is entangled with foreign influences, dominantly Western, and of our different roots.¹⁰ With all this in consideration, it may seem impossible to find a purely Filipino identity. Moreover, I contend that this seeming impossibility is exacerbated when the Filipino is situated in the context of globalization in which membership is not limited to one's nation alone but extends toward the entire globe and national identities no longer exist. As borders break down, the question of *who is a Filipino?* becomes

⁶ Jerwin M. Mahaguay, "The Philosophy of Education of Emerita S. Quito," *Malay* 30, no. 2 (2018): 9–10.

⁷ Roland Theuas DS. Pada, "The Methodological Problems of Filipino Philosophy," *Kritike* 8, no. 1 (2014): 28.

⁸ Co, "Doing Philosophy in the Philippines," 12.

⁹ *Ibid.*, 3-4.

¹⁰ Pasricha, "Rereading the Canon through Feminism," 72.

even more complex—not just historically, but in a time where identity extends beyond the nation-state.

The Filipino in a Global Society

The self-determination of Filipinos faces yet another problem in the face of rapid technological advancements. Not long ago, the separation of lands and oceans helped shape distinct national identities. It hindered the external influences which existed outside the community that paved the way for the cultivation of what is uniquely their own. However, the world had drastically changed. The borders that once defined nations and communities have become easily connected anytime and anywhere more than ever. The separations caused by lands and oceans now seem to only be illusions since crossing and surpassing them is no longer an obstacle. The advancements in transportation and communication allowed interaction between different nations achievable which allowed the influence of something foreign to freely roam around in one's midst. This interconnected age of globalization presents both opportunities and dangers for nations that have yet to fully define their own identities.¹¹ While it fosters the opening of cultural boundaries and provides an avenue to understand each other's uniqueness. However, reality speaks differently – avenue of openness has become a means of standardization, homogenization, and erasure of national identities, particularly those of smaller and historically colonized nations such as the Philippines.¹²

For some, global integration offers advantages by broadening perspectives. It exposes nations to different ways of thinking and enriching cultural hybridity. This adaptation to external influences is often seen as a mark of progress.¹³ Cultural hybridization, though positive, might complicate the search for a Filipino identity. Whether through homogenization or hybridization – both will continue to blur the Filipino identity that has already been hardly perceived. As I have established earlier, the purely Filipino identity, if there is such, had already been hindered by the Philippines long history of colonization. Currently, one could argue that Filipinos are once again undergoing yet another form of colonization, not through military conquest but through. While the Philippines undoubtedly benefits from global trade, being included in a global society is a double-edged sword.¹⁴ While the Philippines undoubtedly benefits from globalization, its national identity becomes harder and harder to determine. The welcoming of the possibility of acquiring these benefits is tantamount to the welcoming of the risk of gradually losing its own identity in the process. The Filipino, in constant relation with other cultures, can no longer be seen in isolation. Instead, the other is already part and parcel of the Filipino experience. Given this reality, the Filipino must be understood not merely as a citizen of the Philippines but as a participant in an evolving, globalized world. Reality must be lived with the truth that the Filipino is caught in the crosshairs of technology and development and becomes not just a citizen of the Philippines but also a participant in the evolving, globalized world.¹⁵ The search for

¹¹ Aileen Baviera and Caroline Hau, "Ethnic and National Identity in the Age of Globalization: The Case of the Ethnic Chinese in Southeast Asia (2002)," *ASLAN STUDIES: Journal of Critical Perspectives on Asia Individual* 57, no. 1 (2021): 33.

¹² *Ibid.*, 33.

¹³ Satoshi Machida, "Does Globalization Render People More Ethnocentric? Globalization and People's Views on Cultures," *The American Journal of Economics and Sociology* 71, no. 2 (2012): 436.

¹⁴ Melanie Pooch, *Diver City – Global Cities as a Literary Phenomenon: Toronto, New York, and Los Angeles in a Globalizing Age* (Bielefeld: Transcript Verlag, 2016), 18.

¹⁵ Jovito Cariño, *Muni: Paglalayag Sa Pamimilosopiyang Filipino* (Manila, Philippines: University of Santo Tomas Publishing House, 2018), xiii.

Filipino identity may not be accomplished through a mere recollection of the past but of a critical engagement with the present. It could be worth noting that the Filipino identity may not be a single thread but an interweaving of various threads of culture and of identities – of indigenous traditions, colonial histories, and global influences.¹⁶

Weaving these reflections together, *who then is a Filipino?* Based on the preceding discussion, I argue that a Filipino is, first, one who is brought to existence by the formalization of the scattered islands into one single country, the Philippines. Second, a Filipino is one who exists at the intersection of various identities brought by indigenous roots, colonial influences, and global membership. The Filipino is neither entirely *one* nor entirely *the other*, but a continuous negotiation of both.

The Quest for a Filipino Philosophy

For now, I will set aside the discussion of who the Filipino is and shift toward the question of Filipino philosophy. Evident in earlier reflections, there is always an inclination to categorize and define matters. One is rarely satisfied with living in uncertainty and not knowing what it really is. The same impulse drives the quest to determine whether a distinct Filipino philosophy exists. For many years, the discipline was confined to select academic institutions, hindered by a lack of professors and limited public interest.¹⁷ Often, philosophy is taken in relation with priesthood and law school but not for its own sake which made it rare for the public to be familiar with it. Despite these challenges, a point came where eventually, a desire rose to determine what a Filipino philosophy is.

However, this endeavor led to difficulty amidst the different attempts of numerous Filipino philosophers. Various Filipino scholars have attempted to define and develop Filipino philosophy, yet the question remains unresolved. Some, like Dr. Emerita Quito and Fr. Roque Ferriols, sought to establish Filipino philosophy by advocating for the use of the Filipino language in philosophical discourse. Others, such as Dr. Ramon Reyes and Dr. Florentino Timbreza, are well known for their works examining Philippine folklore and proverbs in an effort to uncover Filipino thought embedded in cultural narratives. Meanwhile, Fr. Leonardo Mercado pursued a comparative study of native languages, searching for philosophical commonalities that could unify the multicultural landscape of the Philippines.¹⁸ Despite the efforts of various people who had tried, either directly or indirectly, to seek for a Filipino philosophy; even so, the slate remains blank. Uncertainties and questions remain to emerge and are waiting to be cleared and answered. If philosophy in the Filipino language exists, does that necessarily make it *Filipino* philosophy? Are folk wisdom and oral traditions sufficient foundations for a philosophical system? Can the Philippines' diverse linguistic and cultural traditions be reconciled into a coherent philosophical framework? Amidst all the attempts to answer these questions, more questions are generated and a definite answer is yet to be found.

¹⁶ Cariño, *Mumi*, xiii.

¹⁷ I do not contend that schools are not aware of the discipline of philosophy; however, by being offered at limited schools, I am referring to the limited offer of the bachelor's degree in philosophy. For example, in Pampanga, a Philosophy degree is only offered at the seminary. Among the numerous and prestigious universities and colleges all-over the province, the degree remains to be unoffered. Some mention that the reason is the lack of qualified professors which would make the availability of the program possible. On the other hand, some mention that the demand for a degree in Philosophy is not substantial which would necessitate for it to be offered.

¹⁸ Co, "Doing Philosophy in the Philippines," 10.

Having this in mind, is it possible that a distinct Filipino philosophy simply does not exist? While entertaining this idea may seem thrilling, the search may lead to a dead end. Unlike China, India, or Japan, civilizations with well-established philosophical traditions, the Philippines lacks a comparable, systematized body of knowledge.¹⁹ This absence raises the question of whether Filipino philosophy is merely a fantasy rather than a tangible reality. This coexists with the earlier mentioned idea that the very thing that makes a Filipino as such is indeterminate. In addition, to identify a Filipino philosophy at the present may seem to be unlikely since the culture of the Filipino is identified to only be at its genesis. In this aim to unlock the mysteries behind our Filipino culture and identity, our language can only be of limited insight as a time capsule due to the Filipinos' multilingual origins in which each language is a time capsule of various cultures.²⁰

Yet, despite these challenges, the search for Filipino philosophy may not be so futile for the case of discovering a Filipino philosophy. The paradox is that philosophy does not have to intend to seek it for it to be revealed. A random Filipino philosopher cannot simply declare that what he is doing is a Filipino philosophy. The only thing that a philosopher has control of is where and when to start philosophizing – to start the process. In doing so, it serves as a spark which ignites the possibility of the unintentional emergence of Filipino philosophy since its starting point is indefinite, contributing to a Filipino philosophical discourse.²¹ History suggests that philosophical traditions are not deliberately *created* but rather *develop naturally* over time. Chinese philosophers did not possibly think of developing a “Chinese philosophy” when they started philosophizing. Rather, their philosophical traditions emerged organically through centuries of continuous thought and debate. Similarly, forcing the question of Filipino philosophy may be as futile as “blowing bubbles against the wind” – a pursuit that dissipates the moment it takes form. Instead, Filipino philosophy exists not through deliberate construction but may rather come by accident as a result of attempts to engage in the mere act of philosophizing.²² In this sense, the quest for Filipino philosophy is not about discovering something pre-existing but about creating the conditions for its emergence by allowing it to take shape on its own terms.

A Filipino Philosophizing

There is more to Filipino Philosophy and the Filipino identity that can be understood by suspending the search for a fixed definition, but by focusing on the activity of philosophizing itself. The pursuit of a rigidly defined Filipino philosophy may, paradoxically, hinder its very emergence. This was expressed perfectly by Co when he stated:

Those of us who are still toiling in a desperate search for the Filipino soul and the Filipino philosophy are really lagging behind. Many of our Filipino thinkers have already done their part by philosophizing and writing. In the process, they have become philosophers. And because these are Filipinos philosophizing, then we call the body of their works Filipino Philosophy. For when the Filipino philosophizes, he at once claims the right to claiming his own views.²³

¹⁹ Pasricha, “Rereading the Canon through Feminism,” 71.

²⁰ Co, “Doing Philosophy in the Philippines,” 10.

²¹ Romualdo E. Abulad, “The Filipino as a Philosopher in Search of Originality,” *Karunungan* 2 (1985): 5.

²² Roque Ferriols, “A Memoir of Six Years,” in *Pagdiriwang Sa Meron: A Festival of Thought Celebrating Roque J. Ferriols* S.J., eds. Nemesio S. Que and Agustin Martin G. Rodriguez (ADMU - Office of Research and Publication, 1997), 216.

²³ Co, “Doing Philosophy in the Philippines,” 17.

The key to a Filipino philosophy, then, is to simply philosophize and engage in the act of doing philosophy. As such, other attempts toward seeking a definition of Filipino philosophy are not futile as long as they are engaged in philosophical endeavors. There is no necessity to exhaust all studies through the discovery of what makes philosophy or identity as Filipino. An action must be done rather than fixating on its discovery. Philosophy is not a mere definition, but it constitutes an action.²⁴ Dr. Romualdo Abulad echoes this sentiment, emphasizing that the task at hand is not to search for Filipino philosophy but to create the conditions for its emergence:

What, then, is the challenge of Contemporary Filipino Philosophy? My answer is simple: To keep on going, to resist the temptation of slithering back to the ways of idleness and mediocrity, to develop the stalwart spirit that dares to think beyond the scope of the popular conception; in one word, to philosophize...to philosophize until our children will finally see the day when they can proudly proclaim to the world that here, at last, is our FILIPINO PHILOSOPHY.²⁵

These two quotations coming from Dr. Co and Dr. Abulad both perfectly stress that it may seem pointless to hope to arrive at a Filipino philosophy; nonetheless, the goal is to not define it but rather focus on the main task, that is, to engage in the act of philosophizing. The Filipino philosopher must recognize that philosophizing is not done for the sake of discovery of something Filipino but the discovery of the truth.²⁶ The concern whether Filipino philosophy emerges as a distinct tradition comes second to the responsibility of engaging in critical thought.

Returning to the etymological roots of philosophy in which a philosopher is a lover of wisdom, I contend that a philosopher is one who is loving something lacking in one's being and it is a loving that will not end since the lover can never catch the beloved – continuously seeking and questioning rather than finding definitive answers. For the hopes of a Filipino philosophy, the quest for Filipino philosophy is not about reaching a final destination but about rekindling this love for wisdom and continuously engaging in philosophizing.

While there might be an absence of a systematized Filipino philosophical tradition comparable to other nations, there is still a characteristic that is unique to Filipinos which other philosophical disciplines possess – the relentless pursuit of understanding.²⁷ The philosophical awe that great philosophical thinkers of the Chinese, French, Germans, and all those established nations have experienced is a shared human experience that exists within Filipinos in virtue of their common humanity.²⁸ As long as this desire for philosophizing burns within the Filipino soul, there remains hope for the emergence of Filipino philosophy.

The Current State of Filipino Philosophy

Filipino philosophy remains an evolving discourse, yet to be fully defined. It may take years or generations of Filipino philosophers engaged in philosophical undertakings, before it might reveal itself. Even so, the current state of Filipino philosophers has the potential to surpass or at least equal the achievements of the 'first wave' of Filipino philosophers. This notion agrees with the hopes and

²⁴ Mark Joseph Calano, "Ang Pilosopiya at Si Roque J. Ferriols, SJ," *Perspectives in the Arts and Humanities Asia* 5, no. 1 (2015): 7.

²⁵ Romualdo E. Abulad, "Contemporary Filipino Philosophy," *Karunungan* 5 (1988): 11.

²⁶ Calano, "Ang Pilosopiya at Si Roque J. Ferriols, SJ," 13.

²⁷ *Ibid.*, 12.

²⁸ Florentino T. Timbreza, "Understanding Filipino Philosophy," *Karunungan* 4 (1987): 11.

visions of Co for Filipino philosophy.²⁹ The increasing number of published works by various Filipino philosophers from across the country is a promising sign. This increase plays a great significance because over time, the collective body of these writings may provide concrete evidence of what Filipino philosophy truly is.³⁰ Furthermore, conferences, associations, organizations, and events continue to cultivate philosophical discussion. In addition, the philosophical achievements of modern times are greatly owed to the development of technology. This aided the problem of accessibility of information that Filipino philosophers of older generations had to face. It was harder to write due to the devices used and due to limited resources found in one's library. Currently, a Filipino philosopher possesses the capability of accessing a work written by another author found on the opposite side of the globe through the mediation of technology. This lessened the need to go abroad to have a chance to study works of foreign authors unavailable in the Philippines.

Similarly, publishing opportunities, both local and international, have expanded. This allowed Filipino philosophers to contribute to global discourse as long as their work meets rigorous philosophical standards. However, globalization is a double edged-sword which presents both opportunities and challenges to Filipino philosophy. While it enriches Filipino philosophical thought by exposing it to diverse intellectual traditions, it also makes it more difficult to distinguish a uniquely Filipino philosophy. Filipino philosophers are engaging with well-established philosophical systems from other cultures before having the chance to fully articulate their own. Yet, as Co reminds us, it is unnecessary to intentionally search for a distinctly Filipino philosophy. Instead, the emphasis should be on philosophizing with excellence:

And so, you will perhaps ask, what happens now to Filipino Philosophy? As I said, you need not worry any longer about the search for a Filipino philosophy, for when you philosophize with excellence, your articulation is bound to be recognized here and elsewhere, now or later. And since you are a Filipino philosophizing, then that philosophy of yours becomes Filipino.³¹

In some way, this perspective shifts the focus from the problem of defining Filipino philosophy toward the problem of flourishing in philosophizing. As long as Filipinos engage in rigorous philosophical reflection, a uniquely Filipino perspective will naturally emerge. The task is not to impose labels and the search for theory must be suspended and must be moved toward activity – allowing philosophy to develop organically through lived experience and active intellectual engagement.

Father Roque Ferriols, in his discussion of Chuang Tzu and Chinese Philosophy, remarked: “When all that can be said has been said, the most important things cannot be said yet, he felt compelled to say all that he could say.”³² Much has been written about Filipino philosophy and trying to do so is not completely useless. However, when one has exhausted all there is to say, it might be time to keep silent and what is left is the act of philosophizing accordingly. What is intriguing is: there is still the compulsion to continue speaking suggesting that there is still something to be explored. In the search of a Filipino philosophy, much will surely be available to be said. In the end, Filipino

²⁹ Co, “Doing Philosophy in the Philippines,” 17-18.

³⁰ Abulad, “Contemporary Filipino Philosophy,” 10.

³¹ Co, “Doing Philosophy in the Philippines,” 18.

³² Ferriols, “A Memoir of Six Years,” 216.

philosophy is not merely about what is said, but the possibility of saying what the life of a Filipino who philosophizes.

Conclusion

Finally, we ask: *What do you seek?* At various points in history, we had all exerted our energies in pursuit of something we had lost or probably just misplaced. Often, our lives continue to play out as they usually do until a catalyst comes up. This cataclysmic event varies from one person to another, but it is something which would give impetus to seek. In some instances, it could arise from a recognition of necessity. For a student, for example, it may be the urgency of an upcoming examination; for another, it may be the sentimental value attached to an object long believed missing. There are those who spend an enormous amount of time and energy searching for a picture, a letter, a shirt, a memento or anything that one has given a high degree of importance. However, going back to the core of each desire to pursue something, one would find that one engages in a search for something due to a conviction that there is something to search for. The acknowledgment that something is lost or misplaced necessitates a search for it. In fact, the very act of searching is, in many ways, an acknowledgement of its existence. It is absurd to dedicate oneself to the pursuit of something one believes to not exist.

Many have sought to define *Filipino Philosophy*, a pursuit driven by the perceived necessity and importance of its discovery. Nevertheless, this search is rooted in a firm belief that a Filipino Philosophy exists and awaits its discovery. What we may find absurd is that its discovery might result from philosophizing and a process of not attempting to venture into the discovery in the first place, rather than from an intentional search. The recent years have proven that many venture into the search of what Filipino Philosophy is and until then, there remains a deep and dark abyss of uncertainty – Filipino Philosophy remains to be elusive. Have those who sought it failed? In a sense, yes – since they were unable to arrive at a final destination; however, they may have succeeded, as their search was a testament of their engagement in their expression of the act of philosophizing. On the question, ‘what is philosophy?’, Martin Heidegger considered it as a path in which in order to reach the destination, one has to consider that there are multiple trajectories in answering the question.³³ It does not yield a singular answer, but rather opens a plurality of paths, each contributing to an ongoing conversation.

The efforts of those who sought Filipino Philosophy, though incomplete, laid the foundation for the philosophical community the Philippines now has. One might continue to search and choose whatever path one pleases. Whether one chooses to continue this search or to forge new directions, as I have explicated earlier, what truly matters is participation in the philosophical endeavor—through thought, speech, and writing. As Dr. Co states:

From such writing, they will create a great corpus of Filipino philosophical cogitation—in time, Filipino consciousness will emerge with greater clarity. From such a clear day, you will find FILIPINO Philosophy, for they are the very Filipino thinkers' legacy, and the rest of the world will judge them as

³³ Martin Heidegger, *What Is Philosophy?*, trans. Jean T. Wilde and William Kluback (USA: Rowman & Littlefield Publishers, Inc., 1956), 19 and 21.

Filipino Philosophy. Meanwhile, we just have to keep working and wait patiently. After all, Patience is a great virtue.³⁴

Like Filipino identity itself, Filipino philosophy remains an open question, a mystery. However, this being a mystery must not be taken negatively or as a limitation but an opportunity for deeper engagement. The truth of what Filipino Philosophy actually is can't be forced to unfold. In many ways, this echoes the Greek understanding of truth as *aletheia*, which means unveiling which occurs in its own time. Truth, in this sense, will unveil on its own and cannot be forced into the open. As seekers of truth, our role is to remain vigilant, ready to recognize and articulate its unfolding. In the meantime, we continue to face the different circumstances we encounter and contribute in strengthening the foundation to where Filipino philosophy would arise.³⁵ More than two decades after Co's article, a definitive Filipino philosophy is still missing. Even then, we have come so far. The current state of philosophical inquiry in the Philippines may not be perfect, but it continues to develop. Filipino Philosophy will unveil itself in due time. In the meantime, our task is clear: to remain patient, persist, and continuously pursue the necessary – to philosophize!

³⁴ Alfredo P. Co, "Introduction," in *Doing Philosophy in the Philippines: The Thomasian Collection (1951-1959)*, ed. Alfredo P. Co (Manila, Philippines: University of Santo Tomas Publishing House, 2022), xvii.

³⁵ Timbreza, "Understanding Filipino Philosophy," 19.

Bibliography

- Abulad, Romualdo E. "Contemporary Filipino Philosophy." *Karunungan* 5 (1988): 1-13.
- . "The Filipino as a Philosopher in Search of Originality." *Karunungan* 2 (1985): 1-25.
- Baviera, Aileen and Caroline Hau. "Ethnic and National Identity in the Age of Globalization: The Case of the Ethnic Chinese in Southeast Asia (2002)." *ASIAN STUDIES: Journal of Critical Perspectives on Asia Individual* 57, no. 1 (2021): 32-50.
- Calano, Mark Joseph. "Ang Pilosopiya at Si Roque J. Ferrriols, SJ." *Perspectives in the Arts and Humanities Asia* 5, no. 1 (2015): 1-19.
- Cariño, Jovito. *Muni: Paglalayag Sa Pamimilosopiyang Filipino* (Manila, Philippines: University of Santo Tomas Publishing House, 2018).
- Co, Alfredo P. "Doing Philosophy in the Philippines: Fifty Years Ago and Fifty Years from Now." *Karunungan* 21 (2004): 1-18.
- . "Introduction." In *Doing Philosophy in the Philippines: The Thomasian Collection (1951-1959)*. Edited by Alfredo P. Co (Manila, Philippines: University of Santo Tomas Publishing House, 2022).
- Ferrriols, Roque. "A Memoir of Six Years." In *Pagdiriwang Sa Meron: A Festival of Thought Celebrating Roque J. Ferrriols S.J.* Edited by Nemesis S. Que and Agustin Martin G. Rodriguez (ADMU - Office of Research and Publication, 1997).
- Heidegger, Martin. *What Is Philosophy?*. Translated by Jean T. Wilde and William Kluback (USA: Rowman & Littlefield Publishers, Inc., 1956).
- Machida, Satoshi. "Does Globalization Render People More Ethnocentric? Globalization and People's Views on Cultures." *The American Journal of Economics and Sociology* 71, no. 2 (2012): 436-469.
- Mahaguay, Jerwin M. "The Philosophy of Education of Emerita S. Quito." *Malay* 30, no. 2 (2018): 1-19.
- Mercado, Leonardo. *Elements of Filipino Philosophy* (Manila: Divine World University Publications, 1976).
- Pastricha, Josephine A. "Doing Philosophy in the Philippines: Rereading the Canon through Feminism." *Karunungan* 21 (2004): 71-82.
- Pada, Roland Theuas DS. "The Methodological Problems of Filipino Philosophy." *Kritike* 8, no. 1 (2014): 24-44.
- Pooch, Melanie. *Diver City – Global Cities as a Literary Phenomenon: Toronto, New York, and Los Angeles in a Globalizing Age* (Bielefeld: Transcript Verlag, 2016).
- Quito, Emerita. *The State of Philosophy in the Philippines* (Manila: De La Salle University Press, 1979).
- Timbreza, Florentino T. "Understanding Filipino Philosophy." *Karunungan* 4 (1987).
- . *Pilosopiyang Pilipino* (Manila: Rex Bookstore, 1982)

From Naivety to Transcendence: The Bracketing of Life-World and Subjectivity

Joshua Andrei P. Pascua

University of Santo Tomas – Manila | joshua.pascua.ab@ust.edu.ph

Abstract: This paper is an exposition of Edmund Husserl’s phenomenology. Specifically, this paper aims to explain the systematic process in Husserl’s transcendental conversion from naive living. I argue that bracketing with an aim towards the life-world is not the same as departing from subjectivity. There are three focal points for analysis that will be discussed—the life-world, the natural attitude, and the phenomenological epoché. To proceed, I, first, present the character of the life-world, the structure of intentionality, and the concept of body. Second, I discuss the natural attitude of the ego-subject naively dwelling in the life-world. Third, I analyze Husserl’s phenomenological epoché, the role of Cartesianism, and the transcendental attitude of the ego-subject. The scope of discussion will be limited to the relationship of the ego-subject’s naivety to the life-world, and the transcendental alteration of epoché as introducing a new one would require further hermeneutical research. Ultimately, this paper will be guided by the question: “How does the phenomenological epoché convert the ego-subject to the transcendental experience of the life-world?”

Keywords: *Edmund Husserl, life-world, natural attitude, epoché, subjectivity*

Introduction

Edmund Husserl, a German mathematician-philosopher, spearheaded the development of phenomenology in the 20th century, which profoundly influenced numerous thinkers in various disciplines. As a mathematician, mathematics had profound influence on Husserl’s phenomenological thought, yet he later recognized that phenomenology could not advance through the framework of logical positivism.¹ Franz Brentano, his teacher, greatly influenced Husserl’s principle that consciousness, in its nature, is a consciousness of something—it is intentional.² Husserl’s intentional structure of consciousness is explicated in his conception of objectivity-for-subjectivity.³ In elaborating the subject-object relation, he altered Descartes’s *cogito ergo sum* to *ego-cogito-cogitatum*, which is a reconstruction of Cartesian program that focuses on the conscious acts of self and object correlation.⁴ The intentionality of consciousness is an embodied experience that is possible through

¹ Christopher Macann, *Four Phenomenological Philosophers* (London and New York: Routledge, 1993), 2.

² *Ibid.*, 3. The discovery of the structures of intentionality is a discovery of new terrain—the land of transcendental subjectivity—that he had transformed phenomenology centuries after.

³ Dermot Moran, *Introduction to Phenomenology* (London and New York: Routledge, 2000), 16.

⁴ *Ibid.* The attempt to doubt is different to the Cartesian Doubt as it is universally restricted. In Husserlian phenomenology, we are not concerned with discarding its doubted existence; rather, we are focused on modification to preserve its actuality. The material of being cannot be held to be certain while doubting its existential reality. See Edmund Husserl, *Ideas: General Introduction to a Pure Phenomenology*, trans. by F. Kersten (Kluwer Boston: Martinus Nijhoff Publishers,

the living body. Through this embodiment, subjects can direct themselves to an experience of the object where subjectivity arises. Thus, the subject-object dichotomy denotes that there is a physical interaction and concrete relationship rooted within the world. Yet, as Husserl argues, there is transcendental alteration with the object's givenness. Does this mean, then, that Husserl's phenomenological epoché is a denial of this relationship? I argue that the method of bracketing is not a withdrawal from the experience of the world. Instead, bracketing is the disclosure of truth about the world, as the phenomenologist focuses on their experiences and the contents of consciousness itself. This truth is subjective, and it is produced from the subject's lived experiences. Therefore, bracketing is the precondition to accessing subjectivity.

In the flow of Husserlian phenomenology, bracketing with an aim towards the life-world is not the same as departing from subjectivity. The life-world, for instance, is the ground where subjects are naively living. The naive or uncritical living is characterized as the natural attitude. Through this attitude, subjects experience the life-world where objects are assumed to be already existing as real actualities. This means that objects are experienced without the subject's focused attention or reflection regarding their essences. However, despite the life-world being there, constantly presenting itself, it must nonetheless be radically placed into "brackets"—synonymous with other terms such as: parenthesizing, excluding, or disconnecting.⁵ The suspension of bias in our judgments undertake the attitude of the phenomenological epoche, influenced by the bedrock of Husserl's maxim "*back to the things themselves!*"⁶ While the epoché converts the subject to the transcendental attitude by way of bracketing, it is not a denial of subjectivity. This is because the epoché preserves the actualities of the life-world, such that the subject changes an attitude (internal), while the life-world (external) remains untouched. In principle, bracketing enables the subjects to suspend their belief held in naivety to realize their subjectivity in their confrontation of the life-world. Driven by transcendental motivation, subjects are able to access the being-in-the-world. This leads to pure consciousness, wherein subjectivity becomes the foreground towards critical living. Based on these, it thus becomes necessary to analyze the process from which subjectivity is posited between naivety and transcendence. Hence, this paper will follow a similar structure to Husserl's phenomenology—namely, the life-world, the natural attitude, and the phenomenological epoché.

The Concept of Life-World

In this section, I will present the life-world to establish the groundwork where the phenomenological analysis is grounded. Husserl's idea of transcendence is neither unworldly nor an abstraction as it is concerned with the lived experiences of the subject within the being-in-the-world. The natural and transcendental attitude belongs to the life-world, which cannot be detached from.

1983), 58. They are necessarily and immediately existing in the living present even if it is not immediately seen in my field of perception.

⁵ The terms can be seen as inconsistent with the different translations of his works. Husserl himself constantly rephrased it, which can be confusing. However, it is significant to note that the meaning of it remains the same. In this paper, I shall use the term "bracketing" for consistency as it is also the common term used by Husserlian scholars. See Husserl, *Ideas*, 57. Cf. Edmund Husserl, *Ideas: General Introduction to Pure Phenomenology*, trans. by W. R. Boyce Gibson (London and New York: Routledge, 2012), 56-60.

⁶ Edmund Husserl, *Logical Investigations*, trans. Dermot Moran (London and New York: Routledge, 2001), 1: xxiii. This method posits to be a set of non-constructive, descriptive, and analytical procedures. See Elisabeth Stroker, *The Husserlian Foundations of Sciences*, ed. John Drummond (Dordrecht: Kluwer Academic Publisher), 251.

This shows that Husserlian phenomenology is rooted in the concrete world that is actually lived where subjectivity is found.

The notion of life-world is a central problem to Husserl's phenomenological investigation that can be traced back to his earlier works.⁷ As Husserl mainly introduced in *Crisis*, the life-world is a dimension that subjects faithfully live in. The life-world can be characterized in different ways such as “the world of experience (*Erfahrungswelt*) as immediately given, already there, taken-for-granted or obvious (*selbstverständlich*),”⁸ among others. It is, nonetheless, the foundation of all praxis whether theoretical or extra-theoretical.⁹ Experiences within the life-world are based on already existing things where all subjectivity and meaning is created from a first-person confrontation. Husserl habitually uses the term “pre-given” to characterize the life-world. The pre-giveness of the life-world is passively received by our consciousness as it creates the backdrop for our natural engagement. These objects, Husserl says, are factually existing as spatiotemporal actualities. Simply, we ordinarily come across already formed objects in the life-world. More than this, it contains a certain “unsurpassability” (*Unhintergebarkeit*)¹⁰ as it is a place of certainty ready to be explored. This creates the horizon for

⁷ In *Ideas I*, Husserl distinguished the notion of world in multiple terms: “the natural world; the world as available (*vorhanden*); the world as reality (*Wirklichkeit*); the world as horizon; the surrounding world (*Umwelt*); the world of values, of goods, of practical interest (*Wertewelt, Güterwelt, praktische Welt*); the psychophysical world; the intersubjective world; the world as correlate of consciousness; the world as unity of meaning; and the world as intentional being.” See Balázs M. Mezei, *World and Life-world* (Frankfurt am Main: Peter Lang, 1995), 35. In this paper, I will use the “life-world” to be consistent, as it is also the “latest” term he used in his later work in *Crisis*.

⁸ Dermot Moran, *Husserl's Crisis of the European Sciences and Transcendental Phenomenology: An Introduction* (United Kingdom: Cambridge University Press, 2012), 181. Husserl argues: “The first, the naturally normal one which absolutely must precede the others not for accidental but for essential reasons, is that of straightforwardly living toward whatever objects are given, thus toward the world-horizon, in normal, unbroken constancy, in a synthetic coherence running through all acts. This normal, straightforwardly living, toward whatever objects are given, indicates that all our interests have their goals in objects.” See Edmund Husserl, *The Crisis of European Sciences and Transcendental Phenomenology* (United States: Northwestern University Press, 1970), 144. The life-world is the groundwork of the normality of living. For Husserl, it is fundamentally the “natural attitude” in which the givenness of the objects are appreciated without recourse to scientific beliefs. He also posited that “the natural life, whether it is pre-scientifically or scientifically, theoretically or practically interested, is life within a universal unthematic horizon. This horizon is, in the natural attitude, precisely the world always pre-given as that which exists. Simply living on in this manner, one does not need the word “pre-given”; there is no need to point out that the world is constantly actuality for us.” See also *Ibid.*, 145. Husserl emphasizes the world where objects are presented and given which do not need to be heeded, recognized, or noticed as naturally “there.” The recognition of these objects, wherein one realizes they are apprehended naturally, means that they are already in reflection, and thus entering the transcendental or phenomenological attitude which is yet unknown. Therefore, it cannot be possible for the subject to assert that they are indeed living in the natural attitude because it entails a “step back” or “detachment” from the givenness, to intentionally be conscious of what attitude is being carried. A confrontation of what is concealed, while paradoxically presented in plain sight, is a commitment where one has to know the difference between the natural and transcendental.

⁹ Husserl, *Crisis*, 142. In the introduction, David Carr explains that “the naive, pretheoretical life is engaged in the world, the milieu and horizon of its activity. The world with which the philosopher, the scientist, attempts to deal is this very world-horizon in which the naive life runs its course. This is the life-world, which is always “already there,” “pre-given,” when theory begins its work. But the world's very pre-giveness, the structure through which it envelops conscious life and provides the ground (*Boden*) on which it moves, is always presupposed by any theoretical activity.” See *Ibid.*, XI. Husserl's creation of the life-world grounds the human experience whether it is theoretical or practical interests. It is the totality of human experiences, where unique and subjectivities emerge. This, however, does not isolate the ego-subjects from each other nor to themselves. Each of our subjectivities are homogenized into a whole concatenation towards intersubjectivity. According to Husserl, it is through the initial act of mutual understanding and “empathy,” that it constitutes a unity. Despite the multiplicities of *ego* and different modes apprehending the world, there is a reconciliation.

