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## Contents

Bogusław Milerski, Andrzej Wierciński – *The hermeneutic paradox: the secret power of education as self-education* ..... 7

Andrzej Wierciński – *The dialectics of power and the irrevocability of time (Unwiderruflichkeit der Zeit)* ..... 19

Gregory Moss – *Rene Girard and the phenomenology of mimetic desire* ..... 43

Duane Armitage – *Girard and Nietzsche's phenomenology of victims* ..... 83

Christopher Haw – *Should we take sides?: Girard, Mouffe, et al on graceful divisiveness* ..... 97

Paulina Sosnowska – *The wounds of war and the scars of culture: Simone Weil and Rene Girard on the symmetry of violence* ..... 131

Klaudia Węc – *Masks and mirrors of subject identity. Between the petrification of language and the mimeticization of the gaze* ..... 147

Małgorzata Hołda – *Via pulchritudinis: the narrative of violence and vulnerability in painting in view of Hans-Georg Gadamer's hermeneutic aesthetics* ..... 161

Piotr Rosół – *Visibility and invisibility of violence in education* ..... 187

Monika Humeniuk – *Prometheus of a scapegoat? Humans in the discourse of the anthropocene and the concept of mimesis and persecution pattern by René Girard: attempts at pedagogical reflection* ..... 199

Emanuele Antonelli – *Being as sacred: on Heidegger's ontological wanderings* ..... 219

Arnold Jafe – *The "lengthy affair" of mytho-poetic education: Plato's cave, Heidegger's hermeneutics, and learning with(out) violence* ..... 237

Helgard Mahrdt – *Hannah Arendt's reflections on power, violence, and terror* ..... 255

Luis António Umbelino – *The violence of space* ..... 271

Ramsey Eric Ramsey – *Saying something concerning truth, violence, and education* ..... 281

Kamila Drapało – *The power of imagination in the Red Shoes* ..... 295
Katarzyna Dworakowska – *The ill body: between power and rebellion* ..... 309
Piotr Zańko – *The slow violence of air pollution: an educational challenge to what is potentially invisible* ..... 327
Rafal Włodarczyk – *Populism, counter-democracy, and counter-education. Notes on the imagination about antidote to the crisis of liberal democracy* ..... 341
Krzysztof Maliszewski – *To not nurture a war – education against violence (Girard - Patočka)* ..... 357
Jerzy Kochanowicz – *Power and violence in Ignatian education* ..... 369
Renata Nowakowska-Siuta – *Hermeneutics and comparative pedagogy. Language as material and powerful tool for assigning meanings, understanding, and transforming information* ..... 387
Bogusław Śliwerski – *Pedagogical hermeneutics at the time of political transition in Poland* ..... 399
Bogusław Milerski – *Half-education as a hermeneutic challenge for religious education in schools* ..... 419
Andrzej Wierciński – *Living with the perplexities of our being in-the-world with others: the paradox of Bildung* ..... 441
AUTHORS ..... 463
INFORMATION FOR AUTHORS ..... 465

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# The hermeneutic paradox: the secret power of education as self-education

**Abstract:** The dialectic of power is one of the fundamental questions of pedagogy. Recognizing that power is a multidimensional phenomenon that manifests itself differently in different contexts, a number of disciplines and paradigms have exposed the dynamics of power at work in pedagogy and in the broader social and cultural contexts of education. A hermeneutic approach to power seeks to cultivate sensitivity and attunement to the interpretive experience of power as a lifelong and collective endeavor of (self-) education. Different situations of detecting, interpreting, critiquing, exercising, accepting, and resisting various manifestations of power in our lives all call for engaging in (self-)education as a constant seeking for the right measure, as a permanent formation (*Bildung*) to discernment, conversation, and responsibility. Learning and teaching to live with and think about power is an essential way of being in the world with ourselves and Others. The international, collaborative research project "Philosophy, Education, Power, and Violence" exhibited in this journal brings together diverse reflections and case studies on the dialectic of power in the spirit of fostering hermeneutic synodality as a model for the empowering experience of (self-)education.

**Keywords:** Theory of Education, Hermeneutic Pedagogy, Dialectic, Power, Bildung.

Violence and power exercised on behalf of a social group, as well as the subjective feeling of power over other human beings, are multidimensional phenomena that appear in different contexts. Also varying are the forms in which they are realized. Their scope is fluid and constantly debated. What did not qualify as aggression and domination in earlier times might be treated as violence today. Paradoxically, it is the direct actions that are the easiest to interpret. They are subject to legal interpretation and jurisdiction. However, violence can take on a much more sublime form, in which direct aggression is merely the consequence of psychological, social, cultural, or political mechanisms. These mechanisms may be a sanctioned form of social consciousness and serve to express a dominant message, cultural canon, custom or social ritual. Such violence manifests itself, in the first instance, at the level of culture and the organization of social life, and therefore, as Ernst Cassirer (2020) puts it, at the level of symbolic forms making up the intelligible code of the lifeworld (*Lebenswelt*) in which we find ourselves.

In this context, a special role is attributed to the power of the Word. Paraphrasing the prologue of the Gospel of John, "in the beginning was the Word": Ἐν ἀρχῇ ἦν ὁ Λόγος (J 1: 1) and "the Word became flesh": ὁ Λόγος σὰρξ ἐγένετο (J 1: 14), one can consider *Logos* as the principle of life. "The greater miracle of language lies not in the fact that the Word becomes flesh and emerges in external being, but that that which emerges and externalizes itself in utterance is always already a word" (Gadamer 1990, p. 424; 2020, p. 437). The word externalized by an individual, a social group, a cultural or religious tradition has creative power. It does not become flesh in the sense of a hardened fossil, but as the word it can create various incarnations, and these incarnations create further forms of reality — both positive and destructive.

Symbolic interactions are analyzed by various disciplines in the humanities and social sciences using a number of theoretical frameworks. One of the most important and historically established paradigms is hermeneutics. The origins of this approach can be traced back to antiquity. It has developed over the centuries as a theory of understanding and interpretation, as a theory of reading or assigning meaning to the reality being analysed. However, hermeneutic theory cannot be reduced to the definition and application of simple rules of interpretation. Rules are necessary, but understanding itself is a distinctive mental process that differs from rationalist or empirical thinking. Hermeneutics is an art, a creative intellectual artistry. In his texts on hermeneutics, published posthumously in 1838, Friedrich Schleiermacher claimed: "The practice of hermeneutics can be regarded as an art, not because it results in producing a work of art, but because in itself it bears the

character of art, as it isn't solely a matter of the mechanical application of some rules" (Schleiermacher, 1990, p. 81).

Traditional hermeneutics developed within three currents: theological, legal and literary. The first half of the 19th century saw the birth of philosophical hermeneutics, which was concerned not only with detailed principles of interpretation but also with a general theory of understanding. This approach was deepened on the one hand by ontological and existential aspects with the category of pre-understanding (*Vorverständnis*), and on the other hand by questions of history, tradition, and memory with the concept of pre-judgment (*Vorurteil*). Moreover, not only cultural texts but also social life viewed in terms of cultural transmission became the object of hermeneutic studies. With the development of philosophical hermeneutics, pedagogical hermeneutics started to take shape.

Historicity and tradition are linked to social memory, collective identity, and intergenerational cultural transmission. These phenomena are mimetic in nature. Mimesis (*imitatio*) consists not only of its declarative dimension, but also an implicit one, especially at the level of social and cultural consciousness and sub-consciousness. In the Latin tradition, *imitatio* was often equated with the reproduction or imitation of certain patterns of thought and behavior. These patterns could range from the imitation of Christ, as expressed explicitly in the titles of books by authors such as Thomas à Kempis and Dietrich Bonhoeffer, to the reproduction of mechanisms of exclusion and violence analyzed by, among others, representatives of critical theory or social memory theory.

The "dialectic of power," as the present volume is entitled, is inextricably linked to the fundamental dilemma of pedagogy. It has been defined by the classics of educational sciences. Already Schleiermacher entitled two chapters of the general part of his lectures on pedagogy (1826): "Theory of education, insofar as it is counter-effect" (*Theorie der Erziehung, insofern diese Gegenwirkung ist*) and "Theory of education insofar as it is support" (*Theorie der Erziehung, insofern diese Unterstützung ist*) (Schleiermacher, 2000, p. 86, 165). In "Democracy and Education" (1916), John Dewey also emphasized two vectors in the power of pedagogical action: education as direction and education as growth (Dewey, 1972, p. 36-76). The dialectic of pedagogical action has been inscribed in the canon of educational studies. This approach was articulated by the classics of humanistic pedagogy, such as Theodor Litt, who entitled one of his most important works *Führen oder Wachsenlassen. Eine Erörterung des pädagogischen Grundproblems* ("*To Guide or Let Grow: A Discussion of the Fundamental Problem of Pedagogy*," 1927), and in Poland

by Bogdan Nawroczyński with his work *Swoboda i przymus w wychowaniu* ("*Freedom and Coercion in Education*," 1929). However, whereas in the first phase of the development of pedagogy, the power of directive influence and the power of emancipation were attributed to the intentional will of individuals and social groups, through critical theory and the anthropology of mimesis, the power of education has been exposed as hidden, symbolic, and cultural violence.

Considerable space in the volume *The Dialectic of Power* is devoted to the interpretation of the thought of René Girard, the author of classic works of modern cultural anthropology, such as *La Violence et le sacrè* (1972; English: *Violence and the Sacred*, 1977; Polish: *Sacrum i przemoc*, 2019) or *Le Bouc* Èmissaire (1982; English: "The Scapegoat" 1982; Polish: *Kozioł ofiarny*, 1987) and many others. Our intention has been to read Girard's works hermeneutically. The central dimension of such a reading is scientific, but social and cultural mimesis is a timeless phenomenon, and, especially in times of crises, its practical consequences tend to reveal themselves in glaring ways.

Girard's achievements are interdisciplinary. They fit into the subject domains of cultural anthropology, philosophy, communication sciences, sociology, religious studies, theology, and pedagogy. For this reason, we invited representatives of various disciplines from research centers on various continents to contribute to the volume. Each article includes information on the authors' affiliations. Our intention was to accentuate not only the interdisciplinary and multifaceted approach, but also the pedagogical relevance and implications.

The volume we submit to readers broadens the spectrum of inquiry. While Girard remains an important point of reference, our research and reflections include other perspectives on the dialectic of power. The aim is not to present a hermeneutical synthesis of Girard's work, but to enrich the body of knowledge by adding new hermeneutical and pedagogical inspirations. Hence, in addition to Girard, reference is made to representatives of philosophical and pedagogical hermeneutics, critical theory, and the history of hermeneutic research in pedagogy.