¹⁰ Moran, *Husserl's Crisis*, 181.

possible experiences. Subjectivity, then, arises from the life-world where subjects are rightfully dwelling. However, the horizon of human experience must not be conceived solipsistically because it is a communal world. The life-world enables communalization (*Vergemeinschaftung*) as it is not only “my world,” but it is also a “world for others,” that is, “available for everyone.”¹¹ Since the life-world is shared, it cannot be entirely objectified as it essentially has a subjective and intersubjective character, which prohibits from its objective description.¹² This is not to suggest that we, as ego-subjects, are separated from each other. To support this, Husserl writes:

Prescientifically, in everyday sense-experience, the world is given in a subjectively relative way. Each of us has his own appearances; and for each of us they count as [*gelten als*] that which actually is. In dealing with one another, we have long since become aware of this discrepancy between our various ontic validities. But we do not think that, because of this, there are many worlds. Necessarily, we believe in the world, whose things only appear to us differently but are the same.¹³

The communal feature of the life-world welcomes everyone despite our subjective-having of it. The objectivity of the life-world still enables the subject to realize their subjective dimension. This is because we are capable of forming our own meaningful experiences as we live continuously in every waking moment. However, the life-world is not only concerned with the overlapping objects that surround us; it also encompasses the world of nature (e.g., sky, mountains, animals, plants, and the world of culture).¹⁴ There are two co-generative and co-relative worlds: the home-world (*heimwelt*) is familiar and normal because it is where I comfortably belong; and the alien-world (*fremdwelt*) is the “non-familiar,” “alien,” “foreign,” and only “others” kind of world.¹⁵ However, all ego-subjects are sharing the same world despite these categorizations. Indeed, the life-world is a communal type of world.

Furthermore, our experience of the life-world connotes an embodied human acting. Otherwise, experience would be impossible without the sensuous capacities of our living body. The natural interest of the subject goes back to the life-world that stems from a sensible experience of intuition. That being so, every concrete thing exhibits itself in the life-world. It has a bodily character, which our living body is participating in.¹⁶ These concrete things are never absent from the perceptual field of hearing, seeing, touching, and so on. This is through the body’s cooperation together with the ego’s motility, i.e., kinesthetics. As such, the kinesthetic function of the living body, or as Husserl would say the “bodily organs” (used in a primitive sense), coincides with the ego as an essential part

¹¹ Moran, *Husserl’s Crisis*, 198. The “communal” world, in the ordinary sense of the word, is the world which is shared by all members of the community of ego-subjects. Not only as an individual ego; but, in living together, we have the pre-given world in this “together,” as the world factually existing for us and to which we, together, belong—it is the world as a world for all with an ontic meaning. For Husserl, such is constantly functioning in every waking moment of our encounter with them, as we also function together, in the different ways of thinking, valuing, planning, and acting together toward the objects that are pre-given to us in common. However, there is a thematic modification. This thematization will bring the “unnoticed” phenomena in our focused attention, for reflection. The we-subjectivity, as continuously functioning together, becomes a thematic object along with the act through which it functions; but, there remains a residuum of unthematic that is anonymous and unknown. See Husserl, *Crisis*, 109. This, however, is a matter of the phenomenological alteration of the epoché which will be further brought to light in the latter part of the paper.

¹² Moran, *Husserl’s Crisis*, 181.

¹³ Husserl, *Crisis*, 23.

¹⁴ Moran, *Husserl’s Crisis*, 184.

¹⁵ To access a fuller explanation of the problematic home-world and alien-world, see Anthony J. Steinbock, *Home and Beyond: Generative Phenomenology after Husserl* (Evanston, Illinois: Northwestern University Press, 1995).

¹⁶ Husserl, *Crisis*, 106.

of the body in performing those experiences.¹⁷ Therefore, consciousness is received only through their collaboration with each other. Husserl, however, distinguished the living body from the physical body. The former is the only one which is actually given in perception (my own body) as living, while the latter is the living body of an “alien” ego-subject (not my own). But it is mainly perceived only as a mere physical body (objects of life-world). Again, the living body is kinesthetically functioning along with the ego, while the physical body may or may not. For this reason, the life-world is experienced through a living body that is embodied.

The living body has consciousness, and it carries the intentional experiences of the subject within the life-world. Husserl’s structure of intentionality in investigating consciousness can be explained through the relationship of intentional act (conscious act) and intentional object (object of conscious act).¹⁸ The act of loving, liking, hating, dreaming, talking, hearing, touching, seeing, eating, and drinking takes an object. It is always directed to a unique conscious experience. Contrarily, Brentano’s intentionality is the separation of the mental and physical aspect—the intentional act and intentional object can be distinguished from a causal relation (a causality). Meanwhile, this became an opportunity for Husserl to walk in a different path and center his investigation of consciousness where intentionality is the core component. Conversely to Brentano, Husserl focused on non-causal relation with objects as the precondition of studying consciousness as an “intentional” relation towards transcendental objects.¹⁹ Certainly, the example about loving, hating, dreaming and so on is still applicable to Husserl. However, unlike his predecessor, his concept of intentionality is consciousness that is fundamentally relational as it takes an object; in other words, the subject-object relation is inseparable. There is a relationship between the body dwelling (*res extensa*) and consciousness (*res cogitans*) that is in synchrony with the world. The subject is able to understand the things as it is experienced through the involvement of mental processes. Therefore, the complementary relationship of intentional act (conscious act) and intentional object (object of conscious act) cannot be separated from each other. It would be an incorrect understanding of the essential nature of psychic acts to remove one from the other. Husserl, nonetheless, abandons the “psychical” aspect as it is loaded with preconceptions and instead focus on “intentional experiences” (*Erlebnisse*) and “intentional acts” (*Akte*), which do not presuppose conscious activity or posit any claims about the nature of the physical on the part of the subject.²⁰ It is not an instruction for any presumptive thinking. Lastly, it is also important to note that consciousness is selective in its intentional activities because there are too many objects in my field of perception to which I can focus my attention²¹ and the rest are set aside.

To summarize, I discussed the characteristics of the life-world. Additionally, I presented the relationship of the ego-subject to the world of objects—the world of lived experience—including the concept of intentionality as a crucial part of Husserl’s structure of consciousness. This is done to

¹⁷ Husserl, *Crisis*, 106.

¹⁸ David Detmer, *Phenomenology Explained: From Experience to Insight* (Chicago: Open Court Publishing Company, 2013), 63-64. Indicated in Husserl’s *Logical Investigations*, the correlation of the *meaning-giving* activity, along with the expressed language, of consciousness cannot be separated as independent with the signified, the *meant*; additionally, in examining the determined life of consciousness away from the concern of subjectivity in relation to the intentionally determined objectivities would be futile. See Macann, *Four Phenomenological Philosophers*, 8. The power of consciousness to process experience into meaning which is generated from our mundane activities is fundamentally relational. Meaning is created from experiential activities and likewise, experience is necessarily directed toward something that is meant.

¹⁹ *Ibid.*, 94.

²⁰ Moran, *Phenomenology*, 114.

²¹ Detmer, *Phenomenology Explained*, 96.

explain how our living body is participating and functioning in the life-world. It crystallized the subject-object relationship, and thus affirmed their inseparable union. This shows that there is a physical interaction and concrete relationship with the world and that Husserl's phenomenology is practically tethered to the "real world." The next section will discuss how this life-world is lived within the natural attitude.

The Naivety of the Ego-Subject

The following discussion will focus on the phenomenology of the lived experience of the ego-subject in the natural attitude. I will explain the consciousness in naivety. This will clarify the difference between the natural and transcendental attitude that will be explored in the succeeding section.

The natural attitude or naivety can be construed as the "normal" execution of life. Beliefs are accustomed to the subject's everyday routine without making them an object of close inspection as they are already "common sense."²² I immediately experience these objects whether or not I am heedful of them. Naivety is prior to any evaluation of consciousness as it is taken in their "banality." They are apprehended through their "raw" and "organic" form as an actuality,²³ which constitutes a universal and clear-cut cognition of it. The natural attitude, in the ordinary sense of the word, is lived within the life-world. The natural world is a place filled with real actualities that presents itself as factually existing. I am conscious of corporeal physical things that are essentially "on hand," and are spatially and temporally distributed in the natural world, because of the different modes of my sensuous perception.²⁴ Thus, things are naively experienced without reflection. For instance, if I am cooking and I accidentally burn myself with the stove, I do not focus my attention on what the stove's heat discloses about the nature of pain because they are simply an object of the accident. I do not prioritize the meaning of what is immediately experienced for I am too occupied with the objects that are naturally given. In this way, physical things contain a subjective element that is produced after the act of experiencing. However, it is concealed to me and I am not aware of it. Moreover, those that are not immediately present in my field of perception still qualifies as a real existing thing. That is, even if I do not pay attention to such objects, they are nevertheless present in my field of intuition²⁵ or consciousness.

Aside from their existence, Husserl posited that these corporeal physical things have value and practical characteristics,²⁶ not just a mere space-occupying-thing. There are inherent potentialities

²² Detmer, *Phenomenology Explained*, 141.

²³ In explaining the existence of objects as indubitably spatiotemporal, Husserl would use the word "actuality" to emphasize that these concrete and physical objects are factually existing. Such objects, both known and unknown, belong to the world in which I myself, and other ego-subjects are surrounded by and more so shares it. See Husserl, *Ideas*, 52-61. I will loosely use this term for the succeeding parts of this paper to avoid ambiguity and confusion. On the other hand, Husserl further elaborates on this in *Crisis* where he explains: "for, in advance, 'world' has the meaning 'the universe of the 'actually' existing actualities': not the merely supposed, doubtful, or questionable actualities but the actual ones, which as such have actuality for us only in the constant movement of corrections and revisions of validities [Umgeltungen von Geltung]—all this considered as the anticipation of an ideal unity." See Husserl, *Crisis*, 146.

²⁴ Husserl, *Ideas*, 51.

²⁵ *Ibid.*

²⁶ To elaborate on this point, I quote Husserl: "Moreover, this world is there for me not only as a world of mere things, but also with the same immediacy as a world of objects with values, a world of goods, a practical world. I simply find the physical things in front of me furnished not only with merely material determinations but also with value-characteristics, as beautiful and ugly, pleasant and unpleasant, agreeable and disagreeable, and the like. Immediately,

attached to it that serve a practical purpose. The subject's role, then, is to seize upon that potentiality. Humans and animals contain valuable characteristics because they also belong to the world whom I share with. I can see them as my enemy, friend, superior, servant that can be honest, loyal, or not. They reveal each other's existence as they encounter one another. Every endeavor that humans take is necessarily enclosed within the life-world. One may call the natural attitude as a "default" attitude because being alive means living naturally within the rules of nature. This world of corporeal beings, as it gives itself, is known to be apprehended naively in the natural attitude.

This world, to which I belong and am surrounded by, consists of the changing spontaneities of consciousness in different forms and levels, such as "complexes of investigative inspecting, of explicating and conceptualizing in descriptions, of comparing and distinguishing, of collecting and counting, of presupposing and inferring."²⁷ They are part of experience to make sense of everything around us that are inescapable. Such includes emotions and willingness: being happy or sad, fearing and hoping, liking and disliking, desiring, wishing, and admiring. The subject is actively participating in the world that is foundational to their belongingness. These examples show how I am actively participating and living in the life-world as an ego-subject. Additionally, these simple ego-acts are embraced by the Cartesian expression, *cogito*.²⁸ Such active participation translates to the continuous and naive living without making the objects of experience a subject of complicated reflection. In facing these objects that are dispersed everywhere, there is only so much that can be perceived but are nonetheless real things. It is not only objects that are in my surrounding world; I also find other human beings. They are understood and accepted as an ego-subject just as I am one, whereby the natural surrounding world is shared and treated objectively as one and the same.²⁹ However, the world is seen differently in their subjective perceptions: their physical appearances, degrees of clarity, distinctness, and features, among other things.

To clarify, we are not mainly concerned with such existence. Here, existence is only secondary. Instead, the focus is on the meaning of their existence and the contents of consciousness itself. There cannot be a world where objects are apprehended without the one apprehending it—there is an inextricable relationship. Thus, consciousness is inseparable to the object. These material things appear naturally in front of those who see them. These are always available at our disposal presented as a givenness such that they immediately yield. The objectivation of the natural attitude allows the subject to not see objects as mere things in nature, but, also, to appreciate their value and practical use (e.g., building, house, chairs, tables, books, clothes, tools and so forth).³⁰ The naive subject, however, encounters these objects without concern for its ontological value and apprehends it simply as it is. I see and apprehend the physical thing as given "in person" as a "naive" human being. On some occasions, I am deceived concerning the factual being of the thing itself because perception is, at times, not a "genuine" perception, e.g., I experience an illusion or hallucination.³¹ In the natural

physical things stand there as Objects of use, the 'table' with its 'books,' the 'drinking glass,' the 'vase' the 'piano' etc. These value-characteristics and practical characteristics also belong constitutively to the Objects 'on hand' as Objects, regardless of whether or not I turn to such characteristics and the Objects." See Husserl, *Ideas*, 53. In this juncture, Husserl speaks of the potentialities of material objects as well as of human beings. Their potentialities are revealed once the ego-subject experiences them, exposing their strengths and weaknesses, capacities and limitations, traits and characteristics.

²⁷ Husserl, *Ideas*, 53.

²⁸ *Ibid.*, 54.

²⁹ *Ibid.*, 55.

³⁰ Husserl, *Ideas*, 78.

³¹ *Ibid.*, 83.

attitude, apparently, these experienceable objects can manipulate our perception. If so, such occurrence necessitates an active experience from direct or personal encounter of it, perhaps to confirm its ontic validity if it is truly real. Life in the natural attitude is a world-belief kind of life.³² Through this kind of naive living, mental processes do not exist only when we intentionally seize upon them through a reflection or experience of something immanent.³³

In the final analysis, the natural attitude is the naive and uncritical mode of living. In discussing the lived experiences of the ego-subject in naivety, I have elucidated the processes of consciousness prior to any philosophizing. More than this, it solidified the naive living of the subject in that they can externally relate with each other within the life-world, while preserving their subjective dimension. In the realization of subjectivity, the subject requires a transcendental conversion. In bracketing all that belongs in the naive world, the ego-subject opens the gateway to transcendence that focuses on the phenomena of experience as it is received in consciousness.

The Ego-Subject in the Phenomenological Epoché

This section will analyze the phenomenological epoché. I will demonstrate how the ego-subject converts from the natural to transcendental attitude. Moreover, I will show that the method of bracketing allows the ego-subject to realize their subjectivity, while preserving the actualities of the life-world. This then leads to the field of extra-mundane experience where transcendental consciousness is found.

The ordinary life has been distorted by our manner of engagement. Our practical concerns, folk-beliefs, and the superficial scientific knowledge got in the way of a pure account of experience as it is given to us.³⁴ Thus, Husserl offers a method of viewing a phenomenon in its experiential purity, undiluted, and without the contamination of prejudice, preconceptions, and assumptions. The practice of “bracketing” is an act of modification of all that belongs to the natural positing or judging. Husserl characterized epoché in multiple terms throughout his works: “abstention” (*Enthaltung*), “dislocation” from, “unplugging” or “exclusion” (*ausschaltung*), “withholding,” “disregarding,” “abandoning,” “parenthesising” (*Einklammerung*), “putting out of action” (*außer Aktion zu setzen*), “putting out of play” (*außer Spiel zu setzen*), and all the positing made within the pre-given of the life-world that entails a “change of attitude” (*Einstellungänderung*).³⁵ The term epoché has its roots from the Skeptics meaning “cessation,” and much like Husserl, they believed in the suspension of judgment towards an epistemological investigation.³⁶ This is not a universal negation insofar as we doubt its factual being or actuality, which Descartes had carried out with the purpose of finding apodictic evidence. To doubt universally serves only as a systematic expedient to bring out certain points that are crucial in the

22. ³² Soren Overgaard, *Husserl and Heidegger on Being in the World* (Dordrecht: Kluwer Academic Publishers, 2004),

³³ Husserl, *Ideas*, 175.

³⁴ Moran, *Phenomenology*, 11.

³⁵ *Ibid.*, 147.

³⁶ *Ibid.*, 148-149.

process of epoché.³⁷ Such is not a denial or rejection but a clarification. This is a modification of the general positing while it in itself remains what it is.³⁸

Furthermore, Husserl posits:

We put out of action the general positing which belongs to the essence of the natural attitude; we parenthesize everything which that positing encompasses with respect to being; thus the whole natural world which is continually “there for us,” “on hand,” and which will always remain there according to consciousness as an “actuality” even if we choose to parenthesize it. If I do that, as I can with complete freedom, then I am not negating this “world” as though I were a sophist; I am not doubting its factual being as though I were a skeptic; rather I am exercising the “phenomenological” *εποχή* which also completely shuts me off from any judgment about spatiotemporal factual being.³⁹

The epoché focuses on the internal structure of our unique consciousness, rather than the external and objective. This brings about the subjective representation of reality and the exclusion of the naive engagement to the life-world. However, the reversion to subjectivity does not imply a renouncement of the world or the mundane. This only articulates the being-there-for-us of the world by leaving the thematization of this world.⁴⁰ The actualities of the life-world remain to be factually existing whether or not they are parenthesized. The phenomenological epoché is an opportunity to depart from this “worldliness” (*Weltkindschaft*) and maintain myself away from being absorbed in the world (*Weltverlorenheit*) and not get lost in it.⁴¹ Despite this, bracketing is not a departure from subjectivity. The life-world remains to be the ground where I am employing the transcendental alteration of the epoché. The external world remains as it is, but my internal consciousness changes. This transcendental attitude offers an alternative perspective through which I no longer take the life-world for granted, and focus on the meaning of experience as it is received in consciousness. Therefore, the epoché enables the subject to access the question of the experience of being-in-the-world (*Dasein*) as present-at-hand (*Vorhandenheit*). Furthermore, epoché is selective depending on the ego-subject’s focused attention as nothing would remain a theme for reflection if it is universally carried out with respect to the existence of what is.⁴² As far as epoché is concerned, Cartesianism speaks of apodictic evidence that does not have the same phenomenological goal.⁴³ A universal scale of bracketing makes

³⁷ Husserl, *Ideas*, 58.

³⁸ Husserl further argues: “it is still there, like the parenthesized in the parentheses, like the excluded outside the context of inclusion [*wie das Ausgeschaltete außerhalb des Zusammenhanges der Schaltung*]. We can also say: The positing is a mental process, but we make “no use” of it, and this is not understood, naturally, as implying that we are deprived of it (as it would if we said of someone who was not conscious, that he made no use of a positing); rather, in the case of this expression and all parallel expressions it is a matter of indicative designations of a definite, specifically peculiar mode of consciousness which is added to the original positing simpliciter (whether this is or not an actual [aktuelle] and even a predicative positing of existence) and, likewise in a specifically manner, changes its value.” See Husserl, *Ideas*, 59.

³⁹ *Ibid.*, 61.

⁴⁰ Overgaard, *Husserl and Heidegger*, 105.

⁴¹ Stroker, *Husserlian Foundations*, 117.

⁴² Timothy Stapleton, *Husserl and Heidegger: The Question of a Phenomenological Beginning* (Albany: State University of New York Press, 1983), 18. Husserl’s epoché is not wholly the same as the method of Cartesian Doubt. The bracketing is unconcerned with the existence of material things, but their essence. It does not condone the life-world to which there is nothing left to experience. Otherwise, there would then be nothing to investigate if we have bracketed everything.

⁴³ Instead of using Descartes *ego cogito* as a premise to transcendental subjectivity, our focus is directed to a new kind of experience: transcendental experience. See Edmund Husserl, *Cartesian Meditation: An Introduction to Phenomenology*, trans. by Dorion Cairns (Dordrecht: Kluwer Academic Publishers, 1999), 27. Again, Husserl’s life-world is the world of spatiotemporal actualities that is undoubtedly existing without question. Therefore, the Cartesian evidence, *ego cogito*, *ego sum*, as a doubting tool for apodictic evidence, is used only to an extent because it neglects that the ego can systematically

the world-belief phenomenologically accessible and that the objects of belief must be maintained as “undecided,”⁴⁴ but not discarded. The epoché converts the subject to this pure ego which reveals the subjective experience of a phenomena and brings out the meaning of it.⁴⁵

To further elucidate, I will demonstrate how the ego-subject converts from naivety to transcendence. Things that are encountered reveal an aspect of its existence that is meant to be experienced in a “beginner” disposition. The phenomenological investigation begins in the natural and unreflective relationship to the world, which manifests itself as having the character of givenness. I am conscious of the objects presented to me, but I am lost in it; I am not aware of them as they are not a subject of my focused attention. It is, therefore, only through reflection that allows me to realize that I am trying to be conscious of something, or that I am intending it.⁴⁶ This is to account that I am being a part of the organic way of reflecting whereby I welcome the frankness of such intentions of the life-world, the “nakedness” of reality. However, I am not tempted to believe such a thing so long as I resist making any judgment, that I am, at this point, doubting. In the process of reflecting, I am not obligated to be a co-believing such beliefs.⁴⁷ I refuse to accept the things that are presented to me in naivety. What remains is the suspension and bracketing of it. As such, I bracket everything that I have accepted in the natural attitude and disqualify the world-belief as the epoché reveals in me the transcendental outlook on the life-world. I, as a knowing subject, sharing the same world with other ego-subjects, become a “disinterested on-looker” (*uninteressierter Zuschauer*) or rather, a “non-participant on-looker” (*unbeteiligter Zuschauer*).⁴⁸ This is analogous to say that I am a spectator without participation, wherein I am withholding the urge to be a decisive subject.

Moreover, Eugene Fink⁴⁹ elucidated the concept further in *Sixth Cartesian Meditation*:

explicate himself *ad infinitum* by means of transcendental experience, which already is a field of work. See also Husserl, *Cartesian Meditation*, 31. For Husserl, the ego is automatically in continual functioning that is a necessary term for the process of epoché towards transcendental experience, whereas for Descartes, the ego is enforced as the central instrument towards apodicticity. To put in perspective, the Cartesian program plays only a partial role in Husserl’s starting ground for a phenomenological investigation. This goes back to Husserl’s position about the existence of things as real actualities, which cannot be doubted. While Descartes’ view on the existence of things are doubtful.

⁴⁴ Stroker, *Husserlian Foundations*, 115. Husserl’s adaptation of Cartesian Doubt is not a universal negation but a preparation of the knowing subject to start in a clean state. It can be associated with the empiricist’s concept of *tabula rasa* such that of John Locke, who believed that the mind is like a blank sheet or “white paper devoid of all characters,” where knowledge about the world is acquired through experience. Similarly, what Husserl is trying to suggest is the detachment of ego from any decisiveness. The objectively apperceived objects are not accepted, including those internal experiences.

⁴⁵ Husserl further elucidates this on his later and more mature work in *Cartesian Meditation*: “On the contrary we gain possession of something by it; and what we (or, to speak more precisely, what I, the one who is meditating) acquire by it is my pure living, with all the pure subjective processes making this up, and everything meant in them, *purely as* meant in them: the universe of ‘phenomena’ in the (particular and also the wider) phenomenological sense. The epoché can also be said to be the radical and universal method by which I apprehend myself purely: as Ego, and with my own pure conscious life, in and by which the entire Objective world exists for me and is precisely as it is for me.” See Husserl, *Cartesian Meditation*, 20-21. In the phenomenological standpoint, the ego-subject is introduced in the transcendental realm of experiencing the life-world. The Cartesian program emphasizes objective knowledge toward undeniable evidence. It cannot totally be carried out in attempting to find in transcendental subjectivity the ground of all sciences and the being of the objective world.

⁴⁶ Stroker, *Husserlian Foundations*, 111.

⁴⁷ *Ibid.*

⁴⁸ *Ibid.*

⁴⁹ Eugene Fink became an assistant for Husserl in late 1928 in Freiburg and closely worked with the development of his phenomenology. His philosophic thinking is heavily influenced by Husserl since Fink was under his intimate training

In the universal epoché, in the disconnection of all belief-positing, the phenomenological onlooker produces himself. The transcendental tendency that awakens in man and drives him to inhibit all acceptedness nullifies man himself; man un-humanizes [*entmenschl*] himself in performing the epoché, that is, he lays bare the transcendental onlooker in himself, he passes into him.⁵⁰

In this excerpt, Fink explains what becomes the ego-subject after the universal epoché: a phenomenological onlooker. The world-belief in the natural attitude, which all acceptedness of the pre-given resides, is nullified. It is a transcendental awakening in man through the “internal” phenomenologizing that is set in motion. The act of phenomenologizing allows man to realize his beliefs in the naivety, which will then be bracketed. The self-consciousness of the onlooker revisits the accepted ideas regarding humanness or one’s sense of belonging to the world and it is replaced with the transcendental having of the world.⁵¹ The knowledge accepted prior to the discovery of the critical standpoint serves only as a basis for reflection. Such is a bestowal of the transcendental experiential life of having the life-world. Similarly in *Crisis*, Husserl explains:

...man becomes a nonparticipating spectator, surveyor of the world; he becomes a philosopher; or rather, from this point on his life becomes receptive to motivations which are possible only in this attitude, motivations for new sorts of goals for thought and methods through which, finally, philosophy comes to be and he becomes a philosopher.⁵²

The performer of the epoché transcends from the natural and naive living. From now on, man sees the world differently as he becomes a phenomenologist. The life-world’s givenness becomes secondary to experience. As a phenomenologist, he is released from his self-incurred captivity of everyday acceptedness, which is mostly concealed in the naive-having of the life-world. Through this, the domain of philosophy is recognized where man is more critical and receptive. It places the experiencer outside of what is mere explicit and uncovers what lies beyond the apparent.

After enforcing the epoché, we are left with a residuum of pure consciousness and focus on the acts of the *ego* or the conscious act as *cogitationes*.⁵³ In this phase, I am able to recognize how things influence my perceptions, thoughts, and attitudes, as I meditate about the objects of my conscious acts and experiences. This is a total change of attitude—from natural to transcendental. Now, since bracketing of particulars is not enough, even if it is enforced *ad infinitum*, it has to be done totally and undivided such that the whole “world-presupposition” is suspended leaving with no remains.⁵⁴ After the conversion, the ego-subject must be in repeated practice to ensure that he would not relapse back to the naive realm. Conversely, reliance on the objectivity of the material being, to declare a judgment out of its given naturalness or “unrefined-ness,” would be a judgment that is unthematic, unthought of, or unanticipated experience of the “on hand.”⁵⁵ The subject is captivated with the unquestioned world—the naive subject accepts whatever is presented. As a phenomenological onlooker, the ego-subject is no longer naive and recognizes this captivation. In being a non-participating spectator, man

for a time. Fink did not only learn his phenomenology primarily in his texts because he listened to him, spoke to him, and thought with him. For a more extensive exposition of their history, see Ronald Bruzina, *Edmund Husserl & Eugene Fink: Beginnings and Ends in Phenomenology, 1928-1938* (London: Yale University Press, 2004) 1-68.

⁵⁰ Eugene Fink, *Sixth Cartesian Meditation: The Idea of Transcendental Theory of Method* (Bloomington & Indianapolis: Indiana University Press, 1995), 39-40.

⁵¹ *Ibid.*, 40.

⁵² Husserl, *Crisis*, 285.

⁵³ Moran, *Phenomenology*, 150-151.

⁵⁴ Stapleton, *Husserl and Heidegger*, 16.

⁵⁵ Husserl, *Ideas*, 58.

continues to ground his living body in the life-world, while phenomenologizing. This is because even if the ego-subject is a surveyor, or in a transcendental dimension, the life-world remains factually existing.

Furthermore, the epoché preserves the actualities of the life-world, such that the ego-subject changes an attitude (internal), while the life-world (external) stays untouched. Thus, all ego-subjects occupying the same world find themselves possessing different views of this world. However, there is a shared understanding of their practical value (i.e., chair is for sitting, plate is for eating, glass is for drinking etc.) in their external sense. There is an element of practicality, consensus, unity, and universality. But their subjective manifold cannot be seen in their peripheral appearance or face value. The individualistic nature of Husserl's epoché eventually constitutes a holistic relationship with all ego-subjects and the world which they live in. The separated worlds of experiences are joined by concatenation of actual experience, making up one intersubjective world through effecting a mutual understanding despite having no relationship to each other's mental lives.⁵⁶ It neither annihilates the shared-common-experience of certain things nor will it be an act of solipsism. Imposing judgment on another is more egocentric and reductive. In other words, the tree that I see is not just for me, but it indicates that it is a tree for others. As explained earlier, the givenness and actualities of the world, being-there-for-us-all, is indicative that it is impossible to keep it for oneself insofar as to have a separate reality to other ego-subjects.⁵⁷ The world exists in itself from the ego-subjects. Despite each experiences, appearances, constituting-objects, and world-phenomenon, the world is for everyone.⁵⁸ There is a communalization of subjectivities in the objective world. The multiplicities of separated *ego* and streams of consciousness of ego-subjects constitutes a unity of experiences mediated by "empathy," thus, making up a whole intersubjective world.⁵⁹

Conclusion

The discussion illuminates the following: first, the naivety or natural attitude homogenizes all ego-subjects. Through this natural outlook of the world, they find themselves having the same understanding of practical things through the objectivity accompanied by this attitude. Despite having different experiences, they can externally relate with each other in the realm of naive living. However, one becomes a passive subject and fails to recognize and experience the purity of material objects towards finding one's own subjectivity and meaning. Second, the phenomenological epoché allows the subject to maintain one's wholeness. The transcendental consciousness bestows the subject to believe things as the phenomenologizing ego experiences them first-hand without preconceived notions from other ego. As such, the subject is able to preserve his individuality as an autonomous being who possesses the power over his psychic processes; that is, free of manipulation or coercion

⁵⁶ Husserl, *Ideas*, 108.

⁵⁷ "In any case then, within myself, within the limits of my transcendently reduced pure conscious life, I *experience* the world (including others)—and, according to its experiential sense, *not* as (so to speak) my *private* synthetic formation but as other than mine alone [*mir fremde*], as an *intersubjective* world, actually there for everyone, accessible in respect of its Objects to everyone." See Husserl, *Cartesian Meditation*, 91.

⁵⁸ "This constitution, arising on the basis of the 'pure' others (the other Egos who as yet have no worldly sense), is essentially such that the 'others'-for-me do not remain isolated; on the contrary, an *Ego-community*, which includes me, becomes constituted (in my sphere of ownness, naturally) as a community of Egos existing with each other and for each other—*ultimately a community of monads*, which, moreover, (it is communalized intentionality) constitutes the *one identical world*." See Husserl, *Cartesian Meditation*, 107.

⁵⁹ Husserl, *Ideas*, 363.

from the egotistical and reductive Other. Lastly, all ego-subjects are relativized through intersubjectivity. There is a mutual understanding that stems from the multiplicity of mental lives. It constitutes a sense of relationship with other ego-subjects despite having “separated worlds” because of the communal feature of the life-world.

The ego-subject’s experience of the presented spatiotemporal fact-world can be transformed. However, one is obligated to habitually take account of transitioning between both attitudes. The epoché essentially annuls the life-world of any affairs that hinders authentic experience. In doing so, the ego-subject is converted as an onlooker: man becomes a phenomenologist whose world is transcendently accepted and experienced. The transposition to transcendence does not alter the life-world’s objective character as factually existing. Through bracketed judgment, the ego-subject experiences the life-world rendering no one else but himself as the primary source of knowledge where subjectivity is derived. Hence, the transcendental consciousness is not a departure from subjectivity because the life-world remains to be the ground where I am employing the transcendental alteration of the epoché. Husserlian phenomenology allows the ego-subject to access the being of the life-world and to unlock their subjectivity from an experience of transcendence.

Finally, the phenomenological epoché provides a view towards the world in the universal scope as it expands outside the self (finding a common ground to transcendental intersubjectivity). Therefore, it is neither reductive nor solipsistic because Husserlian phenomenology starts with the self as an ego, which will eventually constitute all other ego-subjects manifested in the life-world. Subjectivity is produced from the experience of the life-world, which is communally shared. It embraces subjective experiences from a holistic lens. Further, the epoché is not epistemological in the Cartesian sense. Despite Husserl using certain aspects of Descartes’ philosophy, he, nonetheless, diverged to achieve a different phenomenological goal. By nature, the natural attitude cannot be completely disowned for it is the default attitude, even if they tried to separate themselves from it *ad infinitum*. Regardless of what attitude is appropriated, the world will remain to be ever present, occupying space and time. Lastly, Husserl provided us with a system towards self-introspection and self-responsibility within the life-world where human beings are closer towards understanding the nature of subject-object relation and transcendental meaning of experience.

Bibliography

- Bruzina, Ronald. *Edmund Husserl & Eugene Fink: Beginnings and Ends in Phenomenology, 1928-1938*. London: Yale University Press, 2004.
- Detmer, David. *Phenomenology Explained: From Experience to Insight*. Chicago: Open Court Publishing Company, 2013.
- Fink, Eugene. *Sixth Cartesian Meditation: The Idea of Transcendental Theory of Method*. Indiana: Indiana University Press, 1995.
- Husserl, Edmund. *Ideas: General Introduction to Pure Phenomenology*. Translated by F. Kersten. Kluwer Boston: Martinus Nijhoff Publishers, 1983.
- _____. *Logical Investigations*. Translated by Dermot Moran. London and New York: Routledge, 2001.
- _____. *Ideas: General Introduction to Pure Phenomenology*. Translated by W. R. Boyce Gibson. London and New York: Routledge, 2012.
- _____. *Cartesian Meditation: An Introduction to Phenomenology*. Translated by Dorion Cairns Dordrecht: Kluwer Academic Publishers, 1999.
- _____. *The Crisis of European Sciences and Transcendental Phenomenology*. United States: Northwestern University Press, 1970.
- Moran, Dermot. *Introduction to Phenomenology*. London and New York: Routledge, 2000.
- _____. *Husserl's Crisis of the European Sciences and Transcendental Phenomenology: An Introduction*. United Kingdom: Cambridge University Press, 2012.
- Macann, Christopher. *Four Phenomenological Philosophers*. London and New York: Routledge, 1993.
- Overgaard, Søren. *Husserl and Heidegger on Being in the World*. Dordrecht: Kluwer Academic Publishers, 2004.
- Stapleton, Timothy. *Husserl and Heidegger: The Question of a Phenomenological Beginning*. Albany: State University of New York Press, 1983.
- Steinbock, Anthony, J. *Home and Beyond: Generative Phenomenology after Husserl*. Evanston, Illinois: Northwestern University Press, 1995.
- Stroker, Elisabeth. *The Husserlian Foundations of Science*. Edited by John Drummond. Dordrecht: Kluwer Academic Publishers, 1997.