*The Dialectic of Power* is a result of international collaboration between the International Institute for Hermeneutics (https://www.iih-hermeneutics.org/), the Faculty of Artes Liberales at the University of Warsaw, and the Faculty of Social Sciences at the Christian Theological Academy in Warsaw. Our teamwork began in 2021 as an international collaborative research project, *Philosophy, Education, Power, and Violence*. Apart from individual consultations, we held several seminars with our colleagues from the University of

Coimbra, the University of British Columbia, Arizona State University, the Chinese University of Hong Kong, and the University of Scranton. In cooperation with the Institute of Cultural Studies at the University of Bialystok, we organized an international conference in Bialystok in 2023, *Authority, Power, and Violence*. With these initiatives, we had the opportunity to discuss our contributions and respond to one another in a hermeneutically hospitable manner. As the volume editors, we are grateful for the comments we received at those gatherings. We are also profoundly indebted to the reviewers, whose often detailed comments and suggestions we treated with the utmost editorial attention. The quality of the final result is an effect of constructive and creative collaboration between many scholars.

Our international collaboration also expresses an important aspect of our shared responsibility for the inhabited world. In the true sense of οἰκουμένη, we are aware of the blessings and challenges of dwelling in the world with Others. Rooted in the biblical tradition of the New Testament, we understand οἰκουμένῃ as the world that is the milieu of God's reconciling mission: The gospel of the reigning of God will be proclaimed in the whole world: καὶ κηρυχθήσεται τοῦτο τὸ εὐαγγέλιον τῆς βασιλείας ἐν ὅλῃ τῇ οἰκουμένῃ (Mt 24:14). Thus, our task is to grow in exercising our personal responsibility for the art of living together in our rapidly globalizing household. By widening our horizons, we need to take seriously the concerns of the whole planet. Ecology, from its etymological roots, is the true Λόγος of our home, οἶκος. We have to listen to this Λόγος and respond to its disclosure. Integral ecology is the only way to approach our common home.

This approach has to be an expression of synodality (συν, together, and way, ὅδος), walking together, thinking together, being inspiring and inspired. It means to search together for having hope in our divided and conflicted world. This common walk in the academic world means constantly exceeding our limits to be a source of life for our common home and all those who live in it. The notion of synodality is rooted in the primacy of conversation that is virtually impossible without permanent conversion. Only when we face each other in going through what needs to be understood (διάλογος) do we recognize the essential incompleteness of each other on our own. This incompleteness is the horizon of the human Dasein as finite, lingual, historical, and temporal. It is in conversation that we experience incompleteness uncovered by the presence of the Other. We discover the unmistakable otherness of the Other's points of view. This essential difference can be truly an obstacle to honestly and openly falling into a conversation. The recognition of the indispensability of the Other and our mutual incompleteness can successfully

open up the space for a conversation. A new opening can be initiated, an opening that happens beyond our wanting and doing, especially when we comprehend that this extraordinary power comes from God and not from us: ἵνα ἡ ὑπερβολὴ τῆς δυνάμεως ᾖ τοῦ Θεοῦ καὶ μὴ ἐξ ἡμῶν (2 Cor 4: 7). St. Paul is very vocal about this power and its "surpassingness" (ἡ ὑπερβολὴ τῆς δυνάμεως). The excess, ἡ ὑπερβολὴ, the surpassing excellence, is freely bestowed on us if we are willing to open ourselves up and respond to being addressed by God (*Angesprochensein*).

Crossing borders in an intimate conversation means communal discernment and, above all, learning together. In our thinking and acting, we have to recognize that, as human beings, we form ourselves into something (*sich zu etwas bilden*) (Gadamer, 1980, p. 139-140; 1998). This forming helps us to develop our (ἤθος), which is a necessary condition for exercising freedom and responsibility in our living with Others (*Mitsein*, *Mit-Anderen-in-einer-Gemeinschaft-Sein*). Alasdair MacIntyre writes (1991, p. 58):

> There ought not be two histories, one of political and moral action and one of political and moral theorizing, because there were not two pasts, one populated only by actions, the other only by theories. Every action is the bearer and expression of more or less theory-laden beliefs and concepts; every piece of theorizing and every expression of belief is a political and moral action.

Ethics is not an additional reflection on our thinking and acting. As human beings, we always think and act ethically, albeit not always consciously and responsibly. Education toward responsibility calls for sharpening the hermeneutic senses, because we are not endowed with the animal instinct that orients us toward self-preservation and continuation of life. Therefore, those who have a *why* to live can bear with almost any *how* (Frankl, 1962, p. 126).[1] To face life is the ultimate call to which we have to give a response. "Each man is questioned by life; and he can only answer to life by answering for his own life; to life he can only respond by being responsible" (Frankl, 1962, p. 131).

*Bildung* can be perceived as constant formation to synodality, and is thus the never-ending formation to discernment. It is the process of intense collaboration that is oriented toward walking together and searching together (Nipkow, 1990). In this life-costing and life-giving togetherness, we can discover the true meaning of the right measure (*das richtige Mass*, μέτριον,

[1] This leitmotif in Frankl is actually a quotation from Friedrich Nietzsche.

rather than μέτρον).2 In the present educational context, it is particularly important to refer to the right measure rather than a rule and formula that can be obtained and applied whenever needed. Everyone needs to know the right measure, but it cannot be taught in any objectifiable way. It can only be slowly experienced by a person who is formed and transformed. It is a matter of maturing in the ability to discern and judge. We have a compelling example in a biblical story from Exodus 16:4-35. God listened to the cry of Moses and rained bread from heaven. The Israelites were miraculously fed in the desert. Some people gathered a large amount. Some gathered a little. But when they measured what they had collected, there was no shortage, and none left over, no excess and no deficiency. Everyone figured out just what they needed. The right measure (τὸ μέτριον) was clearly not the measure in the sense of the amount gathered, but rather more the fitting (τὸ πρέπον), the opportune (τὸν καιρόν), and the necessary (τὸ δέον) (Márquez, 2006; Mathiesen, 2014).