Conscientious Co-Determination: A Heideggerian and Wojtylan Ethics of Technology

Joseph Vincent A. Casta

Bicol University | josephvincentarevalo.casta@bicol-u.edu.ph

Jovito M. Manrique V

Bicol University | jovitovmillena.manrique@bicol-u.edu.ph

Abstract: Technology, as an important aspect of human civilization, is considered an aid that potentially augment daily activities. However, a distorted perception of technology may lead in a paradoxical understanding of its impact on the human *life-world*. This is a result of technology's ability to either reveal or *enframe* us from the truths of the world. This aligns with Heidegger's contention that technology, through its ability of *enframing*, can devalue human beings. As such, they may be reduced to mere *standing reserves* to which we become resources meant for exploitation. Wojtyla, similarly engages in a dialogue by expressing a concern on technology's potential threat to human beings rather than an ally. Therefore, Heidegger's philosophy of technology and Wojtyla's *Laborem Exercens* (on Human Labor) offer a complementary perspective concerning the ethics of technology. To analyze the impact of technology within the human *life-world*, this paper explores the perspective on technology and human relations of Martin Heidegger, providing a general thought on the critique of technology, and Karol Wojtyla's philosophy of *personalism*, as presented in this encyclical on human labor. Specifically, this paper in dialogue between Heidegger and Wojtyla. This emphasizes the revealing aspect of technology, as well as the impact of technology within the human *life-world*. Consequently, in forming an ethical consideration, I argue that the dialogue between humanity and technology leads to the fulfillment of a human ethical responsibility in the use of technology. Furthermore, the dialogue enters as a kind of *praxis* in response to the issues of technology, such as social media and artificial intelligence. This is why the dialogue becomes necessary in serving as an alternative approach to technology. It highlights the intrinsic value present both in humans and technology. Finally, through this dialogue, the study seeks to strengthen and enrich contemporary ethical discourse on technology by contrasting and complementing classical and modern perspectives.

Keywords: *conscientious co-determination, ethics, Heidegger, technology, Wojtyla*

Introduction

The emergence of technology has brought convenience and increased production in the daily lives of human beings. Technology serves as a tool for work efficiency, as well as ease in leisure. Such advancements have brought progress within the human *life-world*.¹ For instance, the

¹ *Life-world* [German: *Lebenswelt*], in Phenomenology, is the world that is immediately or directly experienced in the subjectivity of everyday life. This includes individual, social, perceptual, and practical experiences. In the context of

increased productivity of humans in their work, as well as reduced social inequality by enabling better access to currently strained services.² However, the perception of human beings toward the use of technology may lead to negative effects. Rather than being considered as an aid to modern-day difficulties, technology might become a disruptive tool, for instance, a subject to deviate from laws. This leads to the misuse of technology for malignant intents such as filtration, censorship, surveillance, and other forms of control.³ Such concerns arise as it elicits the potentiality of human beings to be deprived of freedom, infringement of privacy rights, and the disruption of human dignity collectively. With such emergence, ethics will come into an analysis of establishing considerations that will systematize the distinction between the “right-ness” and “wrong-ness” of the use and development of technology. This will expose how human beings can use technology in the right way in elaborating its purpose using a grassroots approach to ethics.

The problem was posited in the following philosophical tenets: Martin Heidegger, in his essay “Questions Concerning Technology,” views technology as potentially harmful if our urge to master technology causes instead to slip from our control, which may cause us to lose focus on other valuable means of understanding the truths of the world.⁴ Conversely, Karol Wojtyla expresses his personalist philosophy in his encyclical⁵ *Laborem Exercens* (On Human Work). Wojtyla contends that while technology can be a beneficial tool, it can cease to be a human’s ally and become almost their enemy if it commences on replacing humans in their very primary nature of work, hence, taking away from their opportunities for employment, satisfaction, creativity, and freedom.⁶ Concerning their significance in the study, these two philosophers, though being disparate since Heidegger has secular roots and Wojtyla is immersed in Neo-Scholasticism, elicit a complementary thought that presents a novel understanding that contributes to the discourse of ethics and philosophy of technology. Their thoughts were honed even before the emergence of advanced technologies, yet they have presented its problem which is evident at present, and it is thus fitting to consider them so as to strengthen and complete the new with the aid of the old.

This paper will present the problem of technology as a paradox, highlighting its dual potential for both good and bad outcomes depending on human use and perception. It will then examine Heidegger’s general critique of technology alongside Wojtyla’s personalist philosophy, and his thoughts as expressed in *Laborem Exercens* (On Human Labor). Consequently, this study will explore the meeting points between their ideas, particularly regarding the revealing aspect of technology and its

the paper, *life-world* entails to the perception and experiences that is brought out of human’s engagement with technology as they experience the aspects of life, particularly the social and the individual. See The Editors of Encyclopedia Britannica, “Life-World,” last modified March 17, 2016, <https://www.britannica.com/topic/life-world>.

² Christopher Burr, Mariarosaria Taddeo, and Luciano Floridi, “The Ethics of Digital Well-Being: A Thematic Review,” *Science and Engineering Ethics* 26, no. 4 (January 13, 2020): 2314.

³ National Academy of Engineering, “The Misuse of Technologies,” in *Sensing and Shaping Emerging Conflicts: Report of a Workshop by the National Academy of Engineering and United States Institute of Peace Roundtable on Technology, Science, and Peacebuilding* (Washington: The National Academies Press, 2013), 37.

⁴ See Martin Heidegger, “The Question Concerning Technology,” in *The Question Concerning Technology, and Other Essays* trans. William Llovit (New York and London: Garland Publishing, Inc., 1977).

⁵ An encyclical is a pastoral letter written by the pope for the whole Roman Catholic Church on matters of doctrine, morals, or discipline. See The Editors of Encyclopaedia Britannica, “Encyclical | Pope, Catholic Church, Doctrine,” in *Encyclopedia Britannica*, last modified July 20, 1998, <https://www.britannica.com/topic/encyclical>.

⁶ Cf. John Paul II, *Laborem Exercens* [Encyclical Letter on Human Work], The Holy See, September 14, 1981, sec. 5, https://www.vatican.va/content/john-paul-ii/en/encyclicals/documents/hf_jp-ii_enc_14091981_laborem-exercens.html.

impact on the human *life-world*. Through a complementary analysis⁷ the novel concept of *conscientious co-determination* shall be formed.⁸ This consideration will enter as a *praxis* into the issues of technology: social media calling for the ethical responsibility in engaging with such, though it is an avenue for virtual camaraderie and the exploration of diverse cultural background, it may be abused due to the distort perception of humans to such.⁹ Similarly, artificial intelligence¹⁰ raises concerns about supplanting human thinking through the overreliance to such tool. Ultimately, this study argues that *conscientious co-determination* between humanity and technology leads to the fulfillment of human ethical responsibility in the use of technology.

Heidegger's Philosophy of Technology

At the heart of Martin Heidegger's thought is the idea that technology is a revealing phenomenon rather than merely a tool. In viewing such advancements beyond its "means-to-an-end" perspective, we can mitigate technology's impact that either reveals or conceals the truths of the world. This challenges us to reconsider our relationship with technology and the broader technological landscape. In emphasizing the concept of "*enframing*,"¹¹ Heidegger unveils how technology shapes our understanding of our *life-world*, which frames our perception of reality in ways that often go unnoticed.¹² This framework urges us to have a critical outlook on how technology will influence human subjectivity, agency, and the very essence of "being." If we approach technology as a revealing force that has the potential to either augment or supplant human existence,¹³ Heidegger encourages us to cultivate a conscientious interaction with technological advancements—one that moves beyond mere utility toward a deeper consideration of human flourishing through his outlook on "*poiesis*."¹⁴

⁷ A research methodology, wherein information and ideas garnered from different methods are pieced or merged together such that each reinforces another to create a more complete, more comprehensive whole. See Pat Bazeley, "Complementary Analysis of Varied Data Sources," in *Integrating Analyses in Mixed Methods Research* (SAGE Publications Ltd., 2018), 91.

⁸ A consideration wherein a mindful engagement with technology that aims to augment *personalistic* qualities is implied that considers the significant role of humans and technology in pursuit of common goals and promoting mutual benefit through reciprocal actions.

⁹ The concern of social media, specifically of the platform "Omegle" being an avenue for sexual trafficking.

¹⁰ The concern on Artificial Intelligence as a means for academic dishonesty due to the distort perception of students toward such advancement.

¹¹ For Heidegger, "*enframing*" [*Gestell* in German] is using technology to turn nature into a resource for efficient use. In the context of this paper, *enframing* serves as a critical factor wherein we analyze the ethical aspects of human-technology relationships. By framing nature as mere resources to be exploited, such reduces the perspective to mere efficiency and instrumentality, rather than its intrinsic value of revealing. This concept intersects with the paper's discussion on *conscientious co-determination* as it highlights the necessity for a critical evaluation concerning the impact of technology in the human *life-world*. See Christopher Cocchiarella, "Heidegger on the Essence of Technology: What Is Technology, Really?," *Mindful Technics*, March 17, 2019, <https://mindfultechnics.com/heidegger>.

¹² Heidegger highlights the revealing aspect of technology as something that can reveal aspects of the world that are hidden and limited (shining-forth), or it can conceal or distort such aspects of the world that is to be revealed (holding-sway) See also Heidegger, "The Question Concerning Technology," 28.

¹³ Heidegger references this through implying "but where danger is, grows. The saving power also." This speaks of a redirection wherein technology can have dangerous and saving impacts in our world depending on our perception of it. See also Heidegger, "The Question Concerning Technology," 28.

¹⁴ *Poiesis* [Greek: ποιῆσις], is a mode of bringing forth into unconcealment that, in the broadest sense of the term, involves any kind of production and bringing forth, including natural production. As a human activity of "properly productive action," *poiesis* relies on the separate productive power of nature to create the elements of poetic production. In the context of the paper, *poiesis* is the implication of any kind of production that is purposive in nature which ties to the idea of the necessity for a deep understanding of the essence of technology that transcends from mere instrumentality. In

Poesis, for Heidegger, is a more dynamic and progressive way of revealing as it “*unconceals*” with a sense of direction the truths about the world. Thus, the Philosophy of Technology of Heidegger serves as a framework for navigating technology’s impact on the human *life-world*. As this section explores Heidegger’s critique, it lays the groundwork for understanding ethical responsibilities in our engagement with technology. This, in turn, leads to a synthesis with Karol Wojtyła’s personalist philosophy, particularly as articulated in his encyclical *Laborem Exercens*, which offers a complementary perspective on technology’s role in human labor and self-fulfillment in the technologically saturated *life-world*.

Personalist Philosophy of Karol Wojtyła in Laborem Exercens

Karol Wojtyła (Pope John Paul II) contributes to the dialogue through his philosophy of *personalism*, which asserts that human experience of external things cannot be understood without reference to his self-experience. Since knowledge is rooted in the lived experience, knowledge could serve as a means for both multiplying and supplementing mutual experiences.¹⁵ Morality is, therefore, rooted from conscience and human action that portrays *efficacy, transcendence, self-determination, and self-fulfillment*¹⁶ both of which must be grounded in the Truth and in the Good. This is in contrast with the cosmological understanding of the human person wherein personhood is elaborated metaphysically to describe their substance in an objective manner.¹⁷ This notion elicits that the human person is part of the “vast whole” and is only defined by their essence. This paper poses a problem since it limits

tying in the context of human engagement, *poiesis* is a human activity that relies on the purposive direction of technology which encapsulates the emergence of *conscientious co-determination*. Thus, *poiesis* is considered as a conceptual framework for a holistic approach to technological engagements which is underscored in the concept of *conscientious co-determination*. See also Mark A. Wrathall and Cambridge University Press, eds., “*Poesis*,” in *The Cambridge Heidegger Lexicon*, by Adam Knowles, 2021, 589

¹⁵ Robert Montaña, “Phenomenological Thomism: The Acting Person: Neo-Thomism,” in *Thomistic Ethics: A Beacon in the Contemporary Moral Landscape* (University of Santo Tomas Publishing House, 2015), 198.

¹⁶ Efficacy is the ability to change a particular aspect that is grounded in self-determination which are the fundamental tenets to the structure of the person. Self-determination is manifested in the experience of the “I will” and “I may but I need not” that elicits that a person is capable of transcendence through action. Such then would correspond to consciousness that entails self-determination. In addition, self-fulfillment is significantly grounded in the dynamic structure of self-determination, with every action that leads to fulfillment. Fulfillment then corresponds to self-determination that underscores the interconnectedness to self-determination. With this, the person’s efficacy leads to responsibility that reveals the dependence of freedom on truth and the significance of the conscience in the transcendence of the person in action. See also John Paul II, *The Acting Person*, trans. Andrzej Potocki (D. Reidel Pub. Co, 1969.)

¹⁷ This notion references the human person as merely as a creature in the world together with other lower beings. See Peter Emmanuel Mara, “Understanding Man as a Subject and a Person: A Wojtylan Personalistic Interpretation of the Human Being,” *Kritike* 1, no. 1 (June 2007): 87. Speaking of only their “essence”, it speaks of the possibility that the “innerness” of the human person is dismissed in this idea. For instance, if one were to discuss a person named John, cosmology will only focus on what John is (what-ness) – his attributes, composition, and place in the world (i.e., the hierarchy of beings). On the other hand, Wojtyła, through his personalist view, will focus on the “who-ness” of John; His lived experiences and his capacity to internalize these experiences, as well as his capacity for self-determination as a being who is conscious and relational.

itself only to the “essence” of the person¹⁸ dismissing the view of the “*Acting Person*”¹⁹ as a whole. Ethics must systematically address how a person ought to live and why, guiding individuals in distinguishing between good and bad actions. It is the role of moral philosophy or ethics to search for something that would guide man in determining what is good and right or bad and wrong.²⁰ morality is rooted from conscience and human action that portrays efficacy, transcendence, self-determination, and self-fulfillment is grounded in the Truth and in the Good. In emphasizing the centrality of the human person in the context of ethical choices through an “*I-Other*” perspective,²¹ Wojtyla urges us to look at our relationship with technology in our subjectivity of work. The former can either augment or supplant humans in their toils for labor which aims not only for the flourishing of the socio-economic whole but for personal *transcendence* and *self-fulfillment*. This was drawn from his encyclical on human work.²² In grounding our ethical perspectives in the personalist thought of Wojtyla, we are moved to look at the prevailing impact of technology on the well-being of the human person, particularly their ability to exercise creativity and satisfaction in pursuit of a technologically-saturated society.

It is thus evident that the perspectives of Wojtyla’s *personalism* and Heidegger’s critique on technology concerning ethical responsibilities between human and technology aligns and diverges. With their respective perspectives concerning human-technological relations, their synthesis would form a dialogue that dwells in specific tenets such as the revealing phenomenon of technology and its impact on humans in their *life-world*, significantly becoming a framework that emerges from two different thoughts. Thus, forming a conscientious co-determining dialogue on technology and human relations.

¹⁸ This elicits the fact that “personhood” is only tied with the idea that if a person fulfills one or many objective qualities of being a person, then they are considered as such. This limits the understanding of the person, for Wojtyla, as having lived experience of self-possession and self-governance. Hence, if I experience that I am a person and that I am a subject. See John Paul II, “Subjectivity and the Irreducible in the Human Person,” trans. Theresa Sandok, OSM, *The Truth Will Make You Free*, 1993, https://actingpersonblog.wordpress.com/2012/07/29/karol-wojtyla-person-and-community_29/.

¹⁹ The “Acting Person” refers not only to the “what-ness” of the person – their attributes and place in the world, but also to the “who-ness” – the emphasis on their capability to act morally and for self-determination. In the context of this paper, this invites us to reflect on how humans act towards technology in order to achieve *conscientious co-determination* that aims for mutual respect for both the human person and technology.

²⁰ Jove Jim Aguas, “Ethics and Moral Philosophy of Karol Wojtyla,” *Kritike* 7, no. 1 (June 2013): 117.

²¹ Wojtyla underscores this type of relationship as a participatory effort to meet common ends from the self (*soi*) to the other (*autrui*) exposing as well an internal and external collaboration of conscience and action as the actualization of the “I–the other” (*soi-autrui*) relationship proceeds from becoming conscious of the fact of the humanity of a specific human outside me, one of many, but is accomplished in the lived-experience of the other “I” as a person. In the context of the paper, *participation* leads us to the sense of co-determination wherein humans engage into a fundamental realization of their personhood with technology. To analyze this stance, we shall view it in the following statements: I cannot experience another person as myself, for my own “I” as such is untransferable. When I experience technology as an avenue to augment my personhood, I approach in a maximal way what determines its “I” as a unique and unrepeatable realness of its capacity for the augmentation of personhood. See John Paul II, “Participation or Alienation?: An Excerpt from Person and Act and Related Essays,” *Church Life Journal*, 1977, <https://churchlifejournal.nd.edu/articles/participation-and-alienation>.

²² “Technology can cease to be man’s ally and become almost his enemy, as when the mechanization of work “supplants” him, taking away all personal satisfaction and the incentive to creativity and responsibility, when it deprives many workers of their previous employment, or when, through exalting the machine, it reduces man to the status of its slave” See John Paul II, *Laborem Exercens [Encyclical Letter on Human Work]*, sec. 5.

Heidegger and Wojtyla: A Conscientious Co-determining Dialogue

Heidegger's philosophy of technology urges us ethically re-evaluate our engagement with technology from a grassroots perspective that leads to a more comprehensive understanding of relationship between humans, technology, and the *life-world*. At the heart of this relationship is the notion that truth is meant to be unveiled rather than imposed. Heidegger argues that humans become *subjects, the self-conscious shaper, and guarantor* of all that comes to him from beyond himself.²³ He presents an evocative notion of human beings as subjects of reasoning and decision making. With this capacity, humans can intentionally shape their existence through their interactions with the world around them, and in doing so, acquire truths from such.

The *personalism* of Wojtyla underscores the significance of autonomy in our engagement with technology, emphasizing the involvement of taking charge of and co-determining what is within our *life-world*. As he points out, the human person is a "subjective being capable of acting in a planned and rational way."²⁴ This underscores the necessity for responsibility to co-determine what is within our *life-world* including technology that augments us in our constant pursuit of the personal tenets, particularly in work. Such notion highlights the necessity for us to have an active engagement with technology that may aid us in realizing our full potential.

For a human-technological engagement to foster autonomy and conscience, and ultimately transcendence and fulfillment, we must carefully consider Heidegger and Wojtyla. To arrive in the understanding of a conscientious co-determinant relationship with technology, it is vital for us to keep in mind on how technology impacts the human person, as well as the condition of technology within its engagement with humans. This aligns with the view that technology functions as a mode of revealing, especially in the way it discloses and shapes our understanding of personhood through our engagement with it.

Viewing technology as having the capacity to augment *personalistic* tenets is tied to the notion of *aletheia* — the idea of truth as unconcealment, or a way of revealing the truths of the world. Wojtyla comments on technology as an undeniable ally of human beings insofar as it facilitates, perfects, accelerates, and augments their work.²⁵ This aligns with Heidegger's understanding that the revealing

²³ Martin Heidegger, "Age of the World Picture," ebook, in *The Question Concerning Technology, and Other Essays*, trans. William Llovit (New York and London: Garland Publishing, Inc., 1977), 147. The difference of "subject" and "object" in phenomenological understanding can be traced back to Descartes in his proposition of dualism wherein the *thinking subject (res cogitans)* is different from the *extended object (res extensa)*. This view was challenged by Heidegger who emphasized the phenomenological understanding of the human person as tied to their lived experiences of the subject, and their interrelation with the world they are in. Heidegger argued that *Dasein* integrates both the *thinking subject* and the *extended object* that goes beyond Cartesian Dualism, As he contends that the ontological source of *Dasein's* Being is not 'inferior'. See also Martin Heidegger, "Temporality and Everydayness," in *Being and Time*, trans. John Macquarrie and Edward Robinson (1927; repr., Blackwell Publishers Ltd., 1962), 334. This moves us beyond what is obvious, as there lays the capacity to "*spring-from*" mere *ontological* understanding. Thus, he contends us to move beyond surface-level understandings of the *subject-object* dichotomy. Rather, we should explore the deeper *ontological* structures that surround it. In the context of the paper, we should dismiss the hierarchical idea of the superiority and inferiority between humans and technology, emphasizing instead a relational approach.

²⁴ John Paul II, *Laborem Exercens [Encyclical Letter on Human Work]*, sec. 6.

²⁵ *Ibid.*, sec. 5.

nature of technology is most clearly witnessed in the context of human labor. As Heidegger would contend:

Technology is a way of revealing. If we give heed to this, then another whole realm for the essence of technology will open up to us. It is the realm of revealing, i.e., of truth.²⁶

Both thinkers, then, identify a facet of technology that reveals and unveils the essence of things. In this shared view, technology is not merely a tool but a mode of disclosure—one that has the potential to unveil answers, including those central to our understanding of personhood. In engaging with technology, human beings encounter not only external realities but also reflections of their own being. This also entails a hallmark that we must view this mode of revealing in a conscientious manner by way of exercising our efficacy and self-determination.

Our perception of technology's revealing function is shaped by Heidegger's notion of *enframing*, wherein he warns that we remain unfree and bound to technology regardless of whether we passionately affirm or deny it. Most dangerously, we become subject to it in the worst possible way when we regard it as something neutral.²⁷ Wojtyla echoes this concern within the context of human labor as he contends:

Both the original industrialization that gave rise to what is called the worker question and the subsequent industrial and post-industrial changes show in an eloquent manner that, even in the age of ever more mechanized "work," the proper subject of work continues to be man.²⁸

Heidegger and Wojtyla's views converge in their insistence on the human subjecthood (i.e., the proper subject of work) amid the emergence of mechanization. Thus, Heidegger and Wojtyla argue that even though technology augments our inherent skills, we should not fail to observe our sense of responsibility in shaping a co-determining aspect and being *enframed* by our distorted perceptions toward technology.

The dialogue thus leads us to the establishment of the term "conscientious" as a key concept in our ethical engagement with technology. It emphasizes the need for an understanding of the ethical aspects of technology in a thoughtful manner that moves beyond surface-level (i.e., mere technical) perspectives. Moreover, it must redirect us to the contemplation of its deep and overarching impact to us humans, and to our *life-world*. This dialogue also brings us to the understanding that our relationship with technology must not be one of domination, but a companionship— what we refer to as "co-determination." This concept emphasizes mutual benefit through augmentation, wherein both humans and technology are valued for their capacity for autonomy, transcendence, and fulfillment. The attainment of such aim lies within the framework of the "*I-Other*" relationship between humans and technology, which also draws upon Saint Thomas Aquinas' articulation of the contemplative and active dimensions of the human person.²⁹ In application of this framework, the

²⁶ Heidegger, "The Question Concerning Technology," 12.

²⁷ *Ibid.*, 4.

²⁸ John Paul II, *Laborem Exercens [Encyclical Letter on Human Work]*, sec. 5.

²⁹ Thomas Aquinas' vision of contemplative (the person as a thinking being) and active (the person as an acting being) lives was heavily influenced by Aristotle. As religious commitment coexisted in Aquinas' thought with pragmatism, the choice of active or contemplative life was often a matter of circumstances and necessity. Some human beings were predisposed to one, others to another. As per the *Summa Theologica*, "Since some men dedicate themselves mostly to the contemplation of truth, while others are primarily occupied with external activities, it follows that human beings can be

Thomistic account of the active and contemplative nature of the human person will be synthesized by virtue of Wojtyła's *I-Other* relationship, and the Heidegger's concept of *Dasein* (Being-there),³⁰ particularly in their engagement with technology as a way of revealing, which can then be applied to the human-technology relationship wherein the person exercises both the active and contemplative aspects in attaining a conscientious co-determinant relationship with technology. In turn, technological advancements participate in these aspects to meet the core aim of mutual benefit through communal action.

Conscientious. The conscientious phase is the *via contemplativa* of what I call the 'conscientious co-determinant' concept wherein the human person, through their efficacy and self-determination ("I will, but I may not"), contemplates on how our engagement with technology should be, and should not be. To be conscientious is to activate the "I" through the act of the conscience. In the Heideggerian sense, this involves remaining attuned to the unveiling capacity of technology that shapes our being of *Dasein*. Conscientiousness in technological engagement can be concretely cultivated through education. For example, the Philosophy Department of Bicol University College of Social Sciences and Philosophy offers a seminar course with the title "Seminar on Special Questions in Ethics." The seminar aims is to have a comprehensive outlook on how technology impacts our world at present, and how do we respond to such phenomenon.³¹ Through the learning modalities and philosophical frameworks integrated within the course, students are guided toward a mode of thinking that echoes Heidegger's call for questioning and revealing, thereby nurturing their conscientious stance toward technology. The cultivation of his conscientiousness prepares the human person for a co-determine relationship with technology in an active way.

Co-determination. Co-determination represents the *via activa* phase of the concept: the act toward the "other" occurs wherein transcendence and self-fulfillment are realized through the act of communal action in pursuit of the common good. Once the "I" has passed through the stage of questioning, an activity that utilizes their *personalistic* trait of efficacy and self-determination, it thus

divided into the active and the contemplative ones" (ST: II-I, q. 179 a. ad 1). See Jiri Zuzanek, "Thomas Aquinas: Vita Activa or Vita Contemplativa?," in *Time, Leisure and Well-Being*, 2020, https://ebrary.net/278700/business_finance/thomas_aquinas_vita_activa_vita_contemplativa#485.

³⁰ *Dasein*, the German word for "being there" or "existence," is a philosophical system developed by Martin Heidegger that examines human existence and the sensation of being in the universe. *Dasein* includes self-awareness, intentionality, and the ability to engage in social interaction. In the context of the paper, *Dasein* is the person per se that is in constant pursuit of transcendence and self-fulfillment. Heidegger's notion that "Being-there" is always in the constant pursuit of existential fulfillment through awareness and social interaction, aligns with Wojtyła's view that the acting person is in the constant pursuit of the good as a whole through conscience and action with other people. In connection with technological relations, it is the ability of the human person to engage actively with technology with the pursuit of the deep fulfillment of personhood through its ability to unveil, rather than idle consumption of convenience deriving from its technical perspective. See Riaz Laghari, "Dasein by Martin Heidegger: Human Existence as 'Being There'," *Medium*, June 11, 2023, <https://medium.com/@riazlaghari/dasein-by-martin-heidegger-human-existence-as-being-there-578264f997d0>.

³¹ In its syllabus, the seminar course declares specifically the aims that are the following: understand the impact of technology on the individual and society; develop a sensitivity and a resolution concerning the ethical issues of artificial intelligence, privacy, and cybercrime; and determine and analyze the ethical issues surrounding technological interventions on the human body and life in general. This concurs the notion of education as a potentially widely used medium in order to attain the conscientious approach of humans to technology since, in this context, involves a systematized learning avenue that ensures availability among students. See Ramon V. Palma, Syllabus: *Philosophy 38: Seminar on Special Questions in Ethics* (Bicol University – College of Social Sciences and Philosophy, 2020).

arrives in awareness of revealing.³² This conscientious awareness becomes the basis for *co-determination* with technology. In the Heideggerian sense, *Dasein* acts in a way that aligns with their conscientious awareness of technology as being-there. To authentically fulfill their role as *Dasein*, the human person must engage with technology in a way that supports their aim for existential fulfillment. In turn, the *Dasein* will acknowledge that technology is part of being-there, thereby affirming its inherent value alongside that of the human being.³³ Returning to the earlier example, students who complete the course will be redirected, for instance, from viewing their gadgets in the learning process as merely tools to accomplish their academic tasks, but as companions that are embedded within their academic life. These technological companions serve to unveil potentials to augment their necessary skills for their development and success as learners.³⁴ This encapsulates the idea that in order for co-determination to take place, the contemplative understanding of technology in a subjective sense, must be actualized for the purpose of flourishing of both humanity and technology.

From this, we can infer that *conscientious co-determination* synthesizes both the active and contemplative features of human-technological relations. By acknowledging the intrinsic value of both the human person and technology in a conscientious manner, we can be able to attain an active *co-determination* that aims toward mutual growth and pursuit of the common good.

An Active Engagement Rather than Passive Consumption

Conscientious co-determination attains the qualities of being both active and contemplative in the sphere of human-technological engagement. When we allow ourselves to contemplate the augmenting factor of technology that concerns our personhood, it allows our actions in engaging with such advancement to flourish. More specifically, it affirms the place of technology within our *life-world*. This concept is supported by the Theory of Participation of Wojtyła, wherein in participation, a person does not wish for their good alone but also wishes for the good of those that are around them.³⁵ Yet, our action of affirming the place of technology in our *life-world* is not sufficient, for when we allow something to be in our place, it deserves the recognition of being co-actors in our pursuit of a common goal. This underscores a ‘one and the many’ perspective of human-technology relations, as every member has a task to fulfill in order to allow them to open up themselves to others and allow others to share their humanity with them.³⁶ Thus, the conscientious co-determinant relationship between

³² Cf. Heidegger, “The Question Concerning Technology,” 12.

³³ After careful contemplation of the *Dasein*, primarily to their being-ness in the world, and consequently on how to obtain the fulfillment of their being-ness, they will consequently enter into a consideration wherein technology can potentially show what it means to be a *Dasein*. This fulfills the very core of the purposive revealing of technology (*poiesis*) that is humans and technology are both artisans in themselves in the pursuit of augmentation, whereby they both harmonize into crafting the realization that due to their respective values, they may come to realize what it means to transcend (i.e., realizing one’s potential) that consequently leads to fulfillment of the *Dasein*’s existential pursuit of knowing in Wojtyła’s terms, “what it means to be an acting person?”

³⁴ These potentials would include, for instance, the capacity to write academic papers using the gadgets provided to them. In this sense, students in their conscientious perspectives may not see these are just mere tools for convenience to write their papers, but a companion that for instance, stores for them their important readings, and even keeps citations for them that shapes their potential to improve their work. With this, a student will consequently take precautions of a certain gadget to prevent themselves for potential misuse (i.e., the potential to use them for idle compliance in which the learning process will be heavily compromised).

³⁵ Edward A. Mejos, “Against Alienation: Karol Wojtyła’s Theory of Participation,” *Kritike* 1, no. 1 (June 2007): 80.

³⁶ *Ibid.*

human and technology should revolve around the conscientious engagement with technology that augments our inherent skills in work and leisure, while keeping in mind the co-determinant idea of collective action for mutual benefit by recognizing the significant role each party plays in pursuit of the common goal and by considering the idea of the nature of reciprocity in communal acting.

The Forgetfulness of *Being*: Hindrance to *Conscientious Co-determination*

Human beings attain an intensive capacity for reason, but they are still prone to the phenomenon of forgetfulness. They tend to forget their fundamental nature of being a person, thus hindering the ethical fulfillment of the use of technology using conscientious co-determination. Heidegger would describe this phenomenon as Forgetfulness of *Being* (*Seinsvergessenheit*).³⁷ In the context of human and technology relations, Heidegger would posit that our engagement with technological advancements can potentially drive us to forgetfulness. This happens when we take the real essence of technology (i.e., as a mode of revealing) for granted and suspend our awareness of its true significance in our human *life-world*, namely, its role in assisting human beings in their pursuit of the *personalistic* tenets of efficacy, self-determination, transcendence, and self-fulfillment. This is because human beings are immersed in ontological narcissism,³⁸ and thus, tend to prioritize their own desires and preferences without considering its extensive implication. This results in the condition that forgetfulness of *being* may lead human beings to the privation of prudence in their engagement with technology. As prudence entails an active engagement that keeps in mind the consequences and the benefit of the collective, it is undermined when human beings become “standing reserves” to technology, that is, when they prioritize egoistic and malignant desires over the pursuit of well-being through technology’s revealing aspects.

Forgetfulness as a Remedy. But when danger is, grows, the saving power also grows.³⁹ To attain ethical fulfillment through *conscientious co-determination*, it is important to recollect our understanding of *being* and keep in mind the significance of both humans and technology in pursuit of common goals through reciprocal actions. As forgetfulness of *being* poses a hindrance to this pursuit, so too does forgetting serve as an antidote to combat this hindrance.⁴⁰ Hence, we must suspend our preconceived and malignant notions about technology to truly encounter its true essence and engage with it actively (*epoché*).⁴¹ This act of suspending our malignant intents with technology through the stances of Heidegger points us to the *personalistic* perspectives of Wojtyła, guiding us to recollect, in a grassroots approach, the quality of human beings possessing *personalistic* tenets. By doing so, humans may attain ethical fulfillment by conscientiously setting aside personal gratification over

³⁷ Forgetfulness of *being* is where we fail to recollect, approach, and experience gratitude for being that which grants us a place in a world of entities. It leads to a lack of awareness and appreciation for the essential and primary role of being (*Dasein*) in our existence. See Lee Braver, “Forgetfulness of Being (*Seinsvergessenheit*),” in Cambridge University Press eBooks, 2021, 329.

³⁸ Ontological Narcissism is the phenomenon wherein we fail to recollect, approach, and experience gratitude for being that which grants us a place in a world of entities. It leads to a lack of awareness and appreciation for the essential and primary role of being (*Dasein*) in our existence. See *Ibid.*, 331.

³⁹ Heidegger, “The Question Concerning Technology,” 28.

⁴⁰ Heidegger would direct us to the contention that we can only retain other things that are encountered within the world by forgetting certain things (i.e., setting aside our perception of technology to use such for immediate gratification of egoistic intents). See also Heidegger, “Temporality and Everydayness,” 389.

⁴¹ Harrison Hall believes that *epoché* means “to set aside or abstain from questions of reference so as to focus on meaning.” See Oded Balaban, “Epoché: Meaning, Object, and Existence in Husserl’s Phenomenology,” in *Springer eBooks*, 2002, 103.

their perception of technology by being aware of its harmful broader implications if exploited, and recognizing instead its significant role as a *mode of revealing*, enabling us to co-determine and augment with such advancements in pursuit of good, particularly in discovering one's potential. Hence, the concept states an “*I-Other*” form of augmentation of human skills through technology's mode of revealing.

Upon establishing a theoretical basis for *conscientious co-determination*, it is also significant to analyze how this concept applies to contemporary issues, particularly its bidirectional nature within human-technology relations.

Conscientious Co-determination as Bidirectional. Borgmann presents the gray area in the discussion of *conscientious co-determination* that addresses the human person's relationship with technology. It goes beyond the human-centric perspective, which underscores the necessity to protect technology from our distorted intentions. In contribution to the formulation of *conscientious co-determination*, Borgmann posits that *conscientious co-determination* urges us to be involved with technology not merely by leaning on it for comfort or convenience, but rather by understanding and affirming the place of technology in our lives through “focal practices.”⁴²

In the perspective of Borgmann, he warns us against the potential for technological distraction⁴³ to occur as he states:

Countering technology through a practice is to take account of our susceptibility to technological distraction, and it is also to engage the peculiarly human strength of comprehension, i.e., the power to take in the world in its extent and significance and to respond through an enduring commitment.⁴⁴

This means that through our enduring strength for comprehension of the things around us, we must keep in mind that these technologies that surround us in our daily lives augment our focal practices. We must not fall into the perspective of treating such tools merely for material efficiency and convenience. This underscores the importance of protecting technology from our ill intentions — we cannot afford to let something that improves our personhood to be in potential danger, for if technology is endangered, our personhood would be in the same state. The necessity for co-determination also involves the exercise of our focal practices of thinking conscientiously and acting ethically. These inherent skills play a vital role in attaining an active engagement with technology, as such engagement would guide us in determining what we can and cannot with technology.