For Gadamer, Bildung in its multidimensional aspects as formation, self-formation, and cultivation, encompasses what is happening in us and to us when we live in our *Lebenswelt*. This happening takes place in language. Being is language: "Being that can be understood is language" (Gadamer, 2020, p. 470).3 As the bearer of tradition, language

> is by no means simply an instrument, a tool. For it is in the nature of the tool that we master its use, which is to say we take it in hand and lay it aside when it has done its service.…Rather, in all knowledge of

[2] The distinction between the practicality and criteria of μέτριον and μέτρον is thematized in an ethical context in Aristotle, *Nicomachean Ethics,* 1096a.20.

[3] "*Sein, das verstanden werden kann, ist Sprache*": "In language Being uncovers itself and makes itself understandable. '*Being that can be understood is language*.' The dialectic of understanding, in which the same is always understood differently, originates in the infinite constellations of meaning characterizing human thinking. The language contains the one, which is at the same time, the other. Speaking is dwelling in the totality of meaning. Every lingual expression is grounded in that totality, which encompasses all individual expressions and overcomes them. The statement "*Being that can be understood is language*" might be interpreted as participation in that totality of meaning, and not as lingual idealism. In Gadamer's philosophical hermeneutics, Being, thinking, and language constitute the unity of Being and thinking (meaning 'thinking of Being') in language. Thinking is not possible outside of language. That which is thought is experienced as lingual being and is expressed in language, thus not only revealing Being (constituted lingually in itself), but also placing Being within a relationship with Dasein. Thinking and language are indivisible. The object of understanding is always determined by its lingual nature since *to be* means *to exist in language*." (Wiercinski, 2019, p. 62).

> ourselves and in all knowledge of the world, we are always already encompassed by the language that is our own.…Learning to speak does not mean learning to use a preexistent tool for designating a world already somehow familiar to us; it means acquiring a familiarity and acquaintance with the world itself and how it confronts us (Gadamer, 1976, p. 62-63).

Our responsibility toward Being (*Sein*) is disclosed in our commitment to the language we speak:

> You must realize that when you take a word in your mouth, you have not taken up some arbitrary tool which can be thrown in a corner if it doesn't do the job, but you are committed to a line of thought that comes from afar and that reaches on beyond you. you. What we do is always a kind of changing back, which I want to call in a very wide sense "translation"… The translation process fundamentally contains the whole secret of how human beings come to an understanding of the world and communicate with each other. Translation is an indissoluble unity of implicit acts of anticipating, of grasping meaning as a whole beforehand, and explicitly laying down what was thus grasped in advance. All speaking has something of this kind of laying hold in advance and laying down (Gadamer, 2020, p. 552).

This line of thought (*Richtung des Denkens*) is the task of understanding. What is most difficult for us is to bring together the beginning (ἀρχή) and the end (ἔσχατον).

We live in a very terrifying time of instability of peace and war. Peace is much more than just a mere lack of war. It is a permanent striving to develop ourselves toward being genuinely open to the Other. The cultivated person (*der Gebildete*) is not a person who has cumulated an impressive amount of information but somebody open (*aufgeschlossen*) to the unexpected, unpredicted, new, and unknown. The happening of education takes place in the in-between of familiarity and strangeness, concealment and unconcealment, sympathy and suspicion. In this hermeneutic in-between, hermeneutic sensitivity is constantly at play.

> The hermeneutic task consists in not covering up this tension by attempting a naive assimilation but consistently bringing it out. This is why it is part of the hermeneutic approach to project a historical horizon that is different from the horizon of the present. Historical consciousness is aware of its own otherness and hence foregrounds the horizon of the past from its own (Gadamer, 2020, p. 305).

An educated person is capable of embracing a plurality of viewpoints. Following Hegel, this implies being able to turn things around and consider them in various aspects. Therefore, the general characteristic of Bildung indicates:

> keeping oneself open to what is other [*Anderes*]—to other, more universal points of view. It embraces a sense of proportion and distance in relation to itself, and hence consists in rising above itself to universality. To distance oneself from oneself and from one's private purposes means to look at these in the way that others see them (Hegel, 1995, p. 355).