This necessity of protecting technology from our own danger lies within the maxim “action follows *being*. When we protect technology from danger, we also protect ourselves from the dangerous

⁴² According to Borgmann, focal things and practices are the human activities that make life meaningful. See John D. O'Brien, “Focal Things,” *Fumbling towards Beatitude* (blog), May 12, 2012, <http://johnobrien.blogspot.com/2012/05/focal-things-and-practices.html>.

⁴³ Technological distraction in this context is the phenomenon wherein the human person possesses a distorted view of technology as merely a tool to be used passively. This dismisses the attainment of the depth of focal experiences and practices that is when people see technology as merely a thing, this misses out the potential of such advancement to realize a human person's full potential. For instance, a person views their phone as merely for itself. In this sense, a person is distracted with their utilitarian view towards the phone, and hence dismisses its augmenting capacity, for instance, to connect with their loved ones through call or text messages using that particular device. In attaining a passive outlook on technology lies the idea of distraction — humans fail to see technology with its core essence.

⁴⁴ Albert Borgmann, *Technology and the Character of Contemporary Life: A Philosophical Inquiry*. (University of Chicago Press, 1984).

outcomes that technology may bring forth on us.⁴⁵ Consequently, this entails the attainment of either reclaiming or developing new focal things and practices that coexist with such advancements. This includes the idea that our personhood can also emerge from integrating technology in ways that augment and enhance human engagement, not diminish it.⁴⁶

The call to protect technology from danger fulfills Borgmann's perspective that technology heightens, rather than denies, the radiance of genuine focal things. When we learn to understand that focal things require a practice to prosper within,⁴⁷ this aspect of understanding requires both contemplative and active way of engagement. To think that technology is destined for augmentation is to act with technology so that augmentation will bring forth.⁴⁸ This is because, if we use technology passively, our relationship with it can erode its augmenting capacity and diminish our engagement with meaningful activities or "focal practices" that connect us with the society.⁴⁹ As Borgmann asserts:

If we recognize the central vacuity of advanced technology, that emptiness can become the opening for *focal things*. It works both ways, of course. When we see a focal concern of ours threatened by technology, our sight for the liabilities of mature technology is sharpened.⁵⁰

⁴⁵ *Agere sequitur esse* (action follows being) is the traditional statement of the metaphysical and moral principle that grounds a person's moral duties and the possibilities in one's very being. The context of the statement mirrors the Scholastic thought in a sense that whatever action we impose in our engagement with technology, reflects on the outcome by beholding its being-ness (i.e., on how technology turned out to be). If we co-determine with technology that we should do what is good, then technology will bring forth what is good or otherwise. Therefore, in the sphere of co-determination, what we act within the engagement with technology will reflect the essence of that particular engagement. See James T. Bretzke, "Reshaping Ourselves?," *America Magazine*, May 6, 2000, <https://www.americamagazine.org/issue/culture/reshaping-ourselves>.

⁴⁶ This posits the fact that technology inherently aids us in fulfilling our personhood, even in its mundane sense of just doing our daily activities, such as solving complex mathematical problems, exercising, or preparing a meal after a certain work or activity. Our active engagement with technology carries us out these activities in the midst of our technological environment that leads us to a more integrated, wholesome, and fulfilling life, hence entering the fact that technology augments our mundane skills as humans (i.e., gives us a booster factor in order to engage with daily events efficiently). These ordinary things intersect with both the Heideggerian *Dasein* and Wojtyla's personhood wherein even in the simplest practice of efficacy and determination among the activities that a human person does actively with technology, they attain transcendence that fulfills their pursuit of responding to the discovery of being-there which leans to the depth and authenticity of their experience of the world, and on how experiences contribute to their development.

⁴⁷ Borgmann, *Technology and the Character of Contemporary Life*.

⁴⁸ *Conscientious co-determination* embodies both the contemplative and active engagement with technology would help ensure we maintain these essential aspects of our human experience instead of succumbing completely to the stereotypical view that technological conveniences are just means to an end.

⁴⁹ This statement exposes the reality that at present, technology has the capability to redefine and augment our experiences, and undoubtedly, human beings reduce them to a form of passive consumption rather than active engagement. The conscientious aspect of human beings will prevent such degradation, preserving the depth and complexity of human experience. While technology introduces convenience, this aspect should not be a detriment to our human dignity — our active participation in life, rather a mode of augmentation and therefore a transcending and fulfilling factor.

⁵⁰ Borgmann implies that just like humans, technology too can have limitations. However, idle acknowledgement of such limitations is not sufficient, rather by engaging into a reciprocal relation wherein both limitations are fulfilled. In this context, Borgmann speaks of *conscientious co-determination* as a concept that "works in both ways" wherein both the contemplative and active pursuits are tied to respond to the vacuity that the perspective of instrumentality and passivity brings. This leads the human person and technology to actively engage in the augmentation of focal things, both conscientiously co-determining each other to foster the depth of focal experience and practices within the *life-world*. See Borgmann, *Technology and the Character of Contemporary Life: A Philosophical Inquiry*.

Conscientious co-determination would help establish a balance that allows for the real essence of technology without undermining essential human aspects, such as human dignity. In turn, we can protect technology from our potentially malignant intents.

Point of Divergence

From the previous statements, Wojtyla and Heidegger engage in a dialogue wherein they address similar concerns regarding human-technology relations, albeit from different approaches, yet in a significant manner. Heidegger reflects the emergence of technology in a general manner as he introduces the notion of ‘*enframing*,’ emphasizing the harmful effects of technology due to our misperception of it, which asserts a potent effect in the human *life-world*. From this stance, he redirects us to the fact that technology can also be beneficial through its purposive unveiling factor (*poiesis*). From Wojtyla’s discourses in the encyclical, his approach is practically contextualized, primarily based on his *personalistic* thought of work, as he underscores the pivotal role of technology in the ever-developing industries and forms of communication. He expresses the relationship between human beings and technology in a contextual manner by emphasizing the involvement of the subject (humans) and the object (technology) in work, emphasizing a co-determinant, collaborative, and interdependent relationship. Therefore, the dialogue of Wojtyla and Heidegger may initially appear to be contrasting, as the former views technology as object,⁵¹ and the latter as a subject⁵² However, both share a complementary discourse that forms a unified thought — to understand the various impacts of technology on the human *life-world*. This leads to the importance of establishing bidirectional ethical considerations in relation to such aspects. This also prompts us to examine the gap being bridged between the thoughts of Heidegger and Wojtyla — how their ideas can converge as one solution to the problem posed in human-technology relations.

Ethical-Technological Gap Bridge

Heidegger and Wojtyla present a complementary view on how technological advancements impact the human *life-world*. Heidegger’s understanding of technology as a way of revealing contributes to the discourse of Wojtyla’s philosophy of *personalism*. In this way, the notion of Heidegger enhances our perspective of the undeniable relationship between humans and technology in the pursuit of self-discovery, a theme central to Wojtyla’s *personalism*.

On the other hand, Wojtyla’s philosophy of *personalism* offers a contrasting perspective. His approach directs us toward an active engagement with technology, underscoring the capacity to augment human beings rather than being *enframed* within utilitarian framework. Wojtyla’s

⁵¹ Wojtyla, rooted in *personalism* with Schelerian and Thomistic thought, looks at technology as an object that is under the subduing of the human person as referenced in his encyclical See John Paul II, *Laborem Exervens*, sec. 6. He points out the role of technology as a tool that enhances human dignity and creativity that pursues communal flourishing. For Wojtyla, the moral dimension of these technological advancements reflects on the intentionality and responsibility of the human who is the subject that engages with it.

⁵² Heidegger’s phenomenological view with technology argues that technology is not a neutral object but *aletheia* — a way of revealing the truths of the world that shapes human understanding with it. He terms this as *enframing* (*Gestell*) as a way of reducing humans and nature into resources. Although Heidegger did not literally argued that technology is a subject, his idea about *enframing* concerning on how technology can influence the human person, creates a “subject-like” understanding with its relations with humans.

considerations expand Heidegger's notion of technology by providing a context rooted in human work, as outlined in his encyclical.

Thus, through their thoughtful engagements, essential gaps have been filled, and contributions have been made in their respective discourses. Heidegger addresses the gap in Wojtyla's view by emphasizing the significance of the revealing aspect of technology, which provides a context for self-awareness and development through such relationships. Conversely, Wojtyla contributes to and bridges the gaps Heidegger's perspective by introducing anthropocentric ethical considerations of technology. This supports the aspect of agency, moral responsibility, and human dignity in the context of human-technological relations, bridging Heidegger's theoretical view on technology as a mode of revealing.

To translate the theoretical dialogue between Heidegger and Wojtyla into practical and novel advancements, this section will examine how their thoughts transition into mere practical engagements into contemporary challenges to technology in the landscape of social media and artificial intelligence.

Wojtylan and Heideggerian Ethics of Technology: From Dialogue to *Praxis*

The dialogue of Heidegger and Wojtyla, along with their complementary views, extends beyond theory into praxis within the discourse of ethics and the philosophy of technology. To systematize the analysis of this *praxis*, formulations were developed to provide understanding of how *conscientious co-determination* can be applied in specific situations:

First Formulation: We must recognize that both humans and technology possess inherent value. From a subjective perspective, we must view technology not only as an external tool but we must think of such as something inherent in our nature that drives us to the course of augmentation.⁵³

Second Formulation: We should not lose sight of technology's true essence of revealing. At times, we may fall into reducing it to merely a tool due to external demands (i.e., instantiation), but out of determination, we must avoid settling into this limited view since technology is more than just an object— out of its revealing nature, it is a subject.⁵⁴

Third Formulation: With the awareness that technology is not merely technical, but also a mode of revealing and augmenting, we should actively participate in its mutual process of attaining

⁵³ The first formulation involves Heidegger's stance of humans being as self-conscious that entails Wojtyla's notion of efficacy wherein we should be conscientious of our value as well as with technology's value. Contemplatively, in viewing our engagement with technology between the lines, we should treat technology as a companion that improves our lives. This contemplative phase of the formulation contributes to the wholeness of the ethical fulfillment through *conscientious co-determination* by establishing an intellectual guidance for the human person to act upon. If we are aware that technology is more than just merely tools to be used, and that the inherent value of technology lies upon its revealing the transcendence of personhood which leads to fulfillment, then we are moved to protect technology from our dangerous intentions through co-determination. This is so that technology may beget the good by co-determining with such in a good manner.

⁵⁴ The second formulation implies that our conscientious awareness of technology's essence must not go out of mind. The potential to "fall into viewing tech as merely tools" falls under Heidegger's *enframing* and forgetfulness of being. Yet, in this sense, by virtue of Wojtyla's contention of humans as a determining being, and in application of the formulation of self-determination that "I may, but need not to," we can choose not to be *enframed* with such as it will concur a two-way result: technology's downfall due to us and our downfall due to our wrong use that is caused by technology.

flourishing. This process should aim to reclaim or augment our focal practice of personal development that aims transcendence and self-fulfillment.⁵⁵

These formulations provide a novel understanding that underscores a conscientious co-determinant relationship between human beings and technology. As *praxis*, these views focus on concrete situations, particularly the use and development of social media and in the present-day advancement of artificial intelligence. The focus on these areas is timely, as both social media and artificial intelligence are practical tools with the potential to augment human experience and practice. Given their capacity for enhancement, these technologies present an opportunity for analysis from an ethical perspective. As the concept of *conscientious co-determination* entails the contemplative and active dimension of the human-technological engagement, it is fitting that the scenarios should be assessed based on the involvement as well of the contemplative and active focal practices.⁵⁶

Social Media

A recent news involving the shutdown of Omegle, a video-chatting platform that connected strangers online, follows a lawsuit that accused it of facilitating child abuse. Launched in 2009, the platform initially gained popularity among teenagers but remained relatively fringe over the years. according to its founder, Leif K-Brooks, Omegle was designed to allow users to explore foreign cultures, seek advice from impartial third parties, and alleviate feelings of loneliness and isolation. However, the platform became increasingly associated with issues concerning child predators and flaws in its design. In 2021, Omegle was sued for allegedly enabling sex trafficking after matching an 11-year-old girl with a man who later sexually abused her. Omegle's shutdown was the result of legal mediation between the company and the survivor's legal representative.⁵⁷

Omegle's closure provides an avenue for examining *conscientious co-determination* within the context of social media engagement. Ethically, the platform originally provided a space for virtual camaraderie, dialogue, and exploration of diverse cultures. However, the case also emphasizes how humans and technology are affected by the fault of passive engagement. As a *praxis*, we shall analyze the case in its intersection with the formulations:

The Recognition of the Inherent Value of Humans and Technology: Omegle's legal history, particularly its association with incidents of sexual harassment and abuse illustrates how the

⁵⁵ The third formulation involves the application of the gray area that Albert Borgmann offers in the study, and with the synthesis of Heidegger and Wojtyła's major arguments, we then should enter action, specifically into a deeper experience of active participation with technology that aims primarily for the improvement of our life (i.e., focal practices that is termed by Borgmann). These aligns with Wojtyła's thought of human beings capable of fulfillment, and with Heidegger supplying such a thought, technology can be a bridge to transcendence and fulfillment. Therefore, human beings do not only think with technology, but they act with technology.

⁵⁶ The contemplative and active focal practices that are elaborated in this statement are categorized in the following: the ability of thought process and critical thinking intersects in the contemplative dimension, while social interaction and camaraderie intersect in the active dimension. This is evident in the human engagement with artificial intelligence, since the scenario intersects with the contemplative dimension of the engagement since it involves intellectual matters, and in social media since intersects with the active dimension of such an engagement that involves interaction and camaraderie.

⁵⁷ Daysia Tolentino and Kat Tenberge, "Omegle, the Anonymous Video Chat Site, Shuts down after 14 Years," *NBC News*, November 10, 2023, <https://www.nbcnews.com/tech/social-media/omegle-shut-down-did-why-leif-k-brooks-shutdown-alternatives-rcna124393>.

platform is used as a mediator between the abuser and the abused. This reflects the tendency of human beings to take for granted the true essence of Omegle, and reducing the platform to means of satisfying their sexual gratification—even at the expense of harming others. This misuse if manifested through unconsented sexual motives, particularly with the involvement of children which are exposed in the platform that raises heightened concerns. Thus, the case posits a deviation of the first formulation. This deviation stems from the distorted perception of users on Omegle, which tarnished its core essence. Many failed to acknowledge Omegle’s potential in augmenting our capacity to be active social beings. To fulfill its element of *praxis*, and as an intervention to this deviation, certain actions that could potentially fulfill this formulation may be taken. For instance, users can cultivate a stronger sense of moderation and self-awareness through educational programs that promote conscientious and responsible engagement with digital platforms. Such initiatives may offer an awareness that social media is a safe space that augments our yearning for connection and our capacity for dialogue with various people.

Recognizing Technology’s Essence of Revealing: One Omegle’s intended advantages is to provide a platform that augments our interactions with people who carry out diverse backgrounds and cultures. Ideally, it augments our social engagement and opens avenues for meaningful, cross-cultural connections. However, the abuser, in this case, took for granted the platform’s capacity for unveiling that goes beyond sexual satisfaction, and used it otherwise as a tool to impose danger on the people, particularly on the children that use the same platform. Thus, the case posits a deviation of the second formulation wherein the opportunity for a genuine view of its purposive revealing factor that entails meaningful connections was overlooked due to distort perception that arises within the user, at the same time, tarnishes the value of the platform being used. As an intervention to this deviation, the platform may establish technical safeguards⁵⁸ that have a feature of a detailed verification, at the same time having educational features that this platform promotes a cross-cultural level of interactions through detailed advertisements.⁵⁹ These actions ensure the intention of the platform to maintain the augmentation of camaraderie that allows connections to flourish through unveiling cross-cultural perspectives. At the same time, such intervention would facilitate the prevention of user distortions as well that could tarnish the revealing essence of the platform.

The Attainment of Flourishing through Co-determination: Omegle, while providing “terms and conditions” to guide user behavior, still allows room for abuse due to the platform’s vulnerabilities and lack of enforcement. Although there is the presence of written guidelines, users could still deviate from it due to its ability to manipulate the platform. Evidently, despite of the presence of guidelines, the abuser had been able to manipulate the platform in order to fulfill his gratification which entailed the deviation from the third formulation. Both the user and the platform could have done more to prevent the abuse to happen. The user could have been conscientious of setting his idea of Omegle as a way to improve socialization, and turn, could have implemented more

⁵⁸ Technical safeguards are access controls intended to ensure that only authorized individuals can gain logical access to view, modify, or delete protected data. See Josh Shaul and Aaron Ingram, “Oracle Security: The Big Picture,” in *Elsevier eBooks*, 2007, 1–31.

⁵⁹ This feature is evident in Meta’s Social Media platform “Facebook” wherein moderators would ask a user to input his personal information to gain access for identity verification, and for identification if that particular user deviated the Terms and Conditions that is aligned in their Data Security statement. In this sense, Omegle could have gathered up a committee that verifies identities that will serve as feasible access to identify violators of the terms and conditions that can be a subject to penalties. See also Meta, “Data Security,” Software, *Meta Platform Terms*, Facebook, April 25, 2023), https://developers.facebook.com/terms/dfc_platform_terms.

practical and enforceable terms and conditions to support a model of co-determination aimed at social growth and personal development.⁶⁰ To address such deviations, the terms and conditions could include enforceable legal measures (i.e., legal penalties) for those who will go against the guidelines. This could be done by collaborating with law enforcement offices that are specialized in cyberspace fields (i.e., police cybercrime units).⁶¹ This action could support a more ethical approach to co-determination that underscores the aspect of both the users and the platform enter in reciprocal actions that aim for communal growth and development that prioritizes the dignity of both the users and the platform they engage in.

Artificial Intelligence

Schools in the United States have expressed concern and frustration over the use of AI, with some, like New York City public schools,⁶² even banning access to AI tools that may enable academic dishonesty.⁶³ ChatGPT is one such tool often used by students. Students oriented in the use of AI may find themselves submitting works that are not their own, as everything can be done by AI.⁶⁴ In contrast, Scott Hartley formulated intelligence augmentation (IA), which suggests that AI supplements rather than replaces humans. IA manipulates machine learning technologies similar to AI, but instead of taking the place of human beings, it focuses on assisting human intelligence instead of relying solely on machines for complying with school requirements. Unlike traditional AI, IA machine learning works hand in hand with the human brain to empower each other and produce a genuine product of human intelligence.⁶⁵

The case concerning the banning of Artificial Intelligence in New York City public schools due to academic dishonesty elicits an avenue for the analysis of *conscientious co-determination*. Additionally,

⁶⁰ In this sense, people can use Omegle to discover their full-potential (i.e., to discover what it means to be a social being). This applies to the Heideggerian notion of *poiesis* and Wojtyła's *personalism* — In order for us to experience oneself, human beings are to experience the external things; Omegle unveils these external things to us, and one way of achieving such is their engagement with such a platform in a way that is active and fulfilling (rendering friendships, and cultivating good character), rather than passive and utilitarian (an avenue to fulfill sexual gratifications). Inherently, Omegle augments our social aspect; therefore, it is a good platform. What hinders such pursuit are those people who use it with ill intentions, as well as the platform's inadequacy to provide a more feasible action that prevents abusers from tarnishing the value of the platform.

⁶¹ Leif K-Brooks emphasized such in his closure statement on the said website, "I believe in a responsibility to be a "good Samaritan," and to implement reasonable measures to fight crime and other misuse." In this context, it entails a co-determinant process; not only should the platform exert efforts to maintain the terms and conditions, yet users should take part by conscientiously abiding to such guidelines in order to have co-determinant measures to eliminate misuse. See Leif K-Brooks, "Omegle Closure Statement," Press release, November 9, 2023, <https://www.omegle.com>.

⁶² Fr. Jesus Jay Miranda, O.P. referenced this scenario in a news article on CNN wherein due to concerns about negative impacts on student learning, and concerns regarding the safety and accuracy of content, access to ChatGPT is restricted on New York City Public Schools' networks and devices. See also Korn and Kelly, "New York City Public Schools Ban Access to AI Tool That Could Help Students Cheat".

⁶³ Jesus Jr. M. Miranda O. P., "From AI to IA, What Is at Stake?," The Manila Times, March 16, 2023, <https://www.manilatimes.net/2023/02/05/opinion/columns/from-ai-to-ia-what-is-at-stake/1877259>.

⁶⁴ Fr. Jesus Jay Miranda, O.P. posited the problem of supplantation, and emphasized ChatGPT as one of the AI tools that are commonly used aside from Blender Bot 2, Alexa Teacher Model, Godel from Microsoft's 2019 DialoGPT project, and LaMDA developed by Google.

⁶⁵ Fr. Jesus Jay Miranda, O.P. posited a potential solution to the problem of Artificial Intelligence supplanting the student's capacity to think critically and to independently craft academic demands out of their potential. Coining Scott Hartley's intelligence augmentation, he points out that such advancements work collaboratively with the human brain to augment each other and produce a genuine product of human intelligence.

the emergence of Scott Hartley's Intelligence Augmentation serves as a potential solution to this problem which portrays an interplay that corresponds with the formulation of *conscientious co-determination* that is broken down into analysis:

The Recognition of the Inherent Value of Humans and Technology: Artificial Intelligence was originally developed with the intention that of contributing positively to the human *life-world*, and as it brings good, it portrays a significant value within their relationship with humans. Yet the case evidently posits two ways: the use of artificial intelligence to cheat on assignment and consequently, the banning of the advancement within the academe. This presents a common impression that the case *per se* deviated the first formulation as they already took for granted how AI could supply human intelligence instead. To intervene with this case, an enhanced application of intelligence augmentation should be done. This can be practiced in a way of planning and implementing⁶⁶ the framework in the academe that would educate the majority of people on how to conscientiously engage with Artificial Intelligence actively, and without leaning into abusive intentions.⁶⁷

Recognizing Technology's Essence of Revealing: Artificial Intelligence, in its essence, serves as a mode of revealing. A simple prompt entered by a user generates information that aligns with their needs, thus allowing the individual to uncover their own potential. In this sense, a person is revealed to themselves that they have more potential in venturing the art of questioning that is prompt-based in this context.⁶⁸ However, the situation at hand highlights a scenario where the true essence of AI may be overlooked, as its potential to reveal insights and foster intellectual growth is overshadowed by concerns over misuse.

Evidently, students may turn to Artificial Intelligence to quickly generate their papers, valuing the convenience it offers. While this process reveals information, it risks overshadowing the critical thinking skills that are central to the learning experience. The decision to ban AI in academic settings, prompted by this issue, reflects a misunderstanding of AI's true potential. Instead of seeing it as a tool for intellectual growth, AI is viewed with fear, neglecting the opportunity for active, ethical engagement and learning. This presents a deviation from the second formulation, where students view

⁶⁶ These are preliminary frameworks that are present within the Philippine Outcome-based education curriculum that involves writing the syllabi with the reflection of learning plan and the measuring of the expected outcomes as its inclusions, as well as implementing the learning plan and strategies planned for producing the outcomes. (See De La Salle University Manila, "OBE Framework," De La Salle University, March 8, 2022, <https://www.dlsu.edu.ph/colleges/gcoe/obe-framework>).

⁶⁷ This intervention is evidently practiced in the inclusion of the Philosophy of Technology as a topic in the syllabus of Special Questions in Ethics that is offered in the Philosophy Department of Bicol University – College of Social Sciences and Philosophy. (See Palma, "Philosophy 38: Seminar on Special Questions in Ethics"). Additionally, the Philosophical Association of the Philippines engaged in a dialogue concerning the theoretical foundations of Artificial Intelligence within the lecture Series for World Philosophy Day with the theme "Adapting Humanity: Exploring the Nexus of Technology, Identity, and the Ethics of the Future." See Jaybee Cabañeros et al., "The Philosophical Association of the Philippines, in Collaboration with the Polytechnic University of the Philippines - Manila and the University of San Carlos - Cebu, Is Inviting All Active Members to Join the Celebration of World Philosophy Day with a Three-Day International Webinar Lecture. The Theme of the Celebration Is 'Adapting Humanity: Exploring the Nexus of Technology, Identity, and the Ethics of the Future,'" *Facebook*, October 5, 2023, <https://www.facebook.com/share/p/9R3yznkJwvH77ePA/?mibextid=K35XfP>.

⁶⁸ This statement highlights the idea that in some instances, we may opt to ask an AI Chatbot for an information that entails a particular question. The art of questioning that was highlighted here underscores how we are able to come up with a question to ask the AI Chatbot.

the revealing aspect of AI purely in terms of material efficiency, using it only to meet immediate goals. To intervene the case, an AI-Literacy topic that is related to intelligence augmentation could be integrated into a general education course. This would encourage students to deepen their understanding of AI, moving beyond the notion of AI as just a tool, and instead recognizing its potential to augment human intelligence and support critical thinking.⁶⁹

The Attainment of Flourishing through Co-determination: Engaging with artificial intelligence involves providing prompts that generate information. In this sense, both the human user and the technology collaborate towards a common goal: gaining knowledge. However, this collaborative effort can be overlooked, as the case reveals that students may over-rely on AI to fulfill academic requirements, which results in an unbalanced engagement. The student provides a prompt, the technology produces information, and the student simply copies and pastes it into their assignment. Moreover, the co-determination is unrequited in this sense since it overlooks the focal practice of thinking critically and the experience of genuine learning which may compromise the intellectual flourishing of the student. Additionally, co-determination might be disrupted since artificial intelligence, in this case, was banned in the academe due to its tarnished impression of being a tolerant device to dishonesty, hence deviating the third formulation. To address this issue, a project-based curriculum could be designed within a general education course that is *praxis*-based. In this course, students would gain hands-on experience with artificial intelligence in the context of research extensions.⁷⁰ This curriculum design ensures the application of critical thinking capacities while co-determining with AI as a companion that enhances their inherent abilities to gather and apply information for research projects.⁷¹

The situations presented demonstrate that the approach of conscientious co-determination is bidirectional. Humans are co-determined with technological advancements due to their intrinsic capacity for reason, a capacity that is augmented by technology through its revealing nature. This emphasizes the importance of protecting technology from being used with negative intentions, in order to safeguard ourselves from the potential pitfalls that our own actions, revealed by technology, may create. The *praxis* involved in applying this formulation, by addressing the deviations in the

⁶⁹ Part of the Outcome-based curriculum in the Philippines is to carry out the strategies planned for measuring the learning outcomes and objectives. In this sense, a particular instructor can measure on how students are aware of the essence of artificial intelligence wherein this data can be collected and can be analyzed to determine the results. In this sense, feedback are obtained if the topic should undergo in a more comprehensive outlook of artificial intelligence to fulfill the aim of AI Literacy that is understood beyond surface level. See De La Salle University Manila, “OBE Framework”.

⁷⁰ Since the core problem of the human-AI engagement dwell commonly in the sphere of research, a response is needed for the academe to determine what needs to be changed that ensures a comprehensive instruction of artificial intelligence in the field of research. The point of this response is to ensure augmentation within the crafting of research projects, rather than supplantation. See De La Salle University Manila, “OBE Framework”.

⁷¹ This intervention was evident in the Philosophy Department of Bicol University – College of Social Sciences and Philosophy wherein the use of Litmaps was introduced to augment the students in searching for prospect literature reviews that will strengthen the arguments in their philosophical research pursuits. See also Bicol University - Young Philosophers Society and Kenneth Jovin S. Orobias, “One of the Hardest Steps in Writing Research Papers Is the Review of Related Literature. Nonetheless, We Have Professor Ramon Palma to Thank for Introducing Litmaps to Us. An Application That Allows Us to Visualize Our Research from One RRL to Another. You Can See the Interconnection Between One Study to Another.” Facebook, April 22, 2023, <https://www.facebook.com/share/nufBLrnPqQ1ASotF/?mibextid=WC7FNe>.

scenario, reflects a synthesis of the dialogue between Wojtyla, in his *personalistic* thought, and Heidegger with regard to technology's mode of revealing and its augmenting impacts to the human *life-world*.

Having engaged with the dialogue between Heidegger and Wojtyla, concerning their critiques of technology, and explored the applications of *conscientious co-determination* in practical landscapes, this paper now examines the broader implications of their thoughts concerning ethics in the technological age.

Conclusion

Through their deductive dialectic engagement, Wojtyla and Heidegger advocate for a prudent approach to technology, suggesting that the *conscientious co-determination* between humanity and technology is essential for fulfilling our ethical responsibility in its use. This perspective calls for a careful and thoughtful engagement with technology that is guided by ethical considerations that are grounded within the inherent value of technology in the human *life-world*, as well as in *personalistic* thought. It emphasizes the understanding that, although technology enhances our practice by revealing truths that improve our lives, our relationship with technology must also prioritize the augmentation of human dignity. It emphasizes the understanding that, although technology enhances our practice by revealing truths that improve our lives, our relationship with technology must also prioritize the augmentation of human dignity.⁷² This emphasizes the vitality of an active engagement within the human-technology relationship.

In other instances, *conscientious co-determination* will be challenged. Potentially, this may be outpaced due to the rapid technological revolution that is happening at present. On the other hand, this concept relies on agents that are actively engaging in responsible decision-making, which may relatively be deviated due to intrinsic factors.⁷³ This would be addressed in a way that this will be open to dialogue, reflection, and interdisciplinary collaboration to make an assurance that *conscientious co-determination* may become an effective means to navigate ethical dilemmas posed by technology at present.⁷⁴

This brings forth important lessons from our thoughtful discourse with Heidegger and Wojtyla on the ethics of technology. We must remain cautious in engaging with such advancements without falling out with the aim to discover our intrinsic potentials. Every art and investigation seem to aim at some good,⁷⁵ and technology being *techne* seems to aim at some good. Therefore, technology, if engaged with conscientious co-determinant manner, is a companion to unveil one's potential that leads to efficacy, self-determination, transcendence, and self-fulfillment which lead us to the Good.

⁷² This aligns with the "*I-Other*" idea of an engagement with technology since for Wojtyla, one's experience of external things cannot be understood without reference to his experience of himself, human beings must engage with technology conscientiously with the aim to fulfill one's potential, so as to aid people in their work in contributing not only to the fulfillment of pragmatic and material needs, but to the harnessing of what considers the goods of the mind (i.e., efficacy, transcendence, self-determination, and self-fulfillment). See Montaña, "Phenomenological Thomism: The Acting Person: Neo-Thomism," 198.

⁷³ Factors for deviation that particularly dwell within the dynamic conscientiousness and intentionality of the human person include but are not limited to negligence, ignorance, and conflict of interests.

⁷⁴ The dialogue may provide as well an opportunity for an emergence of a potential project that utilizes *conscientious co-determination* as an analysis to the Philippine Context of Technological Saturation wherein the issues concerning hacking, phishing, and pirated movies can be used as a *praxis*.

⁷⁵ Aristotle, *Nicomachean Ethics*, trans. Harris Rackham (Harvard University Press, 1934).

This ultimate Good is the central aim in the complementary dialogue between Heidegger and Wojtyła on the ethics of technology, underscoring the need for conscious, participatory reflection in our engagement with technological advancements, which should not only serve the good of the self but also the greater good of the human *life-world*.

Bibliography

- Aguas, Jove Jim. "Ethics and Moral Philosophy of Karol Wojtyla." *Kritike* 7, no. 1 (June 2013): 115–37.
- Aristotle. *Nicomachean Ethics*. Translated by Harris Rackham. Massachusetts: Harvard University Press, 1934.
- Balaban, Oded. "Epoché: Meaning, object, and existence in Husserl's Phenomenology." In *Phenomenology World-Wide: Foundations — Expanding Dynamics — Life-Engagements A Guide for Research and Study*. Edited by Anne-Teresa Tymieniecka, 103–14, Dordrecht: Springer Dordrecht, 2002.
- Bazeley, Pat. "Complementary Analysis of Varied Data Sources." In *Integrating Analyses in Mixed Methods Research*, 91–125. SAGE Publications Ltd, 2018.
- Bicol University - Young Philosophers Society, and Kenneth Jovin S. Orobia. "One of the hardest steps in writing research papers is the RRL. Nonetheless, we have Professor Ramon Palma to thank for introducing Litmaps to us. An application that allows us to visualize our research from one RRL to another, you can see the interconnection between one study to another." *Facebook*, April 22, 2023. <https://www.facebook.com/share/nufBLrnPqQ1ASotF/?mibextid=WC7FNe>.
- Borgmann, Albert. *Technology and the Character of Contemporary Life: A Philosophical Inquiry*. University of Chicago Press., 1984.
- Braver, Lee. "Forgetfulness of being (Seinsvergessenheit)." In *Cambridge University Press eBooks*, 329–32, 2021. doi:10.1017/9780511843778.089.
- Bretzke, James T. "Reshaping ourselves?" *America Magazine*, May 6, 2000. <https://www.americamagazine.org/issue/culture/reshaping-ourselves>.
- Burr, Christopher, Mariarosaria Taddeo, and Luciano Floridi. "The Ethics of Digital Well-Being: A Thematic Review." *Science and Engineering Ethics* 26, no. 4 (January 13, 2020): 2313–2343.
- Cabañeros, Jaybee, University of San Carlos - Cebu, Polytechnic University of the Philippines, and The Philosophical Association of the Philippines. "The Philosophical Association of the Philippines, in collaboration with the Polytechnic University of the Philippines - Manila and the University of San Carlos - Cebu, is inviting all active members to join the celebration of World Philosophy Day with a Three-Day International Webinar Lecture. The theme of the celebration is 'Adapting Humanity: Exploring the Nexus of Technology, Identity, and the Ethics of the Future.'" *Facebook*, October 5, 2023. <https://www.facebook.com/share/p/9R3yznkJwvH77ePA/?mibextid=K35XfP>.
- Cocchiarella, Christopher. "Heidegger on the essence of technology: What is technology, really?" *Mindful Technics*, March 17, 2019. <https://mindfultechnics.com/heidegger/>.
- De La Salle University Manila. "OBE Framework." De La Salle University, March 8, 2022. <https://www.dlsu.edu.ph/colleges/gcoe/obe-framework/>.
- Heidegger, Martin. "Age of the World Picture." Ebook. In *The Question Concerning Technology, and Other Essays*. Translated by William Llovit, 115–54. New York and London: Garland Publishing, Inc., 1977.

- . “Temporality and Everydayness.” In *Being and Time*, translated by John Macquarrie and Edward Robinson. 1927. Reprint, Blackwell Publishers Ltd., 1962.
- . “The Question Concerning Technology.” Ebook. In *The Question Concerning Technology, and Other Essays*, translated by William Llovit, 3–35. New York and London: Garland Publishing, Inc., 1977.
- John Paul II. *Laborem Exercens [Encyclical Letter on Human Work]*. The Holy See, 1981. https://www.vatican.va/content/john-paul-ii/en/encyclicals/documents/hf_jp-ii_enc_14091981_laborem-exercens.html.
- . “Participation or Alienation?: An excerpt from Person and Act and Related Essays.” *Church Life Journal*, 1977. <https://churchlifejournal.nd.edu/articles/participation-and-alienation/>.
- . “Subjectivity and the Irreducible in the Human Person.” Translated by Theresa Sandok OSM. *The Truth Will Make You Free*, 1993. https://actingpersonblog.wordpress.com/2012/07/29/karol-wojtyla-person-and-community_29/.
- . *The Acting Person*. Translated by Andrzej Potocki. D. Reidel Pub. Co, 1969.
- K-Brooks, Leif. “Omegle Closure Statement.” Press release, November 9, 2023. <https://www.omegle.com/>.
- Korn, Jennifer, and Samantha Kelly. “New York City public schools ban access to AI tool that could help students cheat.” *Cable News Network (CNN)*, January 6, 2023. <https://edition.cnn.com/2023/01/05/tech/chatgpt-nyc-school-ban/index.html>.
- Laghari, Riaz. “Dasein by Martin Heidegger: Human Existence as ‘Being There.’” *Medium*, June 11, 2023. <https://medium.com/@riazleghari/dasein-by-martin-heidegger-human-existence-as-being-there-578264f997d0>.
- Mara, Peter Emmanuel. “Understanding Man as a Subject and a Person: A Wojtylan Personalistic Interpretation of the Human Being.” *Kritike* 1, no. 1 (June 2007): 86–95.
- Mejos, Edward A. “Against Alienation: Karol Wojtyła’s Theory of Participation.” *Kritike* 1, no. 1 (June 2007): 71–85.
- Meta. “Data Security.” Software. *Meta Platform Terms*. Facebook, April 25, 2023. https://developers.facebook.com/terms/dfc_platform_terms/.
- Miranda, Jesus Jr. M., O. P. “From AI to IA, what is at stake?” *The Manila Times*, March 16, 2023. <https://www.manilatimes.net/2023/02/05/opinion/columns/from-ai-to-ia-what-is-at-stake/1877259>.
- Montaña, Robert. “Phenomenological Thomism: The Acting Person: Neo-Thomism.” In *Thomistic Ethics: A Beacon in the Contemporary Moral Landscape*, 198–202. University of Santo Tomas Publishing House, 2015.
- National Academy of Engineering. “The Misuse of Technologies.” Ebook. In *Sensing and Shaping Emerging Conflicts: Report of a Workshop by the National Academy of Engineering and United States Institute of Peace Roundtable on Technology, Science, and Peacebuilding*, 37. Washington DC, United States of America: The National Academies Press, 2013.

- O'Brien, John D. "Focal Things." *Fumbling towards Beatitude* (blog), May 12, 2012. <http://johnobrien.blogspot.com/2012/05/focal-things-and-practices.html>.
- Palma, Ramon V. "Philosophy 38: Seminar on Special Questions in Ethics." Syllabus, Data set. Bicol University, 2020.
- Shaul, Josh, and Aaron Ingram. "Oracle Security: the big picture." In *Elsevier eBooks*, 1–31, 2007.
- The Editors of Encyclopaedia Britannica. "Encyclical | Pope, Catholic Church, Doctrine." In *Encyclopedia Britannica*, July 20, 1998. <https://www.britannica.com/topic/encyclical>.
- . "Life-world." In *Encyclopedia Britannica*, March 17, 2016. <https://www.britannica.com/topic/life-world>.
- Tolentino, Daysia, and Kat Tenbarge. "Omegle, the anonymous video chat site, shuts down after 14 years." *NBC News*, November 10, 2023. <https://www.nbcnews.com/tech/social-media/omegle-shut-down-did-why-leif-k-brooks-shutdown-alternatives-rcna124393>.
- Wrathall, Mark A. and Cambridge University Press, eds. "Poiesis." In *The Cambridge Heidegger Lexicon*, 2021.
- Zuzanek, Jiri. "Thomas Aquinas: Vita Activa or Vita Contemplativa?" In *Time, Leisure and Well-Being*, 2020.

“Namimilosopo ka na!”: Filipino Children as Victims of Testimonial Quieting¹

Justin Anjelo A. Clemente

University of the Philippines - Los Baños | jaclemente1@up.edu.ph

Abstract: Filipino children are often met with dismissive remarks such as “Namimilosopo ka na!” or “Hindi mo maiintindihan, isip bata ka pa,” when they engage in reasoning or ask questions. These statements are often delivered in a derogatory manner as children are not seen as knowers, or at least, as potential knowers. Despite its prevalence, limited scholarly works have examined how Filipino children suffer from this treatment and perception of adults. As such, I aim to illustrate in this paper how Filipino children experience a specific practice of silencing, that is, testimonial quieting, when they do philosophy. To establish what it means for children to “do philosophy,” I first draw on Peter Paul Elicor’s article “Are Filipino Children Too Young to Do Philosophy?” Elicor highlights how adults easily dismiss children’s philosophical questions, seeing them as naïve, embarrassing, or unworthy of serious attention. Then, I discuss Karrin Murriss’ “Can Children Do Philosophy?” to address common skepticism about children’s ability to do philosophy. Building on these discussions, this paper primarily aims to conceptualize the practice of silencing experienced by Filipino children using Kristie Dotson’s account of testimonial quieting. Testimonial quieting occurs when an audience fails to recognize a speaker as a knower. Dotson highlights how speakers hugely depend on their audience’s willingness to be acknowledged and understood properly. I conclude by offering a preliminary account of how Filipino children suffer from testimonial quieting in two ways: first, by being ignored, and second, by receiving inaccurate or dismissive answers. This paper ultimately aims to challenge the misconceptions toward Filipino children’s status as knowers and capacity for philosophical thinking.

Keywords: *Philosophy for Children, epistemic violence, pamimilosopo, silencing*

Introduction

Filipino children frequently experience having their questions dismissed or not taken seriously by adults. Even in cases where their questions are answered, they are often met with simplified and inaccurate answers. These responses do not come from genuine engagement with children; it functions more as a way to stop them from asking more questions. Similarly, children’s testimonies and attempts at reasoning are frequently dismissed. This pattern reflects a broader societal tendency that does not recognize children as knowers simply by virtue of age.

¹ I thank Keisha Christle Abog for her insightful comments and suggestions since the early conception of this paper in our Philosophy for Children class.

In this paper, I aim to conceptualize how Filipino children suffer from a practice of silencing that fails to see them as knowers, that is, testimonial quieting. This paper is structured into four sections. First, I discuss Peter Paul Elicor's argument that Filipino children can and are already engaging in philosophical inquiry. I draw from his definition of philosophy as an attempt to understand the world by asking questions. Second, I present Karin Murriss' critique of John White and Richard Kitchener who argue against children's ability to do philosophy. By discussing Murriss' work, I aim to address the common misconceptions regarding children's ability to do philosophy. Third, I introduce Kristie Dotson's account of epistemic violence and testimonial quieting, which serves as the primary framework of my analysis. Finally, I present two ways in which Filipino children experience testimonial quieting: first, through being ignored, and second, through receiving inaccurate or dismissive answers. I conclude by emphasizing the importance of ameliorating our assumptions and attitudes toward Filipino children to foster a genuinely inclusive epistemic environment that cultivates their philosophical thinking.

Filipino Children Doing Philosophy

In his article, "Are Filipino Children Too Young to Do Philosophy?", Elicor argues that Filipino children are not only capable of doing philosophy, but they are also already engaging in it.² Philosophy, in this regard, is the practice of reflecting on one's own and others' experiences in making sense of the world. Doing philosophy, then, involves being perplexed by one's conditions and attempting to understand them. This often leads to asking existential questions. It is important to clarify that, in this paper, philosophy does not pertain to a subject matter transferred from one person to another. It is also not the academic discipline taught in universities that requires a degree and expertise.³ However, this is not to say that this is Elicor's sole definition of philosophy. Rather, this definition of philosophy must be understood within the specific goal of Elicor's paper: to establish Filipino children's ability to do philosophy—in its less strict sense.

Elicor provides several examples to illustrate how Filipino children do philosophy by asking existential questions. For example, a child may ask, "Why does tatay have to work abroad?" or "Why do I have to wear polka-dotted clothes on New Year's Day?" Similarly, an adolescent might wonder, "Why am I not as pretty as the other girls in school?"⁴ From these questions, Elicor suggests that children may have deeper existential concerns in asking these kinds of questions. He argues that such inquiries can be an opportunity to explore a child's existential concerns and guide them in exploring such inquiries. Thus, it becomes problematic when children's questions are quickly dismissed or given simplistic answers because it restricts them from cultivating their thinking skills. Similarly, adults miss the opportunity to critically reevaluate their personal assumptions.⁵

Furthermore, Elicor problematizes the way that adults often perceive children's questions as naïve, embarrassing, or unworthy of serious attention. He posits that the focus should not be on whether children can do philosophy or not, but on whether adults are willing to engage with and refine children's philosophical thinking. He identifies two common beliefs among adults that hinder

² Peter Paul Elicor, "Are Filipino Children Too Young to Do Philosophy?," *Kritike* 18, no. 1 (March 2024): 67–68.

³ *Ibid.*, 67.

⁴ *Ibid.*, 68.

⁵ *Ibid.*, 69.

children's engagement with philosophy. First is the assumption that children must reach adulthood before they can engage in higher-order thinking. As such, Elicor questions the idea of children as *isip bata* (childlike thinking) and lack the necessary experience in life to formulate meaningful questions. Second is the belief that children must be protected from certain topics that adults consider mature or age inappropriate. For example, adults typically avoid talking about taboo and controversial topics with children, such as death and sexuality. While Elicor recognizes that certain topics may not be practical to discuss with children all the time, he warns against completely dismissing their questions, as doing so silences children's curiosity rather than nourishing it.⁶

This is why, in this paper, I adopt Elicor's account of philosophy wherein philosophy is taken as an inquiry into understanding one's existential conditions and as a means to sharpen one's thinking skills. When I refer to the notion of children doing philosophy, I do not mean that children are engaging in academic philosophy as practiced in higher education. Instead, I refer to children's ability to engage and reflect on their personal experiences and interests, then formulate meaningful questions. Additionally, I also align with Elicor's critique of how children's questions are frequently dismissed. Identifying this problem lays the groundwork for a deeper philosophical inquiry, that is, examining the ways in which Filipino children experience silencing when they attempt to do philosophy. The tendency to dismiss children's questions can be traced to some commonly held beliefs about children's supposedly "limited" thinking skills. Such beliefs assume that children are too young to ask meaningful questions and form substantial beliefs. Thus, they must not be taken seriously. To further investigate this issue, I turn to Karin Murriss' work to discuss some of the misconceptions we may intuitively have toward children's thinking skills. By identifying these misconceptions, we can have a clearer idea of why children are easily undervalued when they engage in philosophical inquiry.

Why Do We Think Children Cannot Do Philosophy?

In "Can Children Do Philosophy?," Karin Murriss addresses some of the criticisms against the idea that children are capable of doing philosophy. She traces these criticisms to Neo-Aristotelian thinking and Jean Piaget's cognitive development theory. Through this discussion, I identify possible reasons why adults instinctively dismiss children's questions, thereby impeding their opportunities to engage in philosophical inquiry.

Murriss responds specifically to John White's and Richard Kitchener's skepticism toward children's ability to do philosophy and higher-order thinking.⁷ On the one hand, White argues that to genuinely do philosophy, children must not only be capable of thinking logically and rationally but must also adopt a "higher-order stance to reasoning" similar to adult philosophers. He distinguishes the kinds of inquiry that children pose from those that adults pose. He believes that while children ask questions to learn how to use a concept, an adult asks questions from a higher-order viewpoint.⁸ For White, just because children can ask questions, it does not necessarily make them capable of doing philosophy. The context and the intention behind the question must be sufficient to consider their inquiries as philosophical.⁹ Because children's intentions differ from those of adults when inquiring,

⁶ Elicor, "Are Filipino Children Too Young to Do Philosophy?," 70.

⁷ Karin Murriss, "Can Children Do Philosophy?," *Journal of Philosophy of Education* 34, no. 2 (2000): 262,

⁸ John White, "The roots of philosophy," in *The Impulses to Philosophise* (Cambridge University Press, 1992), 75.

⁹ *Ibid.*, 74.

he argues, they are not doing philosophy.¹⁰ Children are merely acquiring a concept and not doing philosophy.¹¹

On the other hand, Kitchener argues that what children express are only one-time performances or “philosophical one-liners.”¹² He warns that using anecdotes as evidence of children’s philosophical thinking can be misleading. For Kitchener, even though children can ask philosophical questions, these must be tested through sustained engagement to test the child’s ability to explain and defend such views.¹³ Looking back on Elicor’s examples of Filipino children doing philosophy, they qualify for what Kitchener calls philosophical one-liners.

In responding to White and Kitchener, Murriss exposes the underlying assumptions in their arguments. She argues that White and Kitchener appear to follow Neo-Aristotelian notions of human development, that is, the view that human beings are *tabula rasa* at birth. This notion relies on the idea that knowledge comes from experience. Therefore, as one’s age increases, the more knowledge they can possess. This implies that since children lack sufficient experience, it hinders their ability to gain knowledge and do philosophy. However, Murriss challenges this claim by arguing that children’s lack of sufficient experience does not hinder their ability to philosophically reflect, ponder, or question.¹⁴ Drawing on Ann Margaret Sharp and Laurence Splitter, she argues that while children may not grasp certain abstract concepts due to limited experience, they are still capable of reflecting on a wide range of philosophical ideas such as causality, reality, personhood, and truth.¹⁵

Meanwhile, from a psychological standpoint, Murriss attributes the dominant educational thinking to Jean Piaget’s cognitive development theory. Similar to the Neo-Aristotelian assumption, Piaget’s theory posits that children’s reasoning capacities develop as they get older. Hastening this process can even result in educational malpractice.¹⁶ As a result, children’s development is understood as a linear process that can be categorized into certain stages. For example, education systems often design curricula according to students’ age and assumed developmental stages. Education, then, has fixated on students’ ages and standardized teaching methods.¹⁷ Murriss points out two key problems with this approach. First, it places excessive emphasis on similarities between children without considering their individuality and differences. Second, it restricts the scope of what children are thought capable of understanding or engaging with. With these problems, Murriss critiques the shortcomings of Piagetian frameworks in education as they overemphasize logical and mathematical thinking, neglecting imaginative thinking.

Two important points can be drawn from Murriss’ work. First, we tend to assess children’s ability to do philosophy through the lens of academic philosophy. Specifically, White’s and Kitchener’s criteria of what counts as “philosophy” are drawn from practices and methods within academia. This

¹⁰ Murriss, “Can Children Do Philosophy?,” 268.

¹¹ White, “The Roots of Philosophy,” 76.

¹² Richard F. Kitchener, “Do Children Think Philosophically?,” *Metaphilosophy* 21, no. 4 (1990): 426.

¹³ *Ibid.*, 427.

¹⁴ Murriss, “Can Children Do Philosophy?,” 267.

¹⁵ Laurence J. Splitter and Ann Margaret Sharp, *Teaching for Better Thinking: The Classroom Community of Inquiry* (Australian Council for Educational Research, 1995), 22.

¹⁶ Ann Gazzard, “Philosophy for Children and the Piagetian Framework,” *Thinking: The Journal of Philosophy for Children* 5, no. 1 (1983): 11.

¹⁷ Murriss, “Can Children Do Philosophy?,” 270.

narrow approach prevents us from appreciating children's way of engaging in philosophical inquiry. Here, I reiterate my earlier point that when I refer to children doing philosophy, I do not mean that they are doing academic philosophy. Rather, they are engaging with personal, often existential questions that emerge from their own lived experiences. Second, I extend Sharp and Splitter's point that we cannot simply project concepts onto children and expect them to easily relate and understand. If we are to take seriously the idea of children doing philosophy, we must start by considering their personal experiences, as they are where they draw most of their philosophical thinking. Again, this follows Elicor's definition of philosophy as an inquiry into one's experiences in an effort to understand them.

Now that I have clarified what it means for Filipino children to do philosophy and what some of the commonly held beliefs are about their philosophical thinking, I turn to Kristie Dotson's account of epistemic violence and testimonial quieting. Using Dotson's account allows us to see what makes the silencing of Filipino children's questions epistemically violent. Moreover, it highlights how children are rendered vulnerable as speakers when adults fail to recognize them as knowers.

Epistemic Violence and Testimonial Quietening

Kristie Dotson draws from Gayatri Spivak's "Can the Subaltern Speak?" to develop her notion of epistemic violence.¹⁸ Spivak was primarily concerned with identifying how marginalized groups are silenced due to colonialism, resulting in the disappearance of local and provincial knowledge in favor of Western epistemic practices. She characterizes epistemic violence as any practice that undermines a group's ability to be heard and to express themselves meaningfully.¹⁹ Therefore, to understand epistemic violence in testimony, Dotson examines the dependent relationship between a speaker and their audience. Specifically, in linguistic exchanges, a speaker relies on their audience to be recognized and taken seriously. The speaker's attempt to communicate depends on whether the audience is willing to listen and engage with the speaker.²⁰ To illustrate, Dotson adopts Jennifer Hornsby's concept of reciprocity from "Disempowered Speech." For Hornsby, a successful linguistic exchange necessitates reciprocity between the speaker and their audience.²¹ Through reciprocity, an audience understands the speaker's words as well as how they are meant to be taken. Also, a speaker's speech and intentions are accurately understood by their audience.²² Simply put, the audience meets the speaker halfway if reciprocity is practiced. Hornsby adds that reciprocity not only allows a speaker to express "meaningful thoughts but also to be heard."²³ From Hornsby's discussion, Dotson highlights that in communication, there must be a willing and capable audience to listen to the speaker. She argues that if the audience fails to reciprocate, then the speaker is put in a vulnerable position.²⁴

¹⁸ Kristie Dotson, "Tracking Epistemic Violence, Tracking Practices of Silencing," *Hypatia* 26, no. 2 (2011): 236.

¹⁹ Gayatri Spivak, "Can the Subaltern Speak?," in *Marxism and the Interpretation of Culture*, ed. Cary Nelson and Lawrence Grossberg (University of Illinois Press, 1988), 282–283.

²⁰ Dotson, "Tracking Epistemic Violence, Tracking Practices of Silencing," 238.

²¹ *Ibid.*, 237.

²² Jennifer Hornsby, "Disempowered speech," *Philosophical Topics* 23, no. 2 (1995): 134.

²³ *Ibid.*

²⁴ Dotson, "Tracking Epistemic Violence, Tracking Practices of Silencing," 238.

With this, Dotson defines her account of epistemic violence as an audience's failure to communicatively reciprocate to a speaker due to pernicious ignorance.²⁵ Pernicious ignorance pertains to any form of reliable ignorance that causes harm. However, it must be noted that reliable ignorance in itself is not harmful. It simply pertains to any form of consistent ignorance or lack of knowledge due to expected gaps in cognitive resources. For instance, Dotson identifies reliable ignorance in a three-year-old child unaware of voting practices in their country. Dotson argues that this form of ignorance is reasonably expected.²⁶ What then makes reliable ignorance harmful? Dotson suggests that harm in epistemic violence is a context-dependent exercise that must include analysis of power relations and other contextual factors that make ignorance harmful. For example, a benign ignorance for one knower in a specific social location and power level may be pernicious to another knower in a different situation.²⁷

Dotson's account of epistemic violence allows us to understand how our linguistic exchanges become a locus of epistemically violent practices. The absence of reciprocity is easily understandable as to why epistemic violence can occur. However, Dotson's idea of pernicious ignorance may not be as robust as her idea of reciprocity. Here, I defend Dotson's idea that identifying harmful reliable ignorance requires context. I agree that while all forms of ignorance are not harmful, they always carry the potential to produce harm. Hence, as Dotson advises, we must look at the person's social location and power differentials.²⁸ With these, I posit that locating pernicious ignorance is best done by analyzing how it translates into harmful practices.

Dotson identifies one practice of silencing as testimonial quieting.²⁹ She calls it a practice of silencing rather than an instance of silencing, since the latter implies a non-repetitive occurrence of silencing. Meanwhile, the former concerns a repetitive occurrence of an audience failing to communicatively reciprocate to a speaker.³⁰ This distinction emphasizes why testimonial quieting is a serious and harmful practice of epistemic violence — it is pervasive and persistent. Testimonial quieting occurs when an audience fails to recognize a speaker as a knower. By not acknowledging a speaker as a knower, reciprocity is denied.³¹ Dotson elaborates on this form of silencing by referring to Patricia Hill Collins' *Black Feminist Thought*, which documents how Black women in America are systematically undervalued as knowers. Their competence is impeded by audiences' failure to acknowledge the stereotypes they hold about black women, making their prejudices naturalized and seem inherent.³² Collins traces this undervaluing to what she calls "controlling images" that stigmatize black women as mere mummies, matriarchs, mothers, and prostitutes.³³ Given these prejudices held against black women, they are targeted as a social group whose capacity as knowers is questioned.

²⁵ Dotson, "Tracking Epistemic Violence, Tracking Practices of Silencing," 238.

²⁶ *Ibid.*

²⁷ *Ibid.*, 239.

²⁸ *Ibid.*

²⁹ The other practice of silencing that Dotson introduces is testimonial smothering. However, given this paper's intent, I only focus on testimonial quieting.

³⁰ Dotson, "Tracking Epistemic Violence, Tracking Practices of Silencing," 241.

³¹ *Ibid.*, 242.

³² Patricia Hill Collins, *Black Feminist Thought: Knowledge, Consciousness, and the Politics of Empowerment*, 2nd ed. (Routledge, 2000), 69.

³³ *Ibid.*, 72–81.

In addition to Collins, Dotson cites how other scholars depict how the failure to recognize speakers as knowers causes harm. For example, Miranda Fricker discusses the damage to a person's intellectual courage. Meanwhile, Cynthia Townley highlights the undermining of knowers' epistemic agency. Lastly, Collins, on a broader scale, notes the erasure of entire intellectual traditions. By listing these thinkers' ideas, Dotson reiterates her stance that the degree of damage due to epistemic violence varies depending on specific circumstances. Dotson argues that a similarity between Fricker, Townley, and Collins is their identification of a problem that arises when an audience fails to see a speaker as a knower.³⁴

Based on Dotson's framework, I offer an integrative definition of testimonial quieting: testimonial quieting occurs when an audience fails to see a speaker as a knower, therefore, they fail to communicatively reciprocate to the speaker due to pernicious ignorance. In the following section, I use Dotson's ideas of epistemic violence and testimonial quieting to conceptualize how Filipino children doing philosophy are silenced. Specifically, I focus on how adults fail to communicatively reciprocate Filipino children's attempts to do philosophy due to pernicious ignorance. More specifically, I attempt to identify and illustrate how pernicious ignorance functions to harm Filipino children as knowers.

How Testimonial Quieting Functions Against Filipino Children

Central to this paper is my conceptualization of how Filipino children suffer from testimonial quieting when they do philosophy. In this section, I delineate two distinct ways in which children are not treated as knowers in linguistic exchanges, making them victims of testimonial quieting. First, I show how children's questions are often ignored or dismissed by adults, drawing from Elicor's anecdote in "Are Filipino Children Too Young To Do Philosophy?" Second, I offer a hypothetical case to demonstrate how adults give inaccurate or misleading answers to children when they ask questions. Through this example, I problematize how giving false answers to children becomes a form of testimonial quieting.

Ignored Inquiries

Elicor shares an anecdote when he was on a flight to Tacloban for a philosophy conference. Sitting beside a mother and her six-year-old daughter, he overhears the child ask: "Mama, aren't we close to heaven now? Would we be able to see God?"³⁵ Embarrassed, the mother hushes her daughter. Elicor points out that, interestingly, the child's question has also been asked by philosophers before her. The difference lies not in the question's depth and content, but in the child's clear and non-hermeneutic language that lacks philosophical jargon. Elicor believes that, in this scenario, the mother missed a chance to explore the notions of God and faith with her child.³⁶

Following Elicor's definition of philosophy, I argue that the child's question reflects her ability to do philosophy. Her inquiry emerges from puzzlement and a desire to understand her experience of being on a plane for the first time. In her attempt to understand the idea of God, she asked her mother a question. The mother's decision to dismiss and ignore the question is where the locus of testimonial

³⁴ Dotson, "Tracking Epistemic Violence, Tracking Practices of Silencing," 243.

³⁵ The child originally asked in her mother tongue. The cited passage here is Elicor's translation of the child's questions in English.

³⁶ Elicor, "Are Filipino Children Too Young to Do Philosophy?," 66–67.

quieting emerges. Testimonial quieting, as defined by Dotson, occurs when a speaker is not regarded as a knower by their audience. In this instance, I posit that the mother failed to see her daughter as a knower, which led her to dismiss the question rather than engage with it. As Elicor argues, the child's inquiry mirrors those asked by academic philosophers. The only difference is the clarity and simplicity with which the child framed the question. Here, I extend Elicor's claim by arguing that the child's question was ignored largely due to her age. The mother's decision to ignore the inquiry reflects a form of pernicious ignorance, which, as Dotson explains, results in a failure to communicatively reciprocate. By acting on her pernicious ignorance, the mother not only disregarded her daughter's question but also committed epistemic violence.

Following Dotson's account, pernicious ignorance must be assessed within its specific context to determine its potential for harm. Hence, I identify several ways that the mother's dismissal of her daughter's question may have caused epistemic harm. First, the child may come to believe that her questions are unintelligent, unimportant, and unworthy of adult attention. After being ignored, the child could internalize the idea that her thoughts and curiosities lack value. Second, such an experience may discourage the child from expressing future inquiries, particularly those prompted by existential or unfamiliar experiences. This reluctance may impede her ability to communicate her existential worries even if she can articulate these by asking questions. I argue that these possible situations are indicative of how the mother's ignorance was not merely a benign oversight, but a pernicious form of harm.

Inaccurate Answers

Another way that testimonial quieting can function is when children's questions are met with inaccurate answers. In such cases, although the child is acknowledged and responded to, they are still not treated as genuine knowers. To illustrate this, I offer a hypothetical scenario that reflects a common experience among children. This example aims to reflect the experience of children who are perplexed by certain concepts and ideas about God, as exemplified by several children's books.³⁷

Let us take the case of Matthew, an eight-year-old child who regularly attends Sunday school with his family. Known for his curiosity, he often asks numerous questions about the Bible. During one class, the topic of Jesus Christ's Ascension was discussed. Confused and curious, Matthew asked his teacher, "Teacher, paano po umakyat sa heaven si Jesus kung nakapako siya sa krus?" At this point in the class, he had already posed several questions. In an attempt to quickly satisfy Matthew's curiosity, the teacher simply replied: "Ginamit ni Jesus 'yung superpowers niya kaya siya naka-alis at nakapunta sa heaven." Satisfied with the answer, Matthew did not ask any further questions and chose to stay silent throughout the class.

Similar to the first example, the locus of testimonial quieting emerged in how Matthew's teacher responded to his question. While Matthew's question was acknowledged, I argue that he still suffered from testimonial quieting due to the inaccuracy and oversimplification of the answer he received. This manifests the teacher's failure to see Matthew as someone capable of understanding the Death and Ascension of Christ. Ideally, the teacher could have explained what happened after Christ's Crucifixion instead of giving a misleading answer. The example shows that while the teacher may appear to have

³⁷ Some books include *Where is God?* by Lawrence and Karen Kushner, *Abraham's Search For God* by Jacqueline Jules, and *What is God Like?* by Rachel Held Evans and Matthew Paul Turner.

communicatively reciprocated to Matthew, he was still not seen as a knower, as he was given an oversimplified response that prematurely ended the child's line of inquiry.

Following Dotson, it is necessary to assess the broader context in which this ignorance becomes pernicious. I posit that the teacher's pernicious ignorance is their assumption that giving Matthew a simplified answer would stop him from asking further questions. This assumption is caused by Matthew's attitude of being persistent in asking questions. The epistemic harm from this example unfolds in two ways. First, Matthew, as an individual knower, may develop misconceptions about his faith based on false information. Second, the teacher's behavior reinforces a broader norm, that it is acceptable to suppress children's inquiries by offering inadequate responses, especially when they are perceived as overly inquisitive. Testimonial quieting in this case not only affects Matthew but also other inquisitive children as well.

Avoiding Testimonial Quieting

One may object that it is not ideal to answer a child's question, especially when practical constraints are involved. For instance, a child may raise a question in a public setting where it might be deemed inappropriate or disruptive, or the question may be an unfamiliar topic to the adult being asked. Here, I argue that it is still possible to communicatively reciprocate without committing epistemic violence and engaging in testimonial quieting. In this way, children are still seen and treated as knowers.

Following Dotson's strategy of defining pernicious ignorance, I posit that communicatively reciprocating to a child's question in impractical situations requires context. For instance, an adult might ask a child how they came up with their question. In this way, while the child's question is not directly answered, their curiosity is still sustained and given importance. Alternatively, the adult might clarify how the child understands the question, which can open the space for a meaningful conversation that explores the child's thought process. Another option is for the adults to admit that they do not know the answer. This gesture of humility allows the child to recognize that not all questions have immediate answers but that the question remains valuable nonetheless. In each of these responses, the adult avoids committing epistemic violence by affirming the child's capacity as a knower. Thus, even in challenging or inconvenient circumstances, it is possible to communicatively reciprocate without silencing children, ensuring that their inquiries are treated with the seriousness they merit.

Conclusion

The problem of silencing Filipino children remains unexplored, prompting the need for a rigorous philosophical investigation into this problem. In this paper, I sought to shed light on this issue by drawing from Elicor's definition of doing philosophy and Dotson's account of testimonial quieting. This approach enables us to recognize the philosophical capacities of children and underscore the role of adults as their epistemic audiences.

I reiterate that the prevalence of epistemic violence and testimonial quieting implores us to reexamine our perception and treatment of Filipino children. The issue is not merely about whether their questions are answered, but whether they are recognized as capable of asking meaningful questions in the first place. The everyday dismissal, simplification, or misrepresentation of their

inquiries reflects a broader cultural tendency to overlook children as genuine epistemic agents. Testimonial quieting, in this context, is not an isolated act but part of a systemic pattern of disregarding children's epistemic capacities. While this point is not thoroughly elaborated in this paper, it opens up opportunities for further research. Nonetheless, it ushers in the problematization of how Filipino children routinely and detrimentally suffer, not only in linguistic exchanges but also in other epistemic affairs. By looking at where testimonial quieting possibly stems from, we can have a clearer picture of why Filipino children are immediately silenced when they do philosophy.

Finally, I conclude by asserting that to ameliorate our epistemic attitude and practices toward Filipino children, it must start by listening intently and engaging sincerely with them. The ultimate desideratum is to create epistemic spaces where Filipino children can sharpen their philosophical thinking as early as possible by being engaged in dialogues that welcome their insights, interests, and questions.

Bibliography

- Collins, Patricia Hill. *Black Feminist Thought: Knowledge, Consciousness, and the Politics of Empowerment*. 2nd ed. Routledge, 2000.
- Dotson, Kristie. "Tracking Epistemic Violence, Tracking Practices of Silencing." *Hypatia* 26, no. 2 (2011): 236–57. doi:10.1111/j.1527-2001.2011.01177.x.
- Elicor, Peter Paul. "Are Filipino Children Too Young to Do Philosophy?" *Kritike* 18, no. 1 (March 2024): 66–87. doi:10.25138/18.1.a3.
- Gazzard, Ann. "Philosophy for Children and the Piagetian Framework." *Thinking: The Journal of Philosophy for Children* 5, no. 1 (1983): 10–13. doi:10.5840/thinking19835121.
- Hornsby, Jennifer. "Disempowered Speech." *Philosophical Topics* 23, no. 2 (1995): 127–47. doi:10.5840/philtopics199523211.
- Kitchener, Richard F. "Do Children Think Philosophically?" *Metaphilosophy* 21, no. 4 (1990): 416–31. doi:10.1111/j.1467-9973.1990.tb00541.x.
- Murris, Karin. "Can Children Do Philosophy?" *Journal of Philosophy of Education* 34, no. 2 (2000): 261–79. doi:10.1111/1467-9752.00172.
- Spivak, Gayatri. "Can the Subaltern Speak?" In *Marxism and the Interpretation of Culture*, edited by Cary Nelson and Lawrence Grossberg. University of Illinois Press, 1988.
- Splitter, Laurance J., and Ann Margaret Sharp. *Teaching for Better Thinking: The Classroom Community of Inquiry*. Australian Council for Educational Research, 1995.
- White, John. "The Roots of Philosophy." In *The Impulses to Philosophise*, 73–88. Cambridge University Press, 1992. doi:10.1017/cbo9780511563829.006.

Contemporary Comedy on Trial: A Perennial Question on Aesthetics

Dominic Bautista Gonzales

Adamson University | dominic.bautista.gonzales@gmail.com

Abstract: The contemporary surge in ethnic and racial stereotypes represents a notable global trend in the present times. The aim of this paper is to philosophically examine the paradox of individual taste juxtaposed with the normalization of vulgarity in racist jokes, against the backdrop of universal moral schemata and the expectation of common agreement. This discourse seeks to elucidate four primary aspects to enhance our understanding of vulgar jokes in contemporary comedy: firstly, the import of laughter; secondly, the nature of humor; thirdly, the social psychological behavior underpinning such humor; and fourthly, the segmentation of societal spaces which also pints to the contemporary seatedness of comedy. Ultimately, the prevailing standard of beauty—or, in this instance, the humorous—deserves to be elevated to a pedestal precisely so it can be methodically scrutinized: why we continue to consume such antics, tolerate mockery, and normalize it without question.