Heraclitus writes in Fragment 18 (Diels & Kranz, 1960): ἐὰν μὴ ἔλπηται, ἀνέλπιστον οὐκ ἐξευρήσει, ἀνεξερεύνητον ἐὸν καὶ ἄπορον — "If you do not expect the unexpected, you will not find it; for it is hard to be sought out and difficult." The undertaking of education is to recognize a multitude of possibilities and develop a corresponding ability to feel addressed by them as tasks. Hope is needed to expect the unexpected. Without transgressing ourselves, without going beyond what is familiar and customary, the unexpected and unpredicted will remain unobtainable and inaccessible. Education is an invitation to progress, develop, and become. It is a way of opening up to the Open, to what comes to us from the future. It is a possibility of approaching the unknown with an open mind and heart in order to let ourselves be formed and transformed. Here, we touch upon and are touched by the phenomenon of learning: To let ourselves be on the way toward understanding that is constantly transgressing the boundaries of the familiar, known, and expected. Only the wise person (φρόνιμος) can do this, and, in turn, it is also the Truth (ἀλήθεια) that only the wise person can recognize in its splendid radiation. The ultimate task of education is living by appropriating wisdom that matures and grows with time. To be a φρόνιμος means to be able to recognize a good wine that is good because it embodies its own history of maturation. However, this is not a matter of the metrical age, but a question of personal development and response to the call that is always individual, personal, and happens in a community with Others.

The paradoxical nature of education is intrinsically connected with the paradoxical nature of language, which is in a permanent state of formation and transformation. Like in the process of landscape formation, the flow from one form into the other is not something that we can project and do, but is rather happening, building itself largely independently from our controlling and determining ambitions. If there is a secret to education, it must

be in pious attentiveness to our *Lebenswelt* in the sense of letting-happen (*Geschehenlassen und Wachsenlassen*). The more we understand that we are less leading our self-education than being led (*sich Erziehenlassen*), the more we can benefit from being constantly gifted. The receiving of the gifts of understanding and maturing involves our active cooperation. It might be very hard work, but it cannot blind the essential insight that great things are happening to us *beyond* our wanting and doing: "I planted the seed, Apollos watered it, but God has been making it grow" — ἐγὼ ἐφύτευσα, Ἀπολλῶς ἐπότισεν, ἀλλὰ ὁ Θεὸς ηὔξανεν (1 Cor 3: 6). Interestingly, the verb αὐξάνω (Latin *augeo*) implies growing, increasing, enlarging, thus indicating the necessity of constant development that becomes the imperative for being a human being in *status viatoris*.

This volume is published in *Studies on the Theory of Education* (*Studia z Teorii Wychowania*), a journal that has an established scholarly reputation in Poland and is published by a university whose mission is to explore social and pedagogical issues in the context of religious, social, and cultural minorities. The publication of this volume, therefore, not only has an academic dimension, but is directly linked to the mandate to conduct critical research on social exclusion and inclusion.

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# The dialectics of power and the irrevocability of time (*Unwiderruflichkeit der Zeit*)

**Abstract:** Power is not merely something external or imposed or a problem to be solved. Rather, power is a task calling for understanding as the mode of being in the world with Others. Power has creative and destructive, challenging and inspiring aspects. As finite human beings thrown into a seemingly overpowering world, we find ourselves in the midst of dynamics and dialectics of power. We have powerful experiences that empower us to respond, to take up the power of faith and the decision to think and be here and now. The hermeneutic experiences of the Gospel, prayer, poetry and art, conversations with ourselves and others, the lives of philosophers, and the power of language all reveal the need for radically responsible approaches to power in lived time. Rather than merely critiquing power, the hermeneutics of power calls for cultivating human attentiveness to power, recognizing the power in and of our lives, and transforming our experiences of power into meaningful events that empower our capacity for timely understanding.

**Keywords:** Power, Finitude, Hermeneutics, Conversation, Time, Poetry.

The hermeneutics of power not only draws in the traditional fields of inquiry explored by philosophers and scholars of power but also more broadly addresses the claims and exigencies of finitude itself. The dialectic of power can thus be deemed to include the myriad forms and dynamics of power and persuasion, ranging from sacrifice to institutional forms and structures, as well as, significantly, the aporias of time that constitute one of the most critical challenges in human life (*eine Lebensfrage*). An essential

aid in dealing with the aporetics of temporality is the poetics of narrativity[1]. To say what is—λέγει τά ἑόυτα—means to tell a story in which the particularities of the said (*das Gesagte*) and the unsaid (*das Ungesagte*) lose their contingency and, in being translated into the language of the Other, acquire a different level of comprehensibility (Arendt, 2006, pp. 223-259). Sharpening the human ability to bring together the end (ἔσχατον, *Endzeit*) with the beginning (ἀρχή, *Anfang*) is one of the ultimate tasks and responsibilities of a human being.

The enigma of time, its essential inscrutability, and the exertion of power are not problems to be solved, but rather genuine tasks for thinking (*Denkauftrag*). The experience of time gives a human being a powerful impetus to be pensive and face life with the required thoughtfulness as a life worth living (Bremer, 2023). We read in Genesis 1:1-3:

׃יִרְאֶ֖ה תְּאֵ֣ום מִיַּמָּ֑שָׁה תֵּא֣ מִיהֶ֔לֵּא אֹרֶ֥ב תִּישָׁאֹ֖רִב
׃מִיָּמָ֔ה יַגֵּ֖פ־לֹ֣עַ תְּפָחֲרָ֑מְ מִיהֹ֔לֵּא חַורָ֣ן מוֹהָ֔תְ יַנֵּ֖פ־לֹ֣עַ דְּשָׁחָ֑וְ וּהבֹ֣ן וּהתְּ֔ הָתָ֖יְהָ יִרְאֶֽהָוְ
׃רוֹאְ־יהִ֖יְ רוֹאְ֑ יהִ֔יְ מִיהֶ֔לֵּא רמֶ֖אֹיַ

ἐν ἀρχῇ ἐποίησεν ὁ θεὸς τὸν οὐρανὸν καὶ τὴν γῆν. ἡ δὲ γῆ ἦν ἀόρατος καὶ
ἀκατασκεύαστος καὶ σκότος ἐπάνω τῆς ἀβύσσου
καὶ πνεῦμα θεοῦ ἐπεφέρετο ἐπάνω τοῦ ὕδατος. καὶ εἶπεν ὁ θεός γενηθήτω φῶς
καὶ ἐγένετο φῶς.