Keywords: *aestheticism, art, comedy, moralism, racism*

I don't understand the British.

I saw a beautiful British woman looking at a mirror upset.

I said what's going on?

She said can't you see? It's a fat mirror! She said this mirror makes me look fatter than I really am.

I said well I think my eyes have the same problem.

I was not mocking her, don't be angry with me! It was a 'cultural misunderstanding.'

I'm from Africa, it's different, when we see someone overweight, we don't think of going on a diet, we're more like 'where did you get the food?'

- Daliso Chaponda, *Britain's Got Talent*

Comedy and the Current Comedy

In the contemporary context, vulgarity has become alarmingly common that is no longer confined to traditional spaces such as taverns and theaters. This phenomenon has permeated the vast expanse of the global arena. Netflix, for example, is one of the most renowned streaming platforms that made substantial investments in comedic productions, exemplifying the genre of *edgy comedy*.¹ Today's entertainment landscape has swiftly accepted the rapid proliferation of edgy comedy,

¹ See Bihari and J. V. Yeldho, "Racism Through the Lens of Stand-up Comedy: Digital Ethnography of Netflix Specials," *Media Watch* 14, no. 1 (2023): 61. Edgy comedy pushes the boundaries of what is considered socially acceptable humor. It frequently tackles taboo subjects, including race, gender, and politics, and does so with a mix of satire, irony, and subversion. While some aspects of this genre may be high comedy, its willingness to engage in politically incorrect or offensive humor often leads to discussions on racism, privilege, and societal norms.

which is characterized by its provocative humor leveraging controversial topics such as race, gender, and politics. Those who indulge in this type of humor derive considerable amusement through both physical and digital social settings, especially in the present status of vulgar jests. To illustrate, Daliso Chaponda, a Malawian stand-up comedian, defensively explained that within his African culture, being overweight is regarded favorably as it indicates being well-nourished. This cultural viewpoint is in stark contrast to the British fixation on dieting and slenderness. The humor behind Chaponda's jest emerges from his innocence. His forthright remark demonstrates the pronounced disparity in cultural attitudes towards bodily appearance. Additionally, his quip about the acquisition of food provides an unexpected twist, demonstrating how racial and cultural insights often serve as for edgy comedy.

Chaponda's comedic approach is fraught with potential for offense, affecting not only the immediate audience but also those belonging to the same demographic, as well as individuals outside that demographic. The reception of such material is inherently unpredictable, as it contains racial themes to produce a comedic effect. Despite the inherent vulgarity and sensitivity of the subject matter, the outcome is notably positive.² This raises critical questions: what precisely renders it humorous? Is it simply a societal fascination with controversial topics? Or does it depend on the comedian's strategies, timing, facial expressions, and physical movements? What makes this skit resonate and appealing? Why do so many find it amusing, especially those present during the performance? Furthermore, what contemporary standards allow us to deem a comedic piece funny rather than offensive, despite its blatancy?

The incorporation and invocation of racial topics in comedy skits is neither novel nor foreign. Minstrel shows, for example, featured white entertainers wearing blackface makeup to caricature African Americans through song, dance, and skits. Such portrayals heavily relied on racial stereotypes, reflecting and reinforcing the racist attitudes of the time. This type of show began in the 1828 and ascended to become a dominant form of entertainment in the United States by the mid-19th century, maintaining their popularity into the early 20th century.³ The first full-fledged minstrel show is often attributed to Thomas D. Rice, renowned for his character "Jim Crow."

Comedy has consistently served as a platform for social commentary throughout history. Comedians have utilized humor either to engage with or critique various societal issues, including those related to race and gender. This tradition persists in contemporary times, with audiences expecting comedians to push boundaries and tackle controversial topics. For instance, Paul Pérez contends that:

With respect to race, stand-up comics often rely on blatant racial and ethnic stereotypes of the perceived deficiencies and proclivities of 'others.' Joke tellers justify the use of such stereotypes by pointing out that the role of comedy is to confront touchy subjects, breach norms of etiquette, name taboos, etc...

² Rob Walker, "Daliso Chaponda: From Malawi to a Major UK Tour with Gags about Slavery," *The Observer*, December 31, 2017, sec. Stage, <https://www.theguardian.com/stage/2017/dec/31/daliso-chaponda-malawi-gags-slavery-colonialism-britains-got-talent>.

³ "Blackface! - a History of Minstrel Shows," 2021, *Archive.org*, 2021, <https://web.archive.org/web/20140927230547/http://black-face.com/minstrel-shows.htm>.

What matters is 'being funny.' The use of comedy to rupture the taboo is not unique to racial discourse, as one can imagine sexual or political humor surfacing in sexually or politically repressive societies.⁴

As an implication, while comedy often conjures images of light-hearted amusement, I argue that the role of a comedian transcends mere entertainment that can have certain implications. It holds profound significance for the mental well-being and flourishing of society, thus confronting *sensitive subject matters*.

This is why the paper aims to philosophically examine the paradox of individual taste juxtaposed with the normalization of vulgarity in racist jokes, against the backdrop of universal moral schemata and the expectation of common agreement. This discourse seeks to elucidate four primary aspects to enhance our understanding of vulgar jokes in contemporary comedy: firstly, the import of laughter; secondly, the nature of humor; thirdly, the social psychological behavior underpinning such humor; and fourthly, the segmentation of societal spaces which also pints to the contemporary seatedness of comedy. Finally, I argue that the prevailing standard of beauty—or, in this instance, the humorous—deserves to be elevated to a pedestal precisely so it can be methodically scrutinized: why we continue to consume such antics, tolerate mockery, and normalize it without question.

Interrogating Comedy

The class of entertainers known as “jesters,” can be traced back to ancient times. They are individuals who were officially sanctioned and paid to provide comic relief to the king and his court. Their primary duty was not merely to provoke laughter, but also to serve as a corrective force, reminding the monarch of what truly mattered and shielding them from the pitfalls of arrogance and self-importance.⁵ This historical precedent suggests that comedy may be more than just a frivolous pastime.

Throughout history, jesters have occupied a unique position in society, often enjoying a degree of immunity when it comes to the consequences of their humor. This leniency stems from the understanding that their role is to entertain and sometimes even to satirize authority figures. This historical precedent of jesters evading punishment for their jests finds resonance in contemporary comedy, where comedians frequently delve into sensitive topics, including race. However, it's crucial to recognize that the use of vulgar mockery or racially charged humor is not a recent phenomenon. As early as the 11th century, figures like the Persian jester Talhak demonstrated audacity by mocking their rulers, even accusing them of being cuckolded. For example:

One day “Sultan Mahmud was lying down with his head on the knee of Talhak. Suddenly he asked, ‘What is your relation to cuckolds?’ He said, ‘I am their pillow.’⁶

Talhak's boldness exemplifies the long-standing tradition of comedians pushing boundaries and challenging societal norms through humor. While the context and targets of comedic critique may have evolved, the fundamental tension between freedom of expression and the potential for offense

⁴ Raúl Pérez, “Learning to Make Racism Funny in the ‘Color-Blind’ Era: Stand-up Comedy Students, Performance Strategies, and the (Re)Production of Racist Jokes in Public,” *Discourse & Society* 24, no. 4 (May 2013): 478-503 and 479.

⁵ Beatrice K. Otto, *Fools Are Everywhere: The Court Jester Around the World* (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 2001), 76.

⁶ *Ibid.*, 55.

remains a central aspect of comedic discourse. Culture deeply influences the discourse on comedy, forming not only its content but also the way it reflects and interacts with societal values, political dynamics, and aesthetic traditions. Comedy does not exist in a vacuum; it is always embedded within the cultural context of its time, and its evolution is intricately linked to broader social and intellectual movements. Throughout history, the nature and function of comedy have adapted in response to changing cultural paradigms. For instance, during the Middle Ages, theocentric perspectives dominated comedy. It often revolved around religious themes, reinforcing the idea that humor could be a tool for spiritual reflection and moral guidance. During this era, comedy, at times, stressed the personal relationship of the individual to God, with heavy themes of divine order and the need to live morally and ethically. Therefore, through such a comedic form, humans could depict folly before such an almighty divine. It often used the joke to re-enforce piety and demonstrate a person who has erred and wandered from the righteous teachings.

As Western culture entered the classicism period, comedy started to take on a more formal and rational approach, mirroring the increasing significance of reason, order, and humanism. Classicism underscored the distinction between reality and romance, with comedy often focusing on the ridiculousness of everyday life compared to idealized, often heroic presentations of human nature.⁷ In this context, comedy was a way to expose the contradictions and failures of people and society, often using satire to comment on social norms and behaviors. The distinction between the real and the romantic became the hallmark of comedic narratives. Humor often came out of the tension between the aspirations of humans and the limitation of reality.

Shakespearean comedy, being at the very top of this movement, shows a more composite mixture of these elements: the comedies of the play exude exuberance in energy, based on romantic plots, mistakes, and happy chaos. However, the darker and more critical parts express the complexity behind the nature of man. While Shakespearean comedy celebrates love and reconciliation, it also grapples with issues of class, gender, and social order, providing a critical lens to the social dynamics of his time.⁸ These plays illustrate how comedy can serve not just entertainment but as a vehicle for exploring the deeper, often troubling aspects of society and the human condition.

Meanwhile, discussions over comedy in contemporary world have progressed even more from post-structuralism to critical race theory perspectives. From this angle, a challenge of fixed meanings in post-structuralism assumes that language, symbols, and cultural norms were fluid and contingent.

⁷ For example, in ancient Greece and Rome, comedy was elevated to a form of high art that blended social commentary with entertainment. Aristophanes, often considered the father of Old Comedy, is renowned for his sharp wit, political satire, and humor that critiqued societal issues, especially the flaws of Athenian democracy and its leaders. In Rome, Plautus and Terence carried the torch for comedic theatre, creating farces and plays that focused on stock characters, misunderstandings, and intricate plots. Their work emphasized the distinction between “real” and “romantic” worlds, using comedy to explore the absurdities of life, often through exaggerated characters and situations. See Aristophanes, Menander, Plautus, and Terence, *Classical Comedy*, ed. Penguin Classics (London: Penguin UK, 2006).

⁸ The Renaissance period saw the flourishing of complex comedic forms, particularly in English theatre. William Shakespeare is the most famous proponent of comedy during this period. His works, including *A Midsummer Night's Dream*, *Twelfth Night*, and *As You Like It*, are filled with romantic entanglements, mistaken identities, and social commentary. Shakespeare's comedic plays were boisterous, joyous, and full of dark, problematic elements that offered profound insights into human nature. Another notable figure, Ben Jonson, while more associated with satire, also contributed significantly to comedic theatre, using humor to address social mores and the human condition. See David Galbraith, “Theories of Comedy,” in *The Cambridge Companion to Shakespearean Study*, ed. Alexander Leggatt (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2002), 14.

Comedic acts then became a contested space where power and social hierarchies were reflective of the existing reality. Simultaneously, they became sites for their deconstruction. This intersection, or the crossing of race with other social categories such as class, gender, and sexuality, introduces an important critique in the sphere of comedy. It underscores how humor, especially when it comes to ethnic and racial stereotypes, can serve to perpetuate or disrupt racial hierarchies. Comedy becomes, in this sense, a tool for the interrogation and contestation of dominant narratives on race, identity, and power. This discussion centers on the modern explosion of ethnic and racial stereotypes in comedy.

As such, post-structuralism brought a new way of looking at comedy, particularly in the 20th and 21st centuries, emphasizing the fluidity of meaning, deconstruction of societal norms, and challenges to power structures. Comedians like Richard Pryor revolutionized comedy by blending personal experience with sharp social critique in addressing race relations and absurdities of American society. The American entertainer, Bert Williams, explained his comedic technique as such:

I try to portray the shiftless darky to the fullest extent: his fun, his philosophy. There is nothing about this fellow I don't know, I must study his movements, I have to. He is not in me. The way he walks; the way he crosses his legs; the way he leans up against a wall, one foot forward. I find much material by knocking around in out of the way places and just listening. Eavesdropping on human nature is one of the most important parts of a comedian's work.⁹

These stereotypes, often found in popular media and stand-up routines, are a reflection of larger societal tensions and struggles regarding race. At the same time, they also reflect a critical commentary on those very tensions. Those comedians engaging with these stereotypes are not just repeating dangerous tropes but are, more often than not, using them as a tool to provoke thought, challenge societal norms, and address racial inequalities. Thus, in this sense, the aesthetics of comedy in the modern age are very much interwoven with political and cultural discourses in the manner that humor is used to reinforce and resist existing power structures. This paper aims to explore how the aesthetics of critical race theory-informed comedy reveal the ways that the genre functions as a societal mirror and a space in which social critique is established.

Comedy serves as a powerful antidote to despair, offering a light-hearted counterbalance to life's somber and melancholic realities.¹⁰ Despite drawing humor from profound themes such as social inequality, it doesn't trivialize or deny their gravity. Instead, comedy empowers us to confront these challenges with a sense of resilience and defiance. Consider, for example, the stark contrast between Harper Lee's solemn portrayal of social issues such as rape and racial inequality in his book *To Kill a Mockingbird* and comical interpretation of the same subject in TV shows such as *Brooklyn Nine-Nine*. While both acknowledge the seriousness of misery, comedy offers a unique perspective—one that acknowledges pain while fostering strength and optimism in the face of adversity. This is exactly what Beardsley calls the *aesthetic experience*.¹¹

The Imperative for Aesthetic Experience

⁹ Elsie Griffin Williams, "The Comedy of Richard Pryor as Social Satire," *American Humor* 4, no. 2 (1977): 15–19.

¹⁰ Monroe C. Beardsley, *Aesthetics: Problems in the Philosophy of Criticism* (New York: Harcourt, Brace & World, 1958), 575.

¹¹ *Ibid.*

Comedy offers upliftment that embodies a spirit of defiance, inviting laughter in the face of life's hardships rather than succumbing to despair. In the 1965 film *Singin' in the Rain*, exemplified by the titular song performed by Gene Kelly, there is a celebration of joy and optimism even amidst rainy weather. Despite the somber mood, there is a steadfast refusal to give in to *gloominess*. Similarly, during the height of World War II in early 1942, the German love song "*Lili Marleen*" captured the hearts of both Axis and Allied troops. In the midst of overwhelming terror and uncertainty, the song served as a beacon of cheerfulness, emphasizing the importance of resilience and defiance in maintaining morale during wartime. As Fitzroy Maclean puts it:

... (To) Lili Marlene, the new German chanteuse, singing her special song for the Afrika Corps from Radio Belgrade, now in enemy hands... Husky, sensuous, nostalgic, sugar-sweet, her voice seemed to reach out to you, as she lingered over the catchy tune, the sickly sentimental words. Belgrade... The continent of Europe seemed a long way away. I wondered when I would see it again and what it would be like by the time we got there.¹²

Humor has the remarkable ability to empower us by mocking things that may otherwise be perceived as threatening or dangerous. Through ridicule, humor renders the seemingly formidable into something absurd and manageable, thereby offering a sense of relief and empowerment.

Moreover, comedy serves as a powerful antidote for feelings of humiliation, especially when faced with situations that challenge our sense of dignity. In the iconic television series *Mr. Bean*, Rowan Atkinson's portrayal of the profound and monumental character exemplifies this concept. Mr. Bean's antics often verge on the absurd, placing him in situations that could be perceived as embarrassing or humiliating. For example, in the opening sequence of the show, he falls from the light apparently coming from a UFO rendering him an alien, a foreigner from outer space as he is extremely bizarre. His clumsiness and peculiar behavior frequently lead to awkward encounters. Despite these flaws, Mr. Bean's character is presented in a lovable and endearing light. His childlike innocence and unintentional mischief evoke empathy and affection from viewers, transforming what could be seen as humiliating moments into opportunities for laughter and warmth. Through the lens of comedy, Mr. Bean's misadventures become a source of joy and camaraderie, reminding us to embrace our quirks and imperfections with a sense of humor and humility.

If one were to witness a scene with a man resembling Edmund Blackadder, wearing a medieval armor with a conniving and often bumbling behavior whose plans frequently lead to chaos, the immediate impression might be an individual engaging in eccentric and seemingly nonsensical behavior. This description could easily lead to the assessment of Edmund Blackadder as an odd and somewhat bewildering figure. However, the fortunate reality is that Edmund Blackadder exists not in the realm of reality, but within the whimsical world created by the actors. In this context, Edmund Blackadder transcends mere eccentricity to embody the quintessential comedic archetype: the charming yet foolish clown.

The character's flaws are juxtaposed with endearing traits, fostering a sense of affection towards someone whom we might otherwise regard unfavorably. This transformative effect is intentionally done by the creators of the show to portray the character in a lovable light despite being perceived negatively, which alludes to the narrative where Jesus encouraged compassion towards the

¹² Fitzroy Maclean, *Eastern Approaches* (Great Britain; Alden Press, 1949), 208.

outcasts and sinners. Thus, comedy has the capacity to create positive and empathetic portrayals, challenging stereotypes and fostering benevolent perceptions.

Comedy plays a significant role in mitigating power differentials by encouraging those in positions of authority to engage in self-deprecating humor. Witnessing individuals with influence and status laugh at themselves serves as a reassuring reminder of their humanity and fallibility. Embracing one's own comedic aspects signifies a level of maturity, demonstrating an ability to acknowledge personal shortcomings without becoming overly defensive. Soren Kierkegaard has a better way to explain such phenomenon of humor amidst tragedy:

What gives humour its legitimacy is precisely its tragic side: that it reconciles itself with the pain from which despair would abstract though knowing no way out. Irony is warranted in respect of immediacy because the equilibrium – not as mere abstraction but as an existence-art – is higher than immediacy.¹³

Humor serves as a constructive avenue for those with less power and in despair, thereby facilitating cope and potentially catalyzing response to life's tragic situations.

Indeed, the sentimental implications of comic relief extend beyond mere amusement as it challenges our preconceived notions and societal archetypes. By providing a lens through which we can perceive the underlying collective spirit of defiance against life's adversities, comedy offers a form of solace and resilience in the face of brutality and harshness. To clarify, this perspective does not condone the use of racial topics within comedic materials, but rather to rationalize their presence as a response to our innate desire for control. However, when control is unattainable, comedy serves as a means of coping with life's challenges.

Humor is both the binding force and the wedge in society. In reality, it represents a psychological collective behavior determined by societal norms, power structures, and group identities. Common laughter tends to produce a group identity and facilitates emotional discharge while reinforcing in-group solidarity. Thus, humor without restraint could further promote stereotypes and debase those at the wrong end of its stick. According to psychological theories, such as Freud's *relief theory* and *superiority theory*, humor serves as a means of coping with the societal tensions that exist but simultaneously reinforce hierarchies. For instance, racial or ethnic comedy sketches may both provide a form of catharsis and subtly reinforce social power imbalances. The reception of such humor is usually determined by the social conditioning of the audience, cultural awareness, and collective experience.

In the context of contemporary comedy, the digital landscape plays a very important role in amplifying the psychological impact of humor. Streaming platforms, viral memes, and social media discussions allow comedic content to transcend local contexts, resulting in diverse interpretations based on varying cultural and psychological perspectives.

Additionally, humor relies on shared cultural references and in-group dynamics. Comedians write their own material based on implicit mutual agreements with their audience on what they can assume; that is, a specific level of shared experience, cultural literacy, and so on. When agreements are not aligned, their humor can fail, or even worse, be hurtful. Imagine a comedian who performs at a

¹³ Soren Kierkegaard, *Concluding Unscientific Postscripts to the Philosophical Crumbs*, trans. Alastair Hannay (Cambridge; Cambridge University Press, 2009), 435-436

culturally homogeneous audience receiving success in material that he would have failed or perhaps offended at a more varied setting. This dimension of humor from a social psychological perspective relates directly to the dynamics involved in performer-audience relationships that deserve closer inspection in this paper.

An example of how humor fails because of cultural differences is when comedian Tony Hinchcliffe performed at a political rally in Madison Square Garden in October 2024. Known for his relentless and sharp roasting style, Hinchcliffe cracked a joke referring to Puerto Rico as a *floating island of garbage*. His remark was highly controversial since it was offensive to the Puerto Ricans and many others, showing how a joke that might be amusing to one group can be hurtful or inappropriate to another.¹⁴ This incident calls for comedians to be aware of the cultural background and sensitivities of their audience. Material that works well in a homogeneous environment can lead to a backlash in a more heterogeneous environment; therefore, it becomes important for the performer to navigate cultural nuances very carefully to avoid misalignment and offense.

Segmentation of societal space indicates the manner in which comedy performs differently through various materials, cultures, and virtual spheres. Comedy performed and was well supported historically at certain venues-taverns, court jesters' chambers, or stages, with their expectations and boundary lines. Nowadays, through digital platforms, comedy venues have expanded into a worldwide scale wherein the audience can enjoy comedic contents irrespective of their cultural context or timeline. In the case of comedy clubs or live performances, audiences respond instantly and collectively for a group experience. Stand-up comedy, specifically, occurs in a setting of specialized venues in which there is an agreement between the audience and the comedian.¹⁵ This setting is like a permanent comedy club, theater, or temporary festival tent and frames how the performance is received. The particular context offers two readings: first, a bare, artifice-stripped stage synecdochally signifies the bare, artifice-stripped performances that occur thereon, and thereby indicates the 'authenticity' of the performance. The comedy performance is received as an immediate, direct, candid, and almost private encounter with the spectators. Compared to this, digital arenas enable humor to be engaged with asynchronously and alone. Jokes that would find success in one specific culture or situational context become out of context and often lead to misinterpretation once shared online.

This segmentation also extends to cultural and social divides. A comedy skit that may work wonderfully in one cultural or social context can easily elicit backlash, depending on the values or histories of a given moment or the power dynamics inherent in that setting. That is, racial humor serves as a critique of systematic inequality in one setting while perpetuating harmful stereotypes elsewhere. Humor, or rather the failure of it in these segmented spaces, therefore, depends not only on the content but also on the sociopolitical environment that exists and the intended audience. On the contrary, digital spaces blur the lines between public and private spaces of comedy. A joke that was told privately between friends can go viral within a short span of time and become a controversy.

¹⁴ Kirsten Fleming, "Comedian Roasted for MSG Rally Jokes Is No Racist — Joe Biden Is Much Further out of Line," *New York Post*, October 30, 2024, accessed December 24, 2024, 12:00 p.m., <https://nypost.com/2024/10/30/opinion/comedian-tony-hinchcliffe-roasted-for-msg-rally-is-no-racist/>.

¹⁵ Ian Brodie, *A Vulgar Art: A New Approach to Stand-Up Comedy* (Jackson: University Press of Mississippi, 2014), 20.

This raises critical questions regarding accountability, the interpretation of the audience, and shifting boundaries of comedy spaces.

Re-understanding Humor through Aesthetics

The nature of humor presents a bizarre paradox that is both universally recognized and deeply understood. Humor operates within the realm of judgment, making it a subjective experience—an aesthetic encounter. While aesthetic judgments are inherently rooted in individual feelings and preferences, they also aspire to a *universal validity*, suggesting that others should concur with our judgments if they are correctly made. This duality creates a tension between subjectivity and universality in aesthetic evaluations. As Immanuel Kant posits:

It is quite plain that in order to say that the object is beautiful, and to show that I have taste, everything turns on what I make of this representation within myself, and not on any factor which makes me dependent on the existence of the object. Everyone must allow that a judgement on the beautiful which is tinged with the slightest interest, is very partial and not a pure judgement of taste. One must not be in the least prepossessed in favour of the existence of the thing, but must preserve complete indifference in this respect, in order to play the part of judge in matters of taste.¹⁶

This implies that it is an intrinsic aspect of aesthetic judgment to expect others to agree with us. Although we often say, “*beauty is in the eye of the beholder*,” our actions suggest otherwise. We debate and argue about our aesthetic judgments, especially regarding works of art, and we believe that such discussions can yield meaningful conclusions. For many purposes, “beauty” functions as though it were a real property of an object, akin to its weight or chemical composition. However, Kant asserts that universality and necessity in aesthetic judgments are products of features of the human mind, which he refers to as “*common sense*,” and that no objective property of an object renders it beautiful.

The nature of humor and what we find funny can be fruitfully explored through a Kantian critique of judgment. According to Kant’s first moment of judgment, we find something humorous because it elicits pleasure and simultaneously seems to serve a purpose. Laughter, therefore, might be deemed necessary not only for its role within societal ethos but also for its psychological benefits. This necessity imbues humor with teleological significance, suggesting that it possesses its own intrinsic formal properties that justify its worthiness.

However, this perspective brings us to a critical examination of the concept of *transgression*, which will be elaborated upon in subsequent sections. The paradox lies in humor’s inherent tension between subjective pleasure and the universal aspiration of comedic judgment. Although humor is deeply personal, our interactions imply a belief in their universal appeal. This intersection of subjectivity and universality in comedic judgment raises profound questions about the nature of humor and its role in human experience. As Kant asserts, the universality and necessity we attribute to humor are products of the human mind’s faculties, rather than any objective property inherent in a joke or comedic situation.

¹⁶ Immanuel Kant, *Critique of Judgement*, trans. James Creed Meredith, ed. Nicholas Walker (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2008), 37.

Standards of Beauty... and *Funny*

Beauty, in philosophical discourse, is contemplated as an aesthetic attribute, implying that it is bestowed upon objects through subjective-universal judgments, derived from pleasure and productivity. However, our perception of beauty, goodness, or, indeed, humor—every attribute we attribute based on personal preference—is contingent upon our cultural milieu. Consequently, our societal norms and economic conduct derive from these cultural underpinnings. Yet, our conduct and artistic expression are riddled with perplexity and intricacy. While we adhere to a particular moral framework, we often transgress its boundaries. We find amusement in jokes laden with racial themes, consuming them as if they were conventional forms of entertainment. However, the reception of such topics in real-world contexts is markedly distinct, highlighting the enigmatic nature of human behavior and societal norms.

The artists themselves then, I posit, take up the position of artworld ‘jesters’, like those of the English historical tradition, employed by noble persons to entertain their guests. They thus straddle both the inside and outside of artworld infrastructures. This special liminal position is what allows them to poke fun at the ‘court’, an approach also noted by Sheri Klein who writes, ‘Certainly, temporary clown/artists draw upon moral, social, political and aesthetic issues, and in doing so, they embrace the role of rebel’.¹⁷

Furthermore, there exists an expectation that everyone should find humor in such jests. Those who fail to do so are often labeled as rather *foolish* or, simply, *lacking in common sense*, thereby earning the disparaging epithet of *killjoy*. Thus, we deem it pleasurable, beautiful, and ultimately funny.

This phenomenon of deeming antics and skits, for instance, as funny and ridiculous are, just like how Kant presupposed an aesthetic judgment, based on a *private* feeling but there is an expectation from everybody to laugh at the same object. Should an individual fail to align with this collective sentiment, they risk being subject to *blame* for their differing judgment.¹⁸

Before stepping into the complexities of our reception and consumption of comedy skits featuring vulgar jokes, particularly within the context of contemporary cultural attitudes towards racism, it is essential to address a fundamental question: Does art require alignment with morality? Must our approach to sensitive issues such as racial discrimination and power dynamics reflect our socio-political, moral, and perhaps even religious convictions?

Transgression of Morality

Andres Serrano, an American photographer and artist, gained significant attention for his series of Cibachrome photographs featuring iconic objects submerged in bodily fluids, such as urine. Among his most notable works is *Piss Christ*, a photograph depicting a wood and plastic crucifix suspended in the artist’s urine, measuring 5 feet by 3 feet. This particular artwork sparked nationwide protests in the United States in 1989, prompting Congress to pass a law directing the National Endowment for the Arts (NEA) to disregard *depictions of sadomasochism, homoeroticism, the sexual*

¹⁷ Nicola McCartney, “The Significance of Authorial ‘Play Spaces’ for Seriously Funny Art,” in *Comedy in Crises: Weaponising Humour in Contemporary Art*, ed. Chrisoula Lionis (New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2021), 102.

¹⁸ Kant, *Critique of Judgement*, 43-44.

exploitation of children, individuals engaged in sex acts, and which do not have serious literary, artistic, political, or scientific value when awarding grants.¹⁹

The conflict between the NEA and the US Congress transcends mere institutional or ideological struggle; it is fundamentally philosophical in nature. At its core, it embodies the tension between the autonomy of art and artistic expression and our adherence to prevailing socio-ethical values and principles; or are they *inseparable*?²⁰ This dilemma extends to contemporary comedy, raising questions about whether art truly exists beyond the realm of morality. Can art be considered exempt from moral scrutiny? Advocates for the autonomy of art may argue that the authenticity of the art form lies at the heart of this debate. Personally, while I appreciate and engage with comedic content circulating online, including skits and memes, I believe it is imperative to question whether art should ever subvert morality—for this inquiry is intrinsic to philosophical discourse surrounding the nature and purpose of art.

In Plato's *Phaedrus*, for example, beauty is conceptualized as that which incites our yearning for moral goodness. Our perception of beauty plays a triggering role in propelling us towards virtue and the pursuit of knowledge concerning the good.

And now I think that you will perceive the drift of my discourse; but as every spoken word is in a manner plainer than the unspoken, I had better say further that the irrational desire which overcomes the tendency of opinion towards right, and is led away to the enjoyment of beauty, and especially of personal beauty, by the desires which are her own kindred—that supreme desire, I say, which by leading conquers and by the force of passion is reinforced, from this very force, receiving a name, is called love.²¹

Plato introduces the idea of a supreme desire, fueled by passion and reinforced by its very intensity, which he labels as “love” or *erromenos eros*²². This love, Plato implies, transcends mere physical attraction; it encompasses a deep, passionate longing that can overpower rational judgment and lead individuals to pursue beauty and desire with fervor. Notably, in his work *Republic*, Plato criticized music and poetry arguing that these arts were *‘corrupting the youth.’*²³ His critique culminates with Socrates asserting that poets, including Homer, would be banned from the ideal city.

Similarly, Aquinas, in his neo-Platonic work *Summa Theologiae*, articulates the notion that *Beauty and goodness in a thing are identical fundamentally; for they are based upon the same thing, namely, the form; and consequently goodness is praised as beauty.*²⁴ Furthermore, Aquinas posits that both concepts share a

¹⁹ NCAC Staff. “National Endowment for the Arts: Controversies in Free Speech - National Coalition against Censorship.” *National Coalition Against Censorship*, 2019, <https://ncac.org/resource/national-endowment-for-the-arts-controversies-in-free-speech>.

²⁰ Elisabeth Schellekens, *Aesthetics and Morality* (London; New York: Continuum, 2008), 95.

²¹ Plato, *Phaedrus*, trans. B. Jowett (The Project Gutenberg, 2008).

²² While eros, “ἔρως”, certainly encompasses elements of attraction and desire, its primary focus lies in the pursuit of beauty, truth, and spiritual fulfillment. Thus, for Plato, erotic love represents a profound and transcendent longing that forms the basis for the human quest for wisdom and enlightenment.

²³ Plato, *The Republic*, ed. G. R. F. Ferrari, trans. Tom Griffith, (New York: Cambridge University Press, 2000), 61.

²⁴ Thomas Aquinas and Dominicans, *Summa Theologica*, (Westminster: Christian Classics, 1981), Reply to Objection 1, 58.

common objective: while moral goodness guides us towards the attainment of our ultimate aims, beauty invites contemplation of the realization of such fulfillment-*causa formalis*.

Explicitly addressing this theme, the poet and philosopher Friedrich Schiller, in his efforts to revise and elucidate what he considered the central elements of Kant's *Critique of the Power of Judgement*, posits that our sense of beauty inherently serves moral purposes. Schiller argues that *aesthetic education*—the deep and contemplative engagement with objects of beauty—has an expressly moral objective.

That which I before said of moral experience can be applied with greater truth to the manifestation of “the beautiful.” It is the mystery which enchants, and its being extinguished with the extinction of the necessary combination of its elements.²⁵

Unlike many of his contemporaries, who viewed the problem of taste primarily as an artistic and cultural issue, Schiller believed that an intimate familiarity with the fine arts is crucial to fostering a desire for the common good. Thus, the cultivation of taste becomes an integral component of our *moral education*. This ultimately implies that if a work of art contains immoral implications, those implications can be considered as contributing to its ‘aesthetic defects.’ Consequently, the aesthetic value of art may be compromised by its immorality.

We then ask the question, “Should art invariably be evaluated within a specific moral framework vis-a-vis *moralism*?” On one side of this debate is the autonomism movement. As Noel Carroll writes:

...it is clear that once we categorize the situation as an artwork, our response to it will differ radically from the way in which we regard comparable seated couples in “real” life.²⁶

Art and ethics are autonomous realms of value, and criteria from the ethical domain should not be applied to evaluate the aesthetic domain. This perspective, known as *aestheticism*, asserts that art should be valued for its aesthetic qualities rather than for its potential to morally enlighten or improve us.

Another perspective on Immanuel Kant's critique of judgment emphasizes the need to distinguish between aesthetic and moral faculties. Kant posited that what we find pleasurable aesthetically reflects our taste, while moral pleasure is derived from our moral feelings. Clive Bell further contends that art, particularly visual art, must fulfill two crucial criteria: it should elicit a specific emotional response—a *means to emotion*. This emotional response forms the appropriate basis for its aesthetic evaluation.²⁷

Conclusion: Race as a Subject of Comedy

Therefore, in light of the debates surrounding *artistic transgression*, what does our reaction to racial jokes indicate about our values and the broader context of Western culture? Both race and humor scholars suggest that overt racist discourse has largely vanished from public view. The primary theories of humor interpret it as a tool for fostering *in-group solidarity* while *establishing out-group boundaries*, often by means of oppression or control. Additionally, humor serves as a *relief mechanism* or social

11. ²⁵ Friedrich Schiller, *On the Aesthetic Education of Man*, trans. Reginald Snell (New York: Dover Publications, 2013),

²⁶ Noël Carroll, *Philosophy of Art: A Contemporary Introduction* (London; New York: Routledge, 2000), 81.

²⁷ Clive Bell, *Art* (New York: Frederick A. Stokes Company, 1913), 77.

safety valve and as a way to resolve *incongruity*.²⁸ These theories, though not mutually exclusive, provide various insights into the societal functions of humor.