*In principio creavit Deus caelum et terram. Terra autem erat inanis et vacua, et tenebrae erant super faciem abyssi: et spiritus Dei ferebatur super aquas. Dixitque Deus: Fiat lux. Et facta est lux.*

In the beginning, God created the heavens and the earth. Moreover, the earth was invisible; darkness covered the Abyss, and the Spirit of God hovered above the waters. God said, "Let there be light," and there was light. A puzzling adjective, ἀκατασκεύαστος, is used to express the state of the highest potentiality, the concentration of the invisible powers ready to explode, erupt, and come to full disclosure. The Greek καταστροφή comes from καταστρεφφιεν, κατα (down or against), and στρεφφιεν (to turn). For our contemporary mentality, this sounds like a true catastrophe. The self-

[1] The emphasis on the importance of narrative identity is a great accomplishment of Paul Ricoeur. His elaboration on the aporias of time contributes essentially to the hermeneutics of our historical condition See especially Ricoeur, 1988.

revelation of the Trinity is powerfully manifested in those three concise lines of the creation story. Verse one introduces God, the Creator. In verse two, the Spirit is hovering above the waters. And finally, in verse three, we are encountered by the voice of God (*Verbum Dei*). This is the God speaking, the divine λόγος that proclaims and brings into being: God said (רָמָאֹיַו), and there was (יהִיַו) (word and event, *Wort und Ereignis*).

The invisibility and darkness covering the Abyss effectively depict the fundamental chaos. And from this elemental confusion of elements, God's Word establishes the unattainable world. It will be the infinite task of prophets and poets to break into the impenetrable mystery of creation in its *Wirkungsgeschichte*. In the compelling personal conviction of their unique vocation, they know that "the words of a dead man are modified in the guts of the living" (Auden, 1940). Because of the intrinsically impenetrable character of the mystery, approaching it remains an ongoing challenge for the human mind to engage the (pro)visions of the universe. The unfathomable mystery of the primordial coming into being and passing away (like in Aristotle's *On Coming To Be and Passing Away,* Περὶ γενέσεως καὶ φθορᾶς) remains the real challenge for the human being confronted with finitude and the facticity of being thrown into the world (*die ungefragte Geworfenheit des Daseins in die Welt und die Unausweichlichkeit des menschlichen Schicksals*). Finding ourselves in the world will always be the most demanding and revealing task of being a human being.

The catastrophic dimension of the life of the world and the human being in the world has accompanied the world throughout its history. The perspective of instant change terrifies and empowers human beings in facing the facticity of their being in the world. Thinking about the potential outcome of the primordial catastrophe stimulates the human mind to differentiate power's creative and destructive aspects. It also invites us to focus on the intrinsic relationship between power and violence and to critically address the human (dis)ability to question our own susceptibility to self-deception.

In Proverbs 3:5, we read: "Trust in the Lord with all your heart and lean not on your own understanding." In the Septuagint, "ἴσθι πεποιθὼς ἐν ὅλῃ καρδίᾳ ἐπὶ θεῷ, ἐπὶ δὲ σῇ σοφίᾳ μὴ ἐπαίρου," and in the Vulgate, "*habe fiduciam in Domino ex toto corde tuo et ne innitaris prudentiae tuae*." Here, the Greek πείθω indicates that the meaning of trust (*fiducia*) refers to the conviction of finding tranquility in God. It denotes becoming a fully dedicated friend of God. Following Kierkegaard, Paul Tillich (1964; 2000) stresses the determination of the decision of faith (*Entschlossenheit des Glaubens*), which is the existential drama of making the fundamental choice for God, *optio*

*fundamentalis* (Kuzmicki, 2015). The task of a human being is to recognize the eternal now as the gift (*Gabe*) and the challenge (*Aufgabe*) that comes along with being gifted. Thus, the true wisdom of life is the matter of opening our own understanding to Transcendence. This opening encompasses what we do, but it is predominantly what is happening to us and in us when we let ourselves be open (*sich Öffnenlassen*). Being filled with the Holy Spirit, we can speak in different languages. Different languages (εταίρες γλώσσες) are different ways of bearing witness to our being (with)in God. (Acts 2:4) The variety of languages expresses the plurality of the *Lebenswelten*, ways of life, and finding ourselves in life in its own thrownness (*Geworfenheit*). In the plurality of languages and through it, we testify to the search for the meaning of our existence in the world. This plurality discloses the blessing of the richness of individual languages. Speaking our own language (ὅτι ἤκουον εἷς ἕκαστος τῇ ἰδίᾳ διαλέκτῳ λαλούντων αὐτῶν, Acts 2:6) is much more than speaking our mother tongue. It is speaking the language that speaks (*die Sprache spricht*)[2]. Therefore, διάλεκτος here encompasses one's native language as well as a mode of conversation and discourse. Consequently, it is rather a matter of understanding language as the way of being in the world (*modus existendi*). Decisiveness (*Entschlossenheit*) in life and attunement to time so as to recognize καιρὸς calls upon a human being to bring together the end with the beginning in the here and now. This is the meaning of the opening of books: βιβλία ἠνοίχθησαν (Rev 20:12). Therefore, the vision of the time when the books will be open, and the deeds will be read from the book of life, βιβλίον τῆς ζωῆς, conveys the full significance of the capacity for decision-making and judgment in the present moment and interpreting what needs to be understood by bringing it into the Open (*in das Offene bringen*).