The *superiority theory of humor*, however, posits that one of its main functions is to assert dominance over others. Building on Freud's analysis of the "tendentious joke" in *The Joke and Its Relation to the Unconscious*, this theory of humor posits that jokes provide a means to express otherwise unspeakable thoughts and release repressed feelings of anger and resentment towards individuals or institutions. As Freud writes:

Where a joke is not an end in itself, i.e., innocuous, it puts itself at the service of two tendencies only, which can themselves be merged into a single viewpoint; it is either a hostile joke (used for aggression, satire, defence) or it is an obscene joke (used to strip someone naked [Entblößung]).²⁹

For over a century, spanning from the pre-Civil War period to the pre-Civil Rights era, blackface minstrel shows were a prevalent form of humor in American society, serving to subordinate Black Americans. During this time, white performers brazenly painted their faces black with burnt corks to imitate, mock, and caricature both Southern and Northern African Americans.³⁰ Additionally, scholars observe that humor was used as a tool to force immigrants to get americanized by ridiculing their language and customs in a 'banally mundane way'.³¹

The pre-civil rights period was marked by ethnic and racial '*humor of accommodation*' (that is, accommodating to white tastes and expectations). They observe that it was during and after the civil rights period that ethnic and racial minorities, blacks in particular, openly engaged in anti-racist comedy or 'reverse discourse' as a form of resistance to oppression.

Lastly, the *relief theory of humor* underscores its function in alleviating social tensions, rupturing societal norms, and disrupting established conventions.³² Notably, comedians of color emerged as influential figures during this period, using their comedic prowess to address racial inequality and promote social change, thus contributing to the easing of racial conflicts within society. Emphasizing the significance of proximity in humor, Mikhail Bakhtin observes that:

Laughter has the remarkable power of making an object come up close, of drawing it into a zone of crude contact where one can finger it familiarly on all sides, turn it upside down, inside out, peer at it from above and below, break open its external shell, look into its centre, doubt it, take it apart, dismember it, lay it bare and expose it, examine it freely and experiment with it.³³

Humor serves as a potent vehicle for individuals on the margins of society to mock and defy established systems of order. Mikhail Bakhtin's concept of the *Carnavalesque* embodies a domain of unfettered freedom and emancipation, where laughter, parody, and grotesque imagery hold sway. This mode of expression exalts the corporeal, the grotesque, and the anarchic, frequently integrating

²⁸ Emma Sullivan, "Kara Walker's Fons Americanus: A Comic Anti-Monument," in *Comedy in Crises: Weaponising Humour in Contemporary Art*, ed. Chrisoula Lionis (New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2021), 69.

²⁹ Sigmund Freud, *The Joke and Its Relation to the Unconscious* (New York: Penguin Books, 2003), 92.

³⁰ See Alexander Saxton, *The Rise and Fall of the White Republic: Class Politics and Mass Culture in Nineteenth-Century America* (London: Verso, 1990).

³¹ Simon Weaver, *The Rhetoric of Racist Humour: US, UK, and Global Joking* (London and New York: Routledge Taylor and Francis Group, 2011), 54.

³² McCartney, "The Significance of Authorial 'Play Spaces,'" 115.

³³ Mikhail Bakhtin, *The Dialogic Imagination: Four Essays* (Austin: University of Texas Press, 1981), 23.

elements of wit, satire, and hyperbole to interrogate prevailing ideologies and power dynamics. Through laughter, we are able to challenge the power structures not only in its ideological form in our society but in the sense of *cosmological order*, thus an *existential refusal*—and hence farther rendering us more mature in viewing life. Bakhtin contends that through the Carnavalesque, voices and perspectives relegated to the periphery can assert themselves, while entrenched hierarchies are subject to scrutiny and subversion.

Skits that feature racial topics, often viewed as conduits for discriminatory racism, possess a potential beyond mere offense. Rather than perpetuating divisions, they possess the capacity to foster relational and mutual understanding among individuals from varied backgrounds. Laughter, stemming from a recognition of truth and relatability within comedic content, can signify an acknowledgment of shared experiences and a readiness to engage in discourse about sensitive topics. Through humor, barriers are *dismantled*, paving the way for *genuine connections* and contributing to a more inclusive and interconnected world.

One prime example of these claims that will be depicted is the “*The Race Draft*” in Dave Chappelle’s Show.³⁴ In this draft, a “draft” occurs to various racial and ethnic groups as they each pick from a set of famous personalities, utilizing stereotypes to add humor. While the sketch uses racism as a form of comedic ridicule of how America sells race and identity as commodities, it also introduces an opportunity to reflect over racial tensions and divisions so that it can both lead to laughter and deeper analysis. In this way, the sketch uses humor through pointing out the absurdity about racial categorization while passing a subtle critique on the way society allows these divisions in society. The laughter created through the sketch can be termed as mutual recognition—a form of mutual understanding about tensions inherent in racial identity and the complexity of race negotiations in a multi-ethnic society.

Another example would be *Black Jeopardy* from Saturday Night Live (SNL). This is a sketch that repeatedly brings to the fore differences and stereotypes in American culture related to race, but there is an added layer of empathy and shared understanding here.³⁵ A notable episode is when Tom Hanks played a Trump-supporting white man who ended up participating in a game of “Black Jeopardy” with predominantly African-American contestants. The sketch plays on stereotypes and cultural differences but also shows moments where the characters realize their shared human experiences, resulting in a moment of mutual understanding and laughter. Here, humor becomes the way to engage with issues that are uncomfortable—alignment, race, and identity—while also provoking reflection and empathy.

It is not clear how these claims are workable: humor rooted in racial topics can indeed be a good vehicle for dialogue and understanding, *but it needs to be handled with care*. Cultural positionalities—the social and historical context from which individuals view the world—play an important role in how one receives racial humor. Those who occupy marginalized or oppressed racial positions may view certain racial jokes as reinforcing harmful stereotypes rather than promoting understanding. In contrast, members of dominant cultural groups may perceive these sketches as humorous without

³⁴ See Lyndsey Lyn Wetterberg, *Deconstructing “Chappelle’s Show”: Race, Masculinity, and Comedy As Resistance* (master’s thesis, Minnesota State University, Mankato, 2012), Cornerstone: A Collection of Scholarly and Creative Works for Minnesota State University, Mankato, <https://cornerstone.lib.mnsu.edu/etds/133/>.

³⁵ *Saturday Night Live*, Season 43, Episode 3, “Black Jeopardy,” (NBC, 2017).

recognizing their potential to perpetuate inequities. The reactions to these sketches are often shaped by the viewer's own experiences with race, privilege, and historical power dynamics.

Theoretically speaking, critical race discourse, therefore, would be extremely skeptical of these claims in that while humor can stand as a form of resistance, it can also further normalize and trivialize what is systemic racism. Students in this field of scholars often argue that the requirement for humor is to break beyond the mere pointing out of racial issues and to deliberately explore power structures and inequality more deeply. While some people appreciate the fact that comedy could open the door for conversation, others may criticize the fact that it doesn't solve the root problems in the structural division of race. This means that while such a sketch can effectively create a mutual understanding in one scenario, in another, its effectiveness may differ because of cultural positionalities.

In globalization, humor becomes a useful tool to overcome cultural barriers and achieve cross-cultural understanding. Such sketches become a means of cultural sharing which help us to gain insight into the different outlooks and experiences of others. As society becomes more and more global, humor fills the language gap and travels across cultures. Through the discovery of shared humanity in laughter, people gain empathy and awareness of different outlooks and thus learn to develop a better global village.

In terms of racial matters in comedy sketches, it's not about what words to use but which audience, time and place to use those words. Race-related material as a form of comedy requires sophistication as a premise for laughter because of the inherent danger of hurting someone's feelings and the need for proper context. Moreover, comedy sketches on racial matters and social justice integrity hang on getting the other elements right.

It is critical to understand that comedy exists within a social context defined by the sensibilities of the viewers. The same skit can be funny to one audience and offensive to another. As Ian Brodie puts it:

... the consequences of stand-up comedy do not extend into the "real world": there is a mutual understanding between audience and performer that what is said in performance does not require enactment.³⁶

The difference may be the general racial composition of the audience and the racial attitudes prevalent in their society. Furthermore, context includes time as comedy never exists in a vacuum; the social and political climate at the time of the performance defines the boundaries of comedic expression. A comedy sketch about racial issues that misjudges its audience, the time, or the place – without the necessary sophistication and context – has the potential to do harm instead of good, and may actually reinforce detrimental stereotypes. Brodie continues:

But the nature of that entertainment, for both performer and audience, both participants in a performative exchange, implies how the "text" presented by the stand-up comedian can so easily fail in its immediate goal of eliciting laughter. It can be found "not funny" in one of two ways: it can simply not elicit laughter as it is found trite, dull, uninspiring, or insipid; or it does not elicit laughter by it being too painful, too scandalous, too threatening, too novel. It is deep play.³⁷

³⁶ Brodie, *The Vulgar Art*, 20.

³⁷ *Ibid.*

In short, the use of racial issues within the comedic discourse of a skit can be an effective tool of critique or comment but requires caution and sensibility in doing so as we still use invariable judgments in the very first place as Immanuel Kant posited- that is, in the end, the uncertain nature of our judgment faculty. The audience, time, and place of a comedic skit matter greatly in determining when racially charged comic commentary crosses the line of sensitivity for the sake of humor, and ultimately transgressing the cultural and moral sensibility of racial talk. At the very least, for now, we are not anymore conscious of color on a global scale. Negative reception still persists, in the end we differ in judgment because, despite the blurring of social standards, society is still composed of people endowed with the same faculty vis-a-vis people belonging to *autonomism* or *moralism*. Comedians and audiences alike must be keenly aware of these factors to ensure the use of racial issues within comedy serves to expand the social conversation around race and identity instead of diminishing it.

Bibliography

- Aquinas, Thomas, and Dominicans. *Summa Theologica*. Westminster: Christian Classics, 1981.
- Aristophanes, Menander, Plautus, and Terence. *Classical Comedy*. Edited by Penguin Classics. London: Penguin UK, 2006.
- Bakhtin, Mikhail. *The Dialogic Imagination: Four Essays*. Austin: University of Texas Press, 1981.
- Beardsley, Monroe C. *Aesthetics: Problems in the Philosophy of Criticism*. New York: Harcourt, Brace & World, 1958.
- Bell, Clive. *Art*. New York: Frederick A. Stokes Company, 1913.
- Bihari, and J. V. Yeldho. "Racism Through the Lens of Stand-up Comedy: Digital Ethnography of Netflix Specials." *Media Watch* 14, no. 1 (2023).
- Brodie, Ian. *The Vulgar Art*. Jackson: University Press of Mississippi, 2014.
- Carroll, Noël. *Philosophy of Art: A Contemporary Introduction*. New York: Routledge, 2000.
- Freud, Sigmund. *The Joke and Its Relation to the Unconscious*. New York: Penguin Books, 2003.
- Galbraith, David. "Theories of Comedy." In *The Cambridge Companion to Shakespearean Study*. Edited by Alexander Leggatt. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2002.
- Kant, Immanuel. *Critique of Judgement*. Translated by James Creed Meredith. Edited by Nicholas Walker. Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2008.
- Kierkegaard, Søren. *Concluding Unscientific Postscripts to the Philosophical Crumbs*. Translated by Alastair Hannay. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2009.
- Maclean, Fitzroy. *Eastern Approaches*. Great Britain: Alden Press, 1949.
- McCartney, Nicola. "The Significance of Authorial 'Play Spaces' for Seriously Funny Art." *Comedy in Crises: Weaponising Humour in Contemporary Art*, edited by Chrisoula Lionis, 102. New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2021.
- NCAC Staff. "National Endowment for the Arts: Controversies in Free Speech - National Coalition against Censorship." *National Coalition against Censorship*. 2019. <https://ncac.org/resource/national-endowment-for-the-arts-controversies-in-free-speech>.
- Otto, Beatrice K. *Fools Are Everywhere: The Court Jester Around the World*. Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 2001.
- Pérez, Raúl. "Learning to Make Racism Funny in the 'Color-Blind' Era: Stand-up Comedy Students, Performance Strategies, and the (Re)Production of Racist Jokes in Public." *Discourse & Society* 24, no. 4 (May 2013).
- Plato. *Phaedrus*. Translated by B. Jowett. The Project Gutenberg. 2008. <https://www.gutenberg.org/ebooks/1636>.
- Plato. *The Republic*. Edited by G. R. F. Ferrari. Trans. Tom Griffith. New York: Cambridge University Press, 2000.
- Walker, Rob. "Daliso Chaponda: From Malawi to a Major UK Tour with Gags about Slavery." *The Observer*. December 31, 2017. <https://www.theguardian.com/stage/2017/dec/31/daliso-chaponda-malawi-gags-slavery-colonialism-britains-got-talent>.

- Schellekens, Elisabeth. *Aesthetics and Morality*. London; New York: Continuum, 2008.
- Schiller, Friedrich. *On the Aesthetic Education of Man*. Translated by Reginald Snell. New York: Dover Publications, 2013.
- “Blackface! - A History of Minstrel Shows.” *Archive.org*, 2021.
<https://web.archive.org/web/20140927230547/http://black-face.com/minstrel-shows.htm>.
- Saxton, Alexander. *The Rise and Fall of the White Republic: Class Politics and Mass Culture in Nineteenth-Century America*. London: Verso, 1990.
- Sullivan, Emma. “Kara Walker’s Fons Americanus: A Comic Anti-Monument.” In *Comedy in Crises: Weaponising Humour in Contemporary Art*, edited by Chrisoula Lionis. New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2021.
- Weaver, Simon. *The Rhetoric of Racist Humour: US, UK, and Global Joking*. London and New York: Routledge Taylor and Francis Group, 2011.
- Wetterberg, Lyndsey Lyn. *Deconstructing “Chappelle’s Show”: Race, Masculinity, and Comedy As Resistance*. Master’s thesis, Minnesota State University, Mankato, 2012. Cornerstone: A Collection of Scholarly and Creative Works for Minnesota State University, Mankato.
<https://cornerstone.lib.mnsu.edu/etds/133/>.
- Williams, Elsie Griffin. “The Comedy of Richard Pryor as Social Satire.” *American Humor* 4, no. 2 (1977): 15–19.

The Lipman-Sharp Model of Community of Philosophical Inquiry and the 2022 Philippine Elections

Emmanuelle O. Jasareno

University of the Philippines - Diliman | eojasareno@alum.up.edu.ph

Abstract: The Philippines is currently under an “infodemic,” marked by the constant threat of disinformation and misinformation, affecting the flow of information and public discourse among Filipino citizens. In particular, this phenomenon poses a significant challenge to the democratic activity during election as it influences voter decisions by shaping their perceptions. An analysis of the role of fake news in the 2022 Philippine elections reveals two main issues: (1) supporters often propagate their beliefs by spreading fake news, and (2) many Filipino citizens are vulnerable to fake news due to their deficiency of skills. These issues highlight the precarious situation of Filipino voters—individuals are misled by members of their own community and educational institutions struggle to produce thinkers capable of resisting the infodemic. As such, this research explores the potentials of the Lipman-Sharp Model of Community of Philosophical Inquiry in addressing these challenges by cultivating multidimensional thinking in students. The study suggests that strengthening the development of critical, creative, and caring thinkers, particularly among the youth, can help reshape political discourse and create a more reflective, respectful environment for navigating opposing beliefs, particularly in the context of the Philippine election.

Keywords: *Community of Philosophical Inquiry, Philippine elections, multidimensional thinking, misinformation, disinformation*

Introduction

In the Philippines, an ongoing “infodemic” underscores the persistent threat posed by disinformation and misinformation. More commonly known as the spread of ‘fake news,’¹ this phenomenon encompasses two forms: misinformation, which refers to inaccurate or false information, and disinformation, which involves the deliberate dissemination of malicious content, often in the form of hoaxes or propaganda.² This growing problem poses a serious threat to the democratic process of elections in the Philippines. In theory, the voting activities including voting decision relies on how voters construct their opinions from unbiased information, but the spread of fake news disrupts this ability.³ We are then regarded as “patient zero” with the amount of fake news

¹ Sheila Siar, “Fake News, Its Dangers, and How We Can Fight It,” Policy notes (PIDS-Online), August 2021, <https://pidswebs.pids.gov.ph/CDN/PUBLICATIONS/pidspn2106.pdf>.

² “Factsheet 4: Types of Misinformation and Disinformation,” Using Social Media in Community Based Protection: A Guide, n.d., 230–31. <https://www.unhcr.org/innovation/wp-content/uploads/2022/02/Factsheet-4.pdf>

³ Yuko Kasuya, Disinformation and the Victory of Ferdinand Marcos Jr. in the 2022 Philippine Presidential Election, January 17, 2024, <https://saferinternetlab.org/wp-content/uploads/2024/01/Yuko-Kasuya-KISIP-PAPER-2024.pdf>.

in social media that corrupts public perception.⁴

To highlight the effects of this movement, the recent elections manifested certain ways on how fake news impede the choices that would determine the ideal flow of the elections. Trolls in the cyberspace are involved in smearing opponents and birthing fervent fanbases.⁵ Political fandoms such as “Kakampinks” and “Uniteam” are two opposing examples, with the former supporting former Vice President Leni Robredo and the latter favoring current President Bongbong Marcos. The campaign period developed different forms of strategies e.g., the spread of different narratives, news, and press releases which blurred the line between what was true or not. This political polarization occurred as differences in views prevailed during the campaign season that resorted to strategies, allowing citizens to act for the benefit of their preferred candidate. Among these strategies is the use of fake news as a tool to influence political beliefs and attitudes that further aggravated the fanbases of both parties. The infodemic bent the elections when it created a media and information culture that can shape perspectives and reinforce beliefs through the lack of factual information and dialogue—leading the Philippines to a deeper polarization in the coming years.⁶

The vulnerability of Filipinos to fake news can be traced back to the thinking skills they possess, or lack thereof. For example, thinking skills such as critical thinking, creative thinking, and problem-solving, which are skills expected to be honed in the 21st century.⁷ These skills are essential to the increasing advancement of technology and globalization, changing the way we function or work in society.⁸ In the complex and uncertain world today, students become effective in accounting for knowledge through “recognizing, defining, acquiring, and producing it.”⁹ Furthermore, better learning experience is facilitated as children become equipped with tools to deal with different problems in a systematic and flexible manner, face information and arguments with a critical disposition, and communicate in a more effectual way.¹⁰ Thus, enhancing their thinking skills will enable students to face the progressing world around them even with challenges brought by its complexity.

Supposedly, these skills are cultivated inside educational institutions that hone and prepare students for society. Unfortunately, the current education system contains persisting problems such as “...low pupil performance, poor teacher quality (in a system where teachers are central to the education process)...”¹¹ Given these problems, schools are unable to produce active students as productive members and thinkers in society. Additionally, not all students have access to quality

⁴ Imelda Deinla et al., “Philippines: Diagnosing the Infodemic,” Lowy Institute, August 2, 2022, <https://www.lowyinstitute.org/the-interpretor/philippines-diagnosing-infodemic>.

⁵ Japhet Quitzon, “Social Media Misinformation and the 2022 Philippine Elections: New Perspectives on Asia,” CSIS, November 22, 2021, <https://www.csis.org/blogs/new-perspectives-asia/social-media-misinformation-and-2022-philippine-elections>.

⁶ Imelda B. Deinla et al., “The Link between Fake News Susceptibility and Political Polarization of the Youth in the Philippines,” *Asian Journal of Political Science* 30, no. 2 (May 4, 2022): 160–181.

⁷ Emine Balci and Ramazan Eryilmaz, “The Impact of Philosophy for Children (P4C) Activities on Enhancing the Speaking Skills of Gifted Students,” *Frontiers in Psychology* 15 (October 22, 2024).

⁸ Lisnawati Rusmin et al., “Critical Thinking and Problem-Solving Skills in the 21st Century,” *Join: Journal of Social Science* 1, no. 5 (August 22, 2024): 144–162.

⁹ Balci and Eryilmaz, “Impact of Philosophy for Children,” 1.

¹⁰ Carol McGuinness, rep., *From Thinking Skills to Thinking Classrooms: A Review and Evaluation of Approaches for Developing Pupils' Thinking* (Colegate, Norwich: Crown Copyright, 1999).

¹¹ Allan B.I Bernardo, Ma. Cynthia Rose B. Bautista, and Dina Ocampo, *When Reforms Don't Transform: Reflections on Institutional Reforms in the Department of Education*, 2009.

education. This further leaves disadvantaged citizens who are vulnerable to fake news. As a result, this hinders the Filipinos ability to receive the proper flow of information, challenging their democratic rights due to acts fueled by agenda. More than this, they are prevented from honing their thinking skills to combat the existing infodemic. This, then, reflects a post-truth phenomenon that depicts how facts are easily susceptible to the rapid increase of fake news, affecting how citizens process the information they receive in the digital sphere.

Therefore, there is a need for a framework that will aid the problems posed in public discourse and equip Filipinos with skills that will combat the infodemic. In this paper, I shall explore an approach that maximizes the potential of students and citizens alike in thinking, particularly in what they observe in their society and what they learn through being in dialogue with other members of the community. Thus, I use the Lipman-Sharp approach of the Community of Philosophical Inquiry (CPI) to cultivate multidimensional thinking skills, namely: Critical, Creative, and Caring thinking. The CPI is part of the Philosophy for Children (P4C) movement that aims to develop the skills of children—allowing them to engage in dialogue and reflect on certain topics as members of a community.¹² With multiple factors affecting the infodemic such as social classes, culture, and politics, this paper attempts to address the polarization of information and how discourse can be shaped within the community through decreasing the blow of the infodemic and creating an environment that is insusceptible to its disrupting effects. After the analysis of fake news that occurred during the recent elections, this paper shall explore the implications of the Lipman-Sharp CPI in creating a better environment amidst the current polarization of Filipino citizens and developing active thinkers essential to nation-building.

The 2022 Philippine Elections

The recent Philippine elections in 2022 were a controversial event in the country as it included multiple candidates who ran for the president’s position in place of former president Rodrigo Duterte. It was regarded by analysts as the “most significant election in the Southeast Asian nation’s recent history” because this entails replacing a president with a reputation for the brutal “drug war”, incompetence, mishandling of the COVID-19 pandemic, and more.¹³ Out of ten candidates, two held the highest chance of winning the position namely, Ferdinand “BongBong” Marcos and Former Vice President Maria Leonor “Leni” Robredo. The other candidates included Manny Pacquiao, Isko Moreno, Panfilo Lacson, to name a few.

The presence of Marcos Jr. in the roster of candidates is one reason why the election was controversial. As the son of former Ferdinand E. Marcos Sr., and First Lady Imelda R. Marcos who ruled the dictatorship in the Philippines for 14 years,¹⁴ a Marcos victory may generate different expectations from Filipinos, as he presented the value of unity with the promise of progress for the country. Additionally, the Vice President of Marcos was Rodrigo Duterte’s daughter, Sara Zimmerman Duterte Carpio, forming a tandem that became one of the most challenging opponents in the race. Due to the popularity of their fathers, they were in a privileged position, effectively seen

¹² Leander Marquez, “Philosophy in Basic Education: Towards the Strengthening of the Foundations of Philippine Education,” *Policy Futures in Education*, December 6, 2017, 1–16.

¹³ “Why the 2022 Philippines Election Is So Significant,” Al Jazeera, May 9, 2022, <https://www.aljazeera.com/news/2022/5/8/why-the-2022-philippines-election-is-so-significant>.

¹⁴ 2022 *Philippine Presidential Elections*, 2022, <https://fleishmanhillard.com/wpcontent/uploads/2022/07/2022-Philippine-Presidential-Elections-Report.pdf>.

as “continuity candidates” of the previous administrations.¹⁵

In addition to this, the country was still in the middle of the pandemic during the campaign season and elections. Despite this, a high record of 4 million first-time voters aged 18 to 21 was reached, creating a landscape dominated by youth in terms of political interest and engagement in conversations.¹⁶ Their presence in social media increased political conversations, allowing them to engage with different people while being exposed to various information from different sources in support of their preferred candidates. However, clashing opinions are exacerbated by the spread of fake news, blurring the lines between factual narratives and information, and eventually leading to political polarization.

The spread of fake news results from the drive to impose beliefs in support of preferred candidates. It was reported that individuals who hate their political opponents are the ones who presumably spread fake news and deliberately share derogative content.¹⁷ This is seen in social media platforms and is a manifestation of how voters were participating in strategies that will benefit the candidates they support. For example, the Marcos-Duterte tandem benefited from inaccurate narratives in obscuring different facts about violations of human rights, plunder, and events from the martial law.¹⁸ Most disinformation carried out on different social media platforms were about the Marcos era being a testament to the “Golden Era” of economic growth and infrastructure while Leni is painted as a communist who was ineffectual in her position.¹⁹ On the other hand, the so-called Kakampinks were also recorded to spread fake news. Vera Files, a media non-profit organization, recorded multiple posts claiming that Atom Araullo supported Leni Robredo during the campaign by using old photos of Atom in different rallies or events which Atom himself fact-checked.²⁰ Quote cards which contain manipulative content and visuals that are intended to deceive Filipinos are seen across social media and were also spread by Filipinos clueless of its falsity.²¹

This issue reflects the problems that Arao stated back in 2019 which lie in the susceptibility of Filipinos to believe false information that they see online and the active dissemination of these. To quote,

“...it is disturbing that a significant number of Filipinos believe stories from fake news websites and dubious social media pages. It is also troubling that there are those who actively promote and disseminate these stories as well. If people start believing in fake news more than they should news from legitimate sources, they will tend to make decisions that would not be based on reliable

¹⁵ Cleve Arguelles, *From Anarchy to Unity of Families in the 2022 Philippine Elections: A Marcos Duterte Leviathan State?*, 2022, 219–36, https://ac.upd.edu.ph/acmedia/zgallery/asj_58_2_2022/ASJ_58_2_2022_FINAL/10_Arguelles_-_Essay_ASJ_58-2-2022.pdf.

¹⁶ FleishmanHillard, “Presidential Elections,” 3.

¹⁷ Mathias Osmundsen et al., “Partisan Polarization Is the Primary Psychological Motivation behind Political Fake News Sharing on Twitter,” *American Political Science Review* 115, no. 3 (May 6, 2021): 999–1015.

¹⁸ Doisa Labiste, “Fact-Checking in the Philippines: The Quest to End Disinformation in Elections,” *FULCRUM*, January 12, 2024, <https://fulcrum.sg/fact-checking-in-the-philippines-the-quest-to-end-disinformation-in-elections/>.

¹⁹ Camille Elemia, “In the Philippines, a Flourishing Ecosystem for Political Lies,” *The New York Times*, May 6, 2022, <https://www.nytimes.com/2022/05/06/business/philippines-election-disinformation.html>.

²⁰ VERA Files, “Vera Files Fact Check: Posts Claiming Atom Araullo Is ‘Kakampink’ False,” VERA Files, June 29, 2022, <https://verafiles.org/articles/vera-files-fact-check-posts-claiming-atom-araullo-kakampink>.

²¹ Deinla et al., “Fake News Susceptibility,” 2.

information.”²²

Moreover, in an online poll conducted during World Press Freedom Day, the sentiments of participants and speakers all led to the common statement that disinformation is the predicted winner of the 2022 Philippines Presidential Elections.²³ Echoing this sentiment, it implies that with the dissemination of this false information, the choices and the beliefs that Filipinos constructed constituted the results of the Philippine elections. False information disguised as legitimate information were rapidly disseminated online that further distorted how voters discern the legitimacy of political materials, allowing voters to choose the information they see according to their ideological preferences.²⁴ To quote Heydarian, “The Philippines is paying the price for not having regulatory oversight and not making sure that the general population has a necessary cognitive resilience against these kinds of brazen and blatant lies.”²⁵ Having affected the sphere of political discourse in social media that will supposedly help citizens create informed decisions, the democratic principle that factual and unbiased information should be accessible for all is compromised.²⁶ Analyzing the outplay of fake news in the 2022 Philippine elections can reveal two main problems: (1) supporters tend to forward their beliefs through spreading fake news, and (2) Filipinos are susceptible to fake news due to their deficiency of skills. This, then, directs us to Philippine education which will explain how the recent elections were carried out and how crucial the quality of information and public discourse is in the democratic rights of voting and its practice.

Philippine Education and the Lack of Thinking Skills

Analyzing the case of infodemic would reveal that the act of producing and spreading fake news can be intentional, causing harm for personal gain.²⁷ It was reported that individuals who hate their political opponents are the ones who presumably spread fake news and deliberately share derogative content.²⁸ The act of suffrage is compromised because there are people who are willing to disseminate false information and distort facts to persuade or convince others to gain vote for their candidate. With the evident presence of polarization, the practices of the Kakampinks and Uniteam became a collective action, further blurring the lines for everyone active on social media during the campaign season. In relation to how false information is disseminated, digital communities are also formed to share and support their common ideas, seemingly providing a sense of belongingness in their views.²⁹ Many Filipinos remain susceptible to fake news, continuing to be victims of biased information in social media.

The increasing use of social media in supporting or undermining candidates during the

²² Kim G. Quilinguing, “The Problem with Fake News: Up Experts Speak on the Impact of Disinformation on Politics, Society and Democracy,” University of the Philippines, December 19, 2023, <https://up.edu.ph/the-problem-with-fake-news-up-experts-speak-on-the-impact-of-disinformation-on-politics-society-and-democracy/>.

²³ Asia Centre, “Disinformation Winner of 2022 Philippines Presidential Election,” Asia Centre, May 26, 2022, <https://asiacentre.org/disinformation-winner-of-2022-philippines-presidential-election/>.

²⁴ Noa Cohen and Mirko Daniel Garasic, “Informed Ignorance as a Form of Epistemic Injustice,” *Philosophies* 9, no. 3 (April 29, 2024): 59.

²⁵ Elemeia, “Political Lies.”

²⁶ Kasuya, “Disinformation,” 17.

²⁷ Siar, “Fake News,” 3.

²⁸ Osmundsen et al., “Partisan Polarization,” 1.

²⁹ Cohen and Garasic, “Informed Ignorance,” 4.

election campaign is not addressed because of the absence of a law that will regulate its use.³⁰ Ideally, this paper may turn to schools as they have always been institutions capable of change and guiding the development of each student under their care. However, based on our discussion, Filipinos remain vulnerable to the threats of the infodemic. Due to the Philippines' education system, Filipinos are susceptible to the spread of fake news, which poses several issues on how it cultivates students who are members of the community. Although the Philippine basic education has been offering different subjects and courses; Filipinos, however, continue to be inadequate in thinking critically, even with the inclusion of teaching critical thinking. Perhaps, the current teaching methods might be ineffective.³¹

The current education system in the Philippines experiences problems such as "... low pupil performance, poor teacher quality (in a system where teachers are central to the education process)..."³² This is a reflection of the traditional education setup first coined by Paulo Freire in *Pedagogy of the Oppressed* where educators have been using the banking model of education wherein the potentialities of students are hindered as a result of the reduction of their creative and critical powers and their passive role inside the classroom.³³ This banking model of education mirrors how fake news influence how people consume information on social media platforms. People also collect information from other mediums that contain data about the world. According to the Philippine Institute for Development Studies, it is important to capacitate citizens with the skill of fact-checking and of being analytical by equipping them with media literacy. However, this is currently not the case for the Philippines. Unequal access to education exacerbates these injustices because resources and tools for knowledge are deprived by the system itself.³⁴

The accumulated effects of misperceptions can reach a collective distortion of public opinion that affects the result of policies and election results.³⁵ Education, or the absence of it, contributes to how people process information and arrive at certain conclusions, having presented candidates who promise certain platforms that attract them. With the constant presence of this infodemic and its attached effects, the corruption of information prevents us from prioritizing the well-being of the citizens through the act of voting. Additionally, the presence of infodemic hinders citizens from realizing the significance of building relationships and possible dialogue that will strengthen the value of the information in the online sphere. There is also a lack of beholding the truth in this endeavor, creating an environment that leads voters astray in the process of deciding on the candidate they will put into position. These occurrences can be ascribed to the "post-truth" phenomenon which Bufacchi defines as:

a deliberate strategy aimed at creating an environment where objective facts are less influential in shaping public opinion, where theoretical frameworks are undermined in order to make it impossible for someone to make sense of a certain event, phenomenon, or experience, and where scientific truth

³⁰ Aries Arugay, "Stronger Social Media Influence in the 2022 Philippine Elections," FULCRUM, November 29, 2022, <https://fulcrum.sg/stronger-social-media-influence-in-the-2022-philippine-elections/>.

³¹ Marquez, "Basic Education," 3-4.

³² Allan B.I Bernardo, Ma. Cynthia Rose B. Bautista, and Dina Ocampo, "When Reforms Don't Transform: Reflections on institutional reforms in the Department of Education." *HDN Discussion Paper Series*, no. 2 (2009): 1-64.

³³ Mahbulul Alam, "Banking Model of Education in Teacher-Centered Class: A Critical Assessment," *Research on Humanities and Social Sciences* 3, no. 15 (2013): 27-32.

³⁴ Cohen and Garasic, "Informed Ignorance," 7.

³⁵ Joshua Tucker et al., "Social Media, Political Polarization, and Political Disinformation: A Review of the Scientific Literature," *SSRN Electronic Journal*, (2018): 51.

is delegitimized.³⁶

McIntyre mentions how this occurs when practitioners are more focused on asserting something more important than the truth.³⁷ This results to actions that pushes people to believe pieces of information regardless of the existence or non-existence of evidence.³⁸ Recalling the situation of the previous 2022 Philippine elections, where stark differences in beliefs arose and the flow of information among citizens became crucial in the outcome of elections, it is thus necessary to improve how we engage or act in political conversations online to forward the truth.

To address the lack of skills caused by the educational issue that continues to affect online discourses about the elections, this paper explores the pedagogical model employed by the P4C program which is the “community of inquiry” that anchors deliberation and collaboration.³⁹ It claims that lives in a democratic society are improved due to the higher-order thinking skills that the program cultivates. This kind of education is designed for all and has a quality evaluated by the thinking skills it develops in students. Even with the challenges presented, we may try to address these concerns by assessing the dynamics that engage in online political conversations, encouraging Filipinos to develop their thinking skills under the CPI as a dialogical framework.

The Lipman-Sharp Community of Philosophical Inquiry

The Community of Philosophical Inquiry (CPI) as developed by Lipman and Ann Margaret Sharp, is compared to the Socratic Dialectic practiced by Socrates whom according to Lipman was a “great communicative genius” despite not practicing communal philosophical dialogue.⁴⁰ As opposed to having Socrates’ conversation with oneself, the CPI is then raised as one that is composed of members who are open to self-correcting processes upon being in dialogue with each other. This approach enables growth through communicating views, asking questions, evaluating ideas, exposing arguments, and reconstructing these.⁴¹ Most people usually see philosophy as a theoretical study of the world—a world full of questions yet few answers, and one which creates “ivory towers” that are detached from the needs of our society. However, these questions can reveal the potential of philosophy in addressing the current challenges of society today.