In the existentially challenging event of crucifixion, Jesus speaks to one of the convicts: "I tell you solemnly, today you will be with me in paradise": Ἀμήν σοι λέγω, σήμερον μετ' ἐμοῦ ἔσῃ ἐν τῷ Παραδείσῳ. (Lk 23:43) In this instance, today, σήμερον, means a favorable time for embracing salvation, which is graciously offered by Jesus's redemptive mission fulfilled on the cross. Jesus points out what is currently happening. Now is the moment of faith that brings a criminal, κακοῦργος, literally an evil worker, into the presence of God. It is his personal καιρός. Ἀμήν σοι λέγω expresses Jesus's intention that this should really happen: So let it be (*Geschehenlassen*). His

[2] "Die Sprache allein ist es, die eigentlich spricht. Und sie spricht einsam… Der Mensch vermag nur zu sprechen, insofern er… auf sie hört. … Das Wort verschafft dem Ding erst das Sein" (Heidegger, 1959, p. 259ff.).

word not only describes reality but also creates it: The crucified κακοῦργος enters the realm of God, where death loses its authority, κυριεύω (Rom 6:9). The moment of faith (*Augenblick des Glaubens*) opens up a vision (*Blick*) that allows seeing (*Sehenlassen*) the anticipated reality in that which shows itself as it seems fitting.

Thus, faith is neither knowledge nor feeling but a quest for the ultimate meaning of human existence in the dynamics of faith (Tillich, 2001). It demands a personal decisiveness (*Entschlossenheit*), a sudden realization, and a moment of clear vision. Something entirely new, unexpected, unknown, and startling breaks into life in an instant and ultimately challenges a person. This moment is not just a happening in a distant future but requires a decision here and now (εδώ και τώρα) to welcome radical transformation. In this opportune moment, existential uncertainty will not be overcome, but in the passion of faith (Kierkegaard, 1998; Lee, 2009; Westphal, 2011) will disclose the imperative of absolute dependence on God (Schleiermacher)[3].

By transcending the infinite distance to God, a human being might discover the overwhelming power of God's calling (*Angesprochensein*) and answer with the ultimate submission to faith. The radical impossibility of disposing of time (*radikale Unverfügbarkeit der Zeit*) and determining its meaning reminds us, often very painfully, of what we cannot decide and resolve but only live in and experience here and now. It calls for an understanding of lived time (Wierciński, 2018). St. Augustine (1950), in his *Confessiones*, Book 11, Chapter 14, beautifully renders the enigma of time: *Neither Time Past nor Future, But the Present Only, Really Is*:

> Those two times, therefore, past and future, how are they, when even the past now is not; and the future is not as yet? But should the present be always present, and should it not pass into time past, time truly it could not be, but eternity. If, then, time present — if it be time — only comes into existence because it passes into time past, how do we say that even this is, whose cause of being is that it shall not be — namely, so that we cannot truly say that time is, unless because it tends not to be?

[3] It was Friedrich Schleiermacher who, speaking of God, coined the phrase "the feeling of absolute dependence" (Schleiermacher, 2016, p. 81).

Blaise Pascal, as a careful reader of Tradition, has a sharp feeling for the now, for the necessity of relentless reorientation toward the constantly fleeing away present. The *Augenblick* never *is*: When we want to catch it, it has either already passed or is not yet. The impossibility of capturing *now* motivates the thinker to dedicate himself to what escapes his conceptualization (Pascal, 2008, p. 9):

> We never keep to the present. We recall the past; we anticipate the future as if we found it too slow in coming and were trying to hurry it up, or we recall the past as if to stay its too rapid flight. We are so unwise that we wander about in times that do not belong to us, and do not think of the only one that does; so vain that we dream of times that are not and blindly flee the only one that is. The fact is that the present usually hurts. We thrust it out of sight because it distresses us, and if we find it enjoyable, we are sorry to see it slip away. We try to give it the support of the future, and think how we are going to arrange things over which we have no control for a time we can never be sure of reaching. Let each of us examine his thoughts; he will find them wholly concerned with the past or the future. We almost never think of the present, and if we do think of it, it is only to see what light it throws on our plans for the future. The present is never our end. The past and the present are our means, the future alone our end. Thus, we never actually live but hope to live, and since we are always planning how to be happy, it is inevitable that we should never be so.