Moreover, Kennedy emphasized that a fundamental aspect of the CPI is the pragmatic problematization of something in order to improve a lived situation.⁴² With this, the continuous process of reevaluating our thoughts comes with discovering that various narratives and experiences will uncover conflicts and differences when communicated within a community. This, then, will drive us to inquire more about them. By becoming aware of their experiences and perspectives, we may reflect on them and enforce necessary changes and actions to further develop ourselves or our

³⁶ Vittorio Bufacchi, “Truth, Lies and Tweets: A Consensus Theory of Post-Truth,” *Philosophy & Social Criticism* 47, no. 3 (January 14, 2020): 347–361.

³⁷ Lee C. McIntyre, *Post-Truth* (Cambridge, MA: The MIT Press, 2018).

³⁸ *Ibid.*, 13.

³⁹ Matthew Lipman, “Teaching Students to Think Reasonably: Some Findings of the Philosophy for Children Program,” *The Clearing House* 71, no. 5 (1998): 277–280.

⁴⁰ David Kennedy, “Lipman, Dewey, and the Community of Philosophical Inquiry.,” *Education and Culture* 28, no. 2 (2012): 36–53.

⁴¹ *Ibid.*, 8.

⁴² *Ibid.*, 9.

community. In the words of Striano:

Lipman chooses to employ the —“community” construct because it goes back to a pattern of relationships and interactions built on the recognition and acceptance of a cultural, ideological, religious or social reference with which the members of the group identify, and which represents the reason for them to form as a group, to meet (according to regular timescales) and to spend time together (following a number of norms, rules, stories and traditions).⁴³

However, being in dialogue with different people in a specific community involves dealing with the different aspects at play. It is why in this approach, Lipman introduced “Multidimensional Thinking” namely, Critical, Creative, and Caring, the most important dimensions of thinking.⁴⁴ An equilibrium of these three thinking skills shall be maintained, constituting a process that “aims at a balance between the cognitive and the affective, between the perceptual and the conceptual, between the physical and the mental, the rule-governed and the non-rule-governed.”⁴⁵ This model can help citizens engage in inquiry, which is central to philosophical reasoning, and be conscious of their ideas leading to a more coherent meaning-making and encourage them to become “balanced, harmonious, and moral intellect.”⁴⁶ This multidimensional thinking can only be achieved if it is also cultivated in educational institutions through the youth. With the availability of online platforms, this can be utilized to engage in conversations and promote multidimensional thinking to a wider reach. Fortunately, as we have mentioned earlier, the P4C pedagogy of Lipman is one successful approach to developing the skills of children—allowing them to engage in a dialogue and reflect on certain topics as members of a community.⁴⁷

Philosophy for Children (P4C)

To strengthen nation-building, the country should be able to cultivate critical thinking in students. However, Philosophy, under the K-12 curriculum implemented by the Department of Education, is required to be taught to students as “Introduction to Philosophy of the Human Person” without any preparatory lessons from Grades 1 to 10.⁴⁸ In response to this, it is best to introduce Philosophy to elementary school students because it can potentially help enhance a student’s thinking skills and teach them how to be involved with society today.⁴⁹ Reflective inquiry and thinking should be the central essence of education. As such, P4C is a program that banks on this essence, aiming to develop society’s quality of thinking. The Philippines needs this result, and certain cultural contexts should be examined to assess what the country needs to adopt from the educational framework that P4C presents. For this to be successful, certain imperatives concerning practices, models, paradigms, materials, and training sessions, must be put into place to create an environment that welcomes a community of inquiry.⁵⁰ The foundational stages of a child, as they are introduced to simple

⁴³ Striano Maura, “The Community of Philosophical Inquiry as a Social and Cognitive Matrix,” *Childhood & Philosophy* 7, no. 13 (2011): 91–102.

⁴⁴ Matthew Lipman, *Thinking in Education*, January 20, 2003.

⁴⁵ *Ibid.*, 199.

⁴⁶ Ann Margaret Sharp, “What Is a ‘community of Inquiry?’,” *Journal of Moral Education* 16, no. 1 (January 1987): 37–45.

⁴⁷ Marquez, “Basic Education,” 7.

⁴⁸ *Ibid.*, 4.

⁴⁹ *Ibid.*, 1.

⁵⁰ Zosimo Lee, “Nurturing Communities of Inquiry in Philippine Schools,” *Thinking: The Journal of Philosophy for Children* 20, no. 3 (2014): 76–82.

philosophical concepts, enrich their curiosity, develop their skills, and prepare them as they face the realities when they grow up. With the dialogical framework of the CPI, I attempt to answer the question, “What is its implications to the problem of online political discourse?” Going back to the two main problems presented in the occurrence of fake news in the Philippine elections, we see that 1) supporters tend to forward their beliefs through spreading fake news and 2) Filipino citizens are susceptible to fake news due to their deficiency of skills. To further expound on the multidimensional thinking skills framework, we shall attempt to respond to these issues we highlighted.

CPI, Misinformation, and Disinformation

Given the country’s current situation as we analyze the Philippine elections, this reveals the lack of skills to remedy these issues. Due to the education system in the Philippines, students are unable to develop the necessary skills as it also fails to produce active thinkers. As previously mentioned, the online sphere has become dominated by the youth as they engage in conversations and promote their beliefs along with other people. Through the CPI, this paper explores potential ways to homogenize the youth with other people who may lack the thinking skills in an online dialogue regarding political conversations.

Multidimensional Thinking

The ability of the CPI to create active thinkers inside classrooms can be extended to the community, especially as multidimensional thinking is cultivated. This then creates a conversational process that exhibits the valuing of different aspects present, especially in a very controversial topic such as the elections where various information and opinions are thrown around social media. Overall, multidimensional thinking is developed through communicating within a community, engaging, becoming aware of other experiences, reflecting on these, and making necessary changes to achieve communal well-being. Lipman emphasized how these thinking skills comprise good judgment, one that is essential in combatting fake news. This approach can be a way to better face political conversations, contrary to what has occurred in the recent elections.

Caring Thinking. A unique aspect of the CPI framework is related to the idea of being caring. This aspect gives value to our passions and emotions, in consideration of the challenges or problems faced given in a specific context before making judgments.⁵¹ As discussed by Lipman, caring is a type of thinking that performs different cognitive operations such as looking for alternatives, exploring and creating relationships, initiating multiple connections, and weighing differences.⁵² Thus, being caring involves recognizing differences in perspectives among people and thinking about how we can respond with a better understanding of the situation. Lipman mentioned a kind of caring thinking called “emphatic thinking” that encourages us to go beyond our own feelings and perceptions and be considerate with someone else’s, enabling better and stronger judgments as to how we should act.⁵³

In the Philippines, citizens encounter believers and clashes of opinion right and left, showing how fake news is disrupting the supposed informed agencies of the citizens, especially in deciding

⁵¹ Joe Oyler, “Philosophy with Children: The Lipman-Sharp Approach to Philosophy for Children,” *Encyclopedia of Educational Philosophy and Theory*, 2016, 1–7.

⁵² Lipman, *Thinking in Education*, 264.

⁵³ *Ibid.*, 269-270.

who they will vote for. Factors that shape the citizen's decisions and viewpoints are yet to be addressed, pointing towards the worsening of the infodemic. With these factors, the value of care allows one to respond not just in a logical way, but one that is receptive to the situation. This also adds a lens that helps us value the importance of being in a dialogue as they inquire into existing issues in society. While children are not fully aware of the deep dimension of care, what matters is the whole experience of the dialogue that transforms them into cooperative inquirers.⁵⁴ As Oyler puts it, caring thinking thus puts value in being sensitive as to “how we are thinking, what is worth thinking about, and what is important to consider as we are thinking.”⁵⁵ In the words of the late Miriam Defensor Santiago:

The problem with elections is that Filipino voters, if they are uneducated, are often swayed by the personal appeal of a candidate. Public opinion is often shaped by conscious efforts of political elites and the media. It is a myth that Philippine voters make rational choices of candidates. Often, the uneducated voter is merely expressing support for the system, or merely expressing emotional attachments to certain symbols.⁵⁶

As this still applies today, this kind of attitude involves an affective situation that takes account of the voters' way of thinking and understanding various contexts that may have affected their beliefs. Their education, or the absence of it, also contributes to how they process information and arrive at certain conclusions, having presented candidates who promise certain platforms that attract them. Recalling Marcos Jr. campaign under the slogan of “unity” and “Bagong Pilipinas,” the desire of people towards the country's betterment is evident. As Aguilar puts it, the element of deception is present through metaphors that mimics the act of courtship using sweet words and promises.⁵⁷ In the same way, Macgamit, as he analyzed how Duterte tricked the Filipinos, calls this an “emotional belief” that highlights how emotions are attached to our reasoning and how emotion and cognition should not be attributed as “zero-sum terms,” proving how people are emotionally-driven in determining their beliefs.⁵⁸ Thus, it is essential to consider the emotional state of other people when communicating.

Creative Thinking. The infodemic is difficult to respond given its complexity. In addition to the previously mentioned thinking skill, Lipman describes this as “freshness” related to one's capability to imagine or envision possibilities as we respond to modern-day problems.⁵⁹ The cultivation of creative thinking allows us: to see through a skeptical lens to examine current beliefs, to see their faults, and to determine what beliefs we should push through to adhere to the situation at hand. At earlier ages, the P4C pedagogy cultivates this by arranging a flexible environment that allows children to explore possibilities and question these to maximize their realms of thought as they

⁵⁴ See Ann Margaret Sharp, “The Other Dimension of Caring Thinking (with a New Commentary by Phillip Cam),” *Journal of Philosophy in Schools* 1, no. 1 (October 16, 2014).

⁵⁵ Oyler, “Philosophy with Children,” 2.

⁵⁶ Miriam Defensor Santiago, “The Problem with Elections.” Transcript of speech delivered at FEU Central Student Organization Lecture Series, November 22, 2012.

https://legacy.senate.gov.ph/press_release/2012/1122_santiago1.asp

⁵⁷ Filomeno Aguilar, “Betting on Democracy: Electoral Ritual in the Philippine Presidential Campaign,” *Philippine Studies: Historical and Ethnographic Viewpoints* 53, no. 1 (2005): 91–118.

⁵⁸ Michael Magcamit, “To Feel Is to Believe: China, United States, and the Emotional Beliefs of Philippines’ Rodrigo Duterte,” *Political Science* 73, no. 1 (January 2, 2021): 6–30.

⁵⁹ Lipman, *Thinking in Education*, 247–249.

confront issues in Communities of Inquiry (COIs).⁶⁰ This can also potentially produce citizens who can conceptualize creative ways to promote the truth. For example, Benjamin & McLean’s study on creatively responding to science and the infodemic claims that improving science communication through changing mediums will improve students’ literacy regarding misinformation in science upon seeing society’s problem in the accessibility of science.⁶¹

Coinciding with the caring aspect of the CPI, creative thinking prevents the tendency of spreading malicious information to forward beliefs. As we have laid out earlier, different parties were involved in the spread of fake news, implying that people from different camps resorted to the act of spreading malicious and biased content for the benefit of their preferred candidate. If we recognize the complexity of the election campaign and the clash of beliefs, ways of forwarding truths and narratives do require a caring and creative aspect that allows us to think of better ways to approach conversations with other people. This then creates a dialogical environment that will allow parties to converse without resorting to hateful remarks, misleading information, and degrading contents that can undermine the preferred candidate of others. Instead, we are offered to listen and open our ears to others.

Critical Thinking. The country is expected to continue its current dynamics in social media where users are expected to reach over 91 million.⁶² With this, critical thinking is essential in combating fake news while online campaigning is prevalent. Traditionally, educators have been using the banking model of education in which the potentialities of students are not actualized due to the reduction of their creative and critical powers due to their passive role inside the classroom.⁶³ This model mirrors how fake news influence how people consume information on social media platforms, from what others say, and other mediums that contain data about the world. According to Lipman, critical thinking is skillful thinking that relies on criteria to produce good judgment, and is sensitive to context, and values self-correction.⁶⁴ Focusing on this definition, we see the powerful capability of thinking that citizens may possess to maximize ways of examining information that are. In an analysis made by Alexandra Babii, a fake news analysis model was created to pinpoint areas where critical thinking takes place.⁶⁵ When presented with fake news, one may be on the lookout for components of arguments, fallacies or reasoning errors, sources, language, and data. As a critical thinker, these common characteristics of fake news are conquered through awareness, careful assessment, and the ability to pause and evaluate thoughts and judgments. This, then, constitutes assessing what we think about a certain piece of information available to us.

Multidimensional thinking skills which Lipman considers as a “trinity of criteria” leads to what we can call an instance of excellent thinking—aiming at a balance between these three that will

⁶⁰ Yahya Ghaedi, Fatemeh Khoshnavay Fomani, and Mona Mahdian, “Identifying Dimensions of Creative Thinking in Preschool Children during Implementation of Philosophy for Children (P4C) Program: A Directed Content Analysis,” *Nigerian Chapter of Arabian Journal of Business and Management Review* 2, no. 11 (November 2014): 30–37.

⁶¹ Kayla A. Benjamin and Sarah McLean, “Change the Medium, Change the Message: Creativity Is Key to Battle Misinformation,” *Advances in Physiology Education* 46, no. 2 (June 1, 2022): 259–267.

⁶² Fleishman Hillard Manila, “Presidential Elections,” 3.

⁶³ Alam, “Banking Model of Education,” 27–32.

⁶⁴ Lipman, *Thinking in Education*, 227.

⁶⁵ Alexandra-Niculina Babii, “The Use of Critical Thinking against Fake News,” *NORDSCI Conference Proceedings, Book 1 Volume 3 3* (2020).

create a multiplicative result.⁶⁶ These three skills shall be seen as equals, emphasizing the essential interplay between these skills in the COI, allowing children to formulate better judgments that Shahrtash considers as “appropriate, insightful, and relevant.”⁶⁷ Although engaging in dialogues entails a challenge that requires facing different opinions and will require effort, we aim to slowly build and foster a dialogical environment that exhibits a great balance of these thinking skills. It is not a guarantee that other people with different beliefs would adopt our preferences. However, the understanding and interplay of thinking skills as we evaluate information and communicate with others constitute a ladder toward a better dynamic in online platforms and potentially develop different actors who constantly engage in political conversations.

The multidimensional thinking that the P4C pedagogy cultivates through CPI offers a potential solution in the education system of the Philippines as it encompasses the different dimensions of the infodemic, whether it calls for critical judgment, creative solutions, or care for the community. As stated by an educator who practices P4C in Bradway Primary School, “Now more than ever, we need to be nurturing their thinking skills, helping them to form opinions and encouraging them to question and challenge the world around them.”⁶⁸ Overall, whether inside or outside our classrooms, we can continue to communicate with other people and exhibit thinking skills through what the CPI has to offer. This has implications for achieving a dialogical environment that Filipinos deserve, especially in the context of the elections.

CPI and Cultivating Thinkers

The experience of Filipinos in the recent elections proves that a lot of work has to be done to address multiple concerns in the current information climate regarding the spread of fake news. We have identified earlier the two main problems that are present: that people spread fake news to forward their beliefs and preferences and that citizens are susceptible to the spread of false information due to a lack of thinking skills. Drawing from our analysis, this constitutes an ongoing crisis and will continue to occur if these are not addressed. However, upon examining the dialogical framework of the CPI, we uncover potential solutions in slowly fixing our problems in online discourse, particularly by examining how the cultivation of thinking skills can transform how citizens participate within an online dialogical environment.

The issues experienced by the people should be addressed through adopting ways that can contribute to fixing these problems that the infodemic has caused. In our country’s case, since online platforms are currently comprised of disruptions to the interactions of the people due to the polarization brought by multiple factors including the infodemic, our solutions should be directed towards addressing this through education. The use of social media as an avenue for political discourse, especially during election campaigns, should emphasize the responsibility of considering other individuals in terms of disseminating information which is crucial in building up our beliefs. This responsibility should then be shared or extended to a collective movement that will combat polarization. The CPI, as a framework, offers possible ways to fight this infodemic and implies an

⁶⁶ Lipman, *Thinking in Education*, 201.

⁶⁷ Farzaneh Shahrtash, “Multidimensional Thinking in a Community of Inquiry (COI) vs. Critical Thinking (CT).,” *Budhi* 21, no. 3 (2017): 14–43.

⁶⁸ Paul Stockley, “Using Philosophy for Children to Help Children Spot Fake News,” SAPERE P4C, January 6, 2020. <https://saperep4c.wordpress.com/2019/12/23/using-philosophy-for-children-to-help-children-spot-fake-news/>.

individual and communal aspect that we should fulfill for the country's well-being.

As Individuals. The role of the individual lies in the CPI's central potential of cultivating multidimensional thinking. Contrary to our ideas being repressed, our engagement in different settings like the classrooms and online platforms allows an opportunity for participation. However, this participation should be done responsibly, emphasizing the importance of employing these thinking skills and its improvement during the process. In a survey conducted by FleishmanHillard's Manila office, results have shown that there is an increased amount of conversations regarding fake news and disinformation after the election, and these are mostly dominated by youth aged 18 to 24 years old.⁶⁹ These conversations imply that there is an ongoing awareness of the infodemic and that people can do and are doing something to talk about the issue at hand. This concerns how other people, including themselves, are faced with the same threats of false information. As online discourses are also dominated by the youth, the capacity to inform, self-correct, and evaluate our knowledge should be pioneered by them in order to be role models for other people in the social media space.

The CPI, as it places value not on theories, we usually study in the academe but instead on philosophizing, transforms the youth into responsible citizens as they engage with others. As we call for studying Philosophy in the early stages of education, we should acknowledge that there is no denying its success in developing thinkers who are critical and analytic, proving useful to the demands of the current world.⁷⁰ Through cultivating multidimensional thinking, we may establish political conversations that reflect how the CPI envisions it, addressing how we respond to competing beliefs and disseminating accurate information that will promote the truth. This way, we are able to give the good that is due for other people, creating an environment that will allow everyone to receive and comprehend information that is crucial to formulate their beliefs for upcoming elections.

Additionally, it is also important for individuals to realize how the CPI is a collaborative endeavor that reveals how a communal goal of the good life is targeted. Seeing the value of community in achieving our goal allows the youth to develop into citizens who push for changes in the system and becomes our drive to become better individuals in promoting better discourses that will help us attain better results.

As a Community. Another thing we need to focus on is how our community should continue to move forward toward change. Adapting multidimensional thinking skills in the online landscape is one thing, but achieving this is another, and that is through reforms in education. Although we suggest how individuals who are able to cultivate thinking skills extend what they learn outside of the classroom, the opportunity to learn and develop as thinkers through education should also be one that is given to everyone. This promotes equal opportunities for Filipinos to be educated. Turning a blind eye to this condones how people are provided unfair resources and access to education.

Recognizing that not everyone has the privilege to be educated, students who will grow and continue to grow as responsible citizens through CPI may continue to extend their call for societal change by asking for further reforms in the education system while promoting the truth that we ought to protect. As stated by Lipman, critical thinking seeks to develop a product—using knowledge to be

⁶⁹ Fleishman Hillard Manila, "Presidential Elections", 4.

⁷⁰ Marquez, "Basic Education," 6.

able to create reasonable change.⁷¹ If Philosophy, under the framework of the CPI, is introduced at an early age, we are able to see the hope for the young. Echoing Marquez:

In order to free themselves from the manacles of oppression, we have to educate the Filipino youth to become critical thinkers and this can be achieved through a pedagogy that is critical, reflective, and reflexive, otherwise, nothing will change. And thus, only through emancipatory education can we achieve true liberation.⁷²

Being able to reflect on the problems in Philippine education can help open our minds to ways in which we can campaign for the knowledge and skills that others have yet to receive in this information climate. Unfair advantage should not be tolerated and should shift into one that necessitates collective action for the good of the community, especially under the context of the elections.

Establishing a system with a framework that can potentially address the issues on the current political polarization in online platforms exacerbated by the infodemic contains implications on how citizens form judgments during the elections. Advocating for education shall then lead to combatting fake news for the better application of skills in decision making in elections that always changes our lives for multiple years after its results. Transforming into a responsible community comprised of critical citizens implies that realizing the value of every vote would eventually help achieve a good life for everyone, sparking necessary ways to combat hurdles that would disrupt the democratic activity of voting for our country's leaders. As stated in the Philippines' Citizen-Voters' Education Module, the slogan is "Your Vote, Our Future."⁷³ This implies how important to promote the good for the country, with regards to practicing the right of suffrage.

Conclusion

The Lipman-Sharp Community of Philosophical Inquiry, therefore, offers ways to respond to the current ineffectiveness of Philippine education in developing citizens, for it transforms them into better members of society that engage in dialogue. The disruption of the flow of relevant political information among Filipinos during the 2022 Philippine elections and campaign season calls for approaches that will help address the unhealthy environment for dialogue which is supposedly a big tool in forming judgments for the upcoming elections.

With its ability to cultivate multidimensional thinking, the problems presented by political discourses that thrives in online platforms is addressed through the ways in which the youth is developed into critical, creative, and caring thinkers who respond to situations with an attitude that promotes a better environment for dealing with opposing beliefs. The complexity of the infodemic directs us to become caring and creative in the situation, to share our knowledge in better ways other than spreading fake news, and to become critical of the information that circulates online. The CPI framework provides opportunities to grow as learners who will extend and apply the skills we continuously develop as we communicate with people online, especially with those who have beliefs that differ from ours. Whichever candidate a person supports, the CPI advocates for becoming

⁷¹ Lipman, *Thinking in Education*, 211.

⁷² Leander Marquez, "Critical Thinking in Philippine Education: What We Have and What We Need," *Journal for Critical Education Policy Studies*, October 1, 2017, 272–303.

⁷³ Office of the Ombudsman, Citizen-Voters' Education Module (2013).

<https://www.ombudsman.gov.ph/UNDP4/wp-content/uploads/2013/03/1.1.1.-CVE-Basic-Module-Final-Draft-1st-Ed.pdf>

responsible individuals and communities who try to remedy the dynamics in political conversations to allow everyone to self-correct, evaluate, reflect, and form their judgments based on accurate information.

The CPI is only achievable if this is implemented in our current education system through the P4C and other reforms that will provide better access to education. A lot of training and effort is required to extend this to other educators. Formal instruction and training of P4C is crucial for the next generation of teachers and teachers today to be better trained in this pedagogy that encourages COI.⁷⁴ Additionally, a political aspect in the way the program operates should also be considered by P4C practitioners, given the current political climate and ailments of Philippine society. If we are to commit ourselves to forwarding equality, democracy, and justice, the program should include ways that take inspiration from critical pedagogy, emphasizing the experiences of the oppressed and how we can criticize the dominant structures in our existing system.⁷⁵ Aside from the value of inquiry and being impartial, being reasonable involves the realization of different forces that perpetuate existing injustices towards Filipinos. Schools are institutions capable of developing skills and calling for equal opportunities for citizens, implying a step toward the change we want to occur in the country.

This implies that our ability to create an impact depends on how we are cultivated in a system that supports the production of responsible thinkers who are also able to extend what they learn in times that call for our participation. Overall, this is the kind of system our society should strive towards to—one that develops thinkers who do not promote the spread of the current infodemic and instead aim to explore and discern knowledge from experiences surrounding us—creating shared learning and understandings that promote the truth for the people even with the threat of uncertainty from fake news. Our role as critical, creative, and caring thinkers in engaging within the community towards making judgments and casting a vote should be realized as we move toward transformation. Only then can we become “building blocks for a better nation”⁷⁶ that can combat the threats hiding the truth that is crucial for our democratic country.

⁷⁴ Lee, “Nurturing Communities of Inquiry,” 80.

⁷⁵ Walter Omar Kohan, “Paulo Freire and Philosophy for Children: A Critical Dialogue,” *Studies in Philosophy and Education* 37, no. 6 (May 11, 2018): 615–629.

⁷⁶ Marquez, “Basic Education,” 5.

Bibliography

- 2022 *Philippine Presidential Elections*, 2022.
<https://fleishmanhillard.com/wpcontent/uploads/2022/07/2022-Philippine-Presidential-Elections-Report.pdf>.
- Aguilar, Filomeno. "Betting on Democracy: Electoral Ritual in the Philippine Presidential Campaign." *Philippine Studies: Historical and Ethnographic Viewpoints* 53, no. 1 (2005): 91–118.
- Alam, Mahbulbul. "Banking Model of Education in Teacher-Centered Class: A Critical Assessment." *Research on Humanities and Social Sciences* 3, no. 15 (2013): 27–32.
- Anni, Eden. "An Education System in Crisis: What Is the Way Forward under a Marcos Presidency?" INQUIRER.net, July 21, 2022. <https://opinion.inquirer.net/155266/an-education-system-in-crisis-what-is-the-way-forward-under-a-marcos-presidency>.
- Arguelles, Cleve. *From Anarchy to Unity of Families in the 2022 Philippine Elections: A Marcos-Duterte Leviathan State*, 2022, 219–36.
- Arugay, Aries. "Stronger Social Media Influence in the 2022 Philippine Elections." FULCRUM, November 29, 2022. <https://fulcrum.sg/stronger-social-media-influence-in-the-2022-philippine-elections/>.
- Asia Centre. "Disinformation Winner of 2022 Philippines Presidential Election." Asia Centre, May 26, 2022. <https://asiacentre.org/disinformation-winner-of-2022-philippines-presidential-election/>
- Babii, Alexandra-Niculina. "The Use of Critical Thinking against Fake News." *NORDSCI Conference proceedings, Book 1 Volume 3 3* (2020).
- Balci, Emine, and Ramazan Eryilmaz. "The Impact of Philosophy for Children (P4C) Activities on Enhancing the Speaking Skills of Gifted Students." *Frontiers in Psychology* 15 (October 22, 2024).
- Benjamin, Kayla A., and Sarah McLean. "Change the Medium, Change the Message: Creativity Is Key to Battle Misinformation." *Advances in Physiology Education* 46, no. 2 (June 1, 2022): 259–267.
- Bernardo, Allan B.I, Ma. Cynthia Rose B. Bautista, and Dina Ocampo. "When Reforms Don't Transform: Reflections on institutional reforms in the Department of Education." *HDN Discussion Paper Series*, no. 2 (2009). 1–64.
- Bufacchi, Vittorio. "Truth, Lies and Tweets: A Consensus Theory of Post-Truth." *Philosophy & Social Criticism* 47, no. 3 (January 14, 2020): 347–361.
- Cohen, Noa, and Mirko Daniel Garasic. "Informed Ignorance as a Form of Epistemic Injustice." *Philosophies* 9, no. 3 (April 29, 2024): 59.
- Deinla, Imelda., Gabrielle Ann Mendoza, Kier Jesse Ballar, and Jurel K. Yap. "The Link between Fake News Susceptibility and Political Polarization of the Youth in the Philippines." *Asian Journal of Political Science* 30, no. 2 (May 4, 2022): 160–181.
- Deinla, Imelda, Ronald U. Mendoza, and Jurel Yap. "Philippines: Diagnosing the Infodemic." Lowy Institute, August 2, 2022. <https://www.lowyinstitute.org/the-interpretor/philippines-diagnosing-infodemic>.
- Elemia, Camille. "In the Philippines, a Flourishing Ecosystem for Political Lies." *The New York Times*, May 6, 2022. <https://www.nytimes.com/2022/05/06/business/philippines-election>

disinformation.html.

- “Factsheet 4: Types of Misinformation and Disinformation.” *Using Social Media in Community Based Protection: A Guide*, n.d., 230–231.
- Ghaedi, Yahya, Fatemeh Khoshnavay Fomani, and Mona Mahdian. “Identifying Dimensions of Creative Thinking in Preschool Children during Implementation of Philosophy for Children (P4C) Program: A Directed Content Analysis.” *Nigerian Chapter of Arabian Journal of Business and Management Review* 2, no. 11 (November 2014): 30–37.
- Kasuya, Yuko. *Disinformation and the Victory of Ferdinand Marcos Jr. in the 2022 Philippine Presidential Election*, January 17, 2024.
- Kennedy, David. “Lipman, Dewey, and the Community of Philosophical Inquiry.” *Education and Culture* 28, no. 2 (2012): 36–53.
- Kohan, Walter Omar. “Paulo Freire and Philosophy for Children: A Critical Dialogue.” *Studies in Philosophy and Education* 37, no. 6 (May 11, 2018): 615–329.
- Labiste, Diosa. “Fact-Checking in the Philippines: The Quest to End Disinformation in Elections.” FULCRUM, January 12, 2024. <https://fulcrum.sg/fact-checking-in-the-philippines-the-quest-to-end-disinformation-in-elections/>.
- Lee, Zosimo. “Nurturing Communities of Inquiry in Philippine Schools.” *Thinking: The Journal of Philosophy for Children* 20, no. 3 (2014): 76–82. <https://doi.org/10.5840/thinking2014203/411>.
- Lipman, Matthew. *Thinking in education*, January 20, 2003.
- . “Teaching Students to Think Reasonably: Some Findings of the Philosophy for Children Program.” *The Clearing House* 71, no. 5 (1998): 277–280.
- Magcamit, Michael. “To Feel Is to Believe: China, United States, and the Emotional Beliefs of Philippines’ Rodrigo Duterte.” *Political Science* 73, no. 1 (January 2, 2021): 6–30.
- Marquez, Leander. “Critical Thinking in Philippine Education: What We Have and What We Need,” *Journal for Critical Education Policy Studies*, October 1, 2017, 272–303.
- . “Philosophy in Basic Education: Towards the Strengthening of the Foundations of Philippine Education.” *Policy Futures in Education*, December 6, 2017, 1–16.
- Maura, Striano. “The Community of Philosophical Inquiry as a Social and Cognitive Matrix.” *Childhood & Philosophy* 7, no. 13 (2011): 91–102.
- McGuinness, Carol. Rep. *From Thinking Skills to Thinking Classrooms: A Review and Evaluation of Approaches for Developing Pupils’ Thinking*. Colegate, Norwich: Crown Copyright, 1999.
- McIntyre, Lee C. *Post-truth*. Cambridge, MA: The MIT Press, 2018. Office of the Ombudsman, Citizen-Voters’ Education Module § (2013). <https://www.ombudsman.gov.ph/UNDP4/wp-content/uploads/2013/03/1.1.1.-CVE-Basic-Module-Final-Draft-1st-Ed.pdf>.
- Osmundsen, Mathias, Alexander Bor, Peter Bjererregaard Vahlstrup, Anja Bechmann, Michael Bang Petersen. “Partisan Polarization Is the Primary Psychological Motivation behind Political Fake News Sharing on Twitter.” *American Political Science Review* 115, no. 3 (May 6, 2021): 999–1015.
- Quilinguing, Kim. “The Problem with Fake News: Up Experts Speak on the Impact of Disinformation on Politics, Society and Democracy.” University of the Philippines, December

- 19, 2023. <https://up.edu.ph/the-problem-with-fake-news-up-experts-speak-on-the-impact-of-disinformation-on-politics-society-and-democracy/>.
- Quitzon, Japhet. "Social Media Misinformation and the 2022 Philippine Elections: New Perspectives on Asia." CSIS, November 22, 2021. <https://www.csis.org/blogs/new-perspectives-asia/social-media-misinformation-and-2022-philippine-elections>.
- Oyler, Joe. "Philosophy with Children: The Lipman-Sharp Approach to Philosophy for Children." *Encyclopedia of Educational Philosophy and Theory*, 2016, 1–7.
- Rusmin, Lisnawati, Yuni Misrahayu, Fien Pongpalilu, Radiansyah Radiansyah, and Dwiyanto Dwiyanto. "Critical Thinking and Problem-Solving Skills in the 21st Century." *Join: Journal of Social Science* 1, no. 5 (August 22, 2024): 144–162.
- Santiago, Miriam Defensor. "The Problem with Elections." *Far Eastern University Central Student Organization Lecture Series*. Lecture presented at the Far Eastern University Central Student Organization lecture series, November 22, 2012.
- Shahrtash, Farzaneh. "Multidimensional Thinking in a Community of Inquiry (COI) vs. Critical Thinking (CT)." *Budhi* 21, no. 3 (2017): 14–43.
- Sharp, Ann Margaret. "The Other Dimension of Caring Thinking (with a New Commentary by Phillip Cam)." *Journal of Philosophy in Schools* 1, no. 1 (October 16, 2014).
- . "What Is a 'community of Inquiry'?" *Journal of Moral Education* 16, no. 1 (January 1987): 37–45.
- Siar, Sheila. "Fake News, Its Dangers, and How We Can Fight It." Policy notes (PIDS-Online), August 2021. <https://pidswebs.pids.gov.ph/CDN/PUBLICATIONS/pidspn2106.pdf>.
- Stockley, Paul. "Using Philosophy for Children to Help Children Spot Fake News." SAPERE P4C, January 6, 2020. <https://saperep4c.wordpress.com/2019/12/23/using-philosophy-for-children-to-help-children-spot-fake-news/>.
- Tucker, Joshua, Andrew Guess, Pablo Barbera, Cristian Vaccari, Alexandra Siegel, Sergey Sanovich, Denis Stukal, and Brendan Nyhan. "Social Media, Political Polarization, and Political Disinformation: A Review of the Scientific Literature." *SSRN Electronic Journal*, 2018, 51. <https://doi.org/10.2139/ssrn.3144139>.
- VERA Files. "Vera Files Fact Check: Posts Claiming Atom Araullo Is 'Kakampink' False." VERA Files, June 29, 2022. <https://verafiles.org/articles/vera-files-fact-check-posts-claiming-atom-araullo-kakampink>.
- "Why the 2022 Philippines Election Is so Significant." *Al Jazeera*, May 9, 2022. <https://www.aljazeera.com/news/2022/5/8/why-the-2022-philippines-election-is-so-significant>.



TALISIK: An Undergraduate Journal of Philosophy is the laboratory undergraduate journal of Kritike: An Online Journal of Philosophy (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" [Keeness] and "Saliksik" [Search]. TALISIK then means "Katalasan ng isip na umunawa ng anuman" [Keeness 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.



TALISIK: AN UNDERGRADUATE JOURNAL OF PHILOSOPHY
KRITIKE: AN ONLINE JOURNAL OF PHILOSOPHY
DEPARTMENT OF PHILOSOPHY
UNIVERSITY OF SANTO TOMAS - MANILA
PHILIPPINES