Pascal is as realistic and bitter as it would seem fitting to be for someone who faces the paradox of existence and dramatically experiences the confusion of voices without wanting to suffocate those that are challenging or clouding his vision (Wierciński, 2011). He reminds us that a philosopher asks fundamental questions that can(not) be answered. The task of human life is to live the life of a questioning being, *homo quaerens*. What is essential in the passion for questioning is to see questioning as the vocation of a human being to be a seeker of truth. In the desire to question what can be inquired into (*fragwürdig*), the pilgrim toward the future is called not to attach oneself to earthly matters and places but to see everything in the horizon of the eternal now. The time is now: "The time is fulfilled, and the reigning of God is at hand; repent and believe in the Gospel" — Πεπλήρωται ὁ καιρὸς καὶ ἤγγικεν ἡ βασιλεία τοῦ Θεοῦ μετανοεῖτε καὶ πιστεύετε ἐν τῷ εὐαγγελίῳ (Mk 1:15). The good news is that God is, and not only will be, among us, and we can experience our time as καιρὸς. It is entirely up to us and our radical decision

for life to convert (μετανοεῖτε) and to believe in the Word that has the power to illuminate, form, and transform us. Understanding our time as καιρὸς, as this opportune now to respond to the Revelation of the dynamics of the reigning of God, discloses something absolutely essential about our perception of the world (*Wirklichkeitsverständnis*). The verb ἐγγίζω tells us that God is here. He came near. In Luke 17:21, Jesus says that his reigning is among us: ἡ βασιλεία τοῦ Θεοῦ ἐντὸς ὑμῶν ἐστιν. This "among us," ἐντὸς ὑμῶν, is the real presence in extreme closeness. To understand this, we need to recognize the human and the divine as the unity that is, in itself, a dynamic unity (Eckhart, 1955, 2007; Schirpenbach, 2004; Beierwaltes, 1980, pp. 97-104), i.e., a unity in permanent movement rather than a reality in the sense of a measurable inventory of scientific inquiry. The task is to perceive understanding as the capacity of insight (*Einsicht*), of comprehending in a vision (*Blick*), and not disassembling, dismantling, and breaking down into individual elements. It is like any reading that brings us into the Open and does not remain at the level of deciphering and the pedantic clarification of details.

Apart from proclaiming the reigning of God among us, Jesus tells us that the time will come when there will be no more time. In explaining the parable of the tares, ζιζάνιον (Mt 13:37-43), he mentions the time of harvest (θερισμός), the time of the end, θερισμὸς συντέλεια αἰῶνός (v. 39). Here time is expressed as αἰών in the sense of αἰών μέλλων, the future age, which as ὁ αἰών ὁ ἐρχόμενος means the era after Jesus's return in glory. Then, what has matured in our lives, what fruit has grown, what is truly from God, and what is not, will be seen. What comes from God "will shine like the sun," ἐκλάμψουσιν ὡς ὁ ἥλιος (Mt 13: 43). The others will perish like the weeds consumed by the fire (Mt 13:40). It takes time to bear the fruit for which we were born. Discernment and patience are indispensable.

**The pluriformity of expressions of reality: the power of poetry (*Macht der Dichtung*)**

Coping with the aporetics of time uncovers the pluriformity of expressions of reality. The Stoics were already aware of something in our thinking that is there, however, in a different way than the spoken word. They called this meditative utterance the immanent word, λόγος ἐνδιάθετος. It was clearly not a particular language. St Augustine coined it as the *verbum interius* (Wierciński, 2019, pp. 60-90). When we speak, we are searching for a word that can express what we wish to convey. This spoken word, λόγος προφορικός, is the word that we seek and cannot ever be fully satisfied with. Every time we say a word, we realize that there is so much more to be

expressed. The totality of what needs to be understood contains the said (das Gesagte) and the unsaid (das Ungesagte). Sharpening the hermeneutic ear makes the experience of searching for the right word more painful but also more meaningful (Wierciński, 2008; Risser, 2019). The ways of searching are very different and stretch over the whole of human life. It is a matter of experimenting, inventing, and, above all, listening to the world in its uninterrupted play of revealing and concealing[4]. The seeker of the right word is the eternal pilgrim, who knows that there is a perfectly fitting word, but it is unattainable for a finite being. The permanent (dis)satisfaction awakens the human spirit and brings the seeker to the poetic word. In the proximity of poetry, the pilgrim is nourished with the ever-changing constellations of meaning that disclose the inexhaustibility of understanding the world, which is our *Lebenswelt*.

The blessing of different languages is much more than just a lucky instance of speaking various languages. It is about the different ways of expressing the world and thus living poetically in the world (Heidegger, 2000). Paul Celan says:

> Ein Dröhnen: es ist/ A rumble: it is
> die Wahrheit selbst/ truth itself
> unter die Menschen/ entered
> getreten, / among people
> mitten ins Metapherngestöber./ right into the flurry of metaphors.

The poet of the word and the image, Paul Celan, conveys the meaning of truth in a remarkably affecting way. It would take the life of a philosopher to say something about truth that has this penetrating and permanent effect of facing the truth. Celan's radical expression of the preoccupation with the

[4] "Being eludes being noticed by unconcealing itself in a being. This holds true for its truth, in the same way. Keeping to that way is the earlier way of its unconcealment. The early way of keeping to that way is Aletheia. By bringing the un-concealment of a being, the early way actually makes the concealment of Being possible. Yet the concealment remains in the course of keeping itself to itself, by way of refusing to let go of itself. We can call this illumining of its keeping-to-itself in the truth about its nature the epoch of Being… The epoch of Being belongs to itself. It is thought out of experiencing the forgetfulness of Being. The epochal nature of its destiny, which comprises what can actually be called the history of the world, comes from the epoch of Being. Every time when Being holds on to its destiny, the 'world' suddenly and unexpectedly happens… However, the equivalent to the epochal character of Being, which we can experience in the first instance, is the ecstatic character of Da-sein (being-there). The epochal nature of Being makes the ecstatic nature of Da-sein happen." (Heidegger, 1963, pp. 333-334).

fate of a human being experiencing the bursting misery of humanity testifies to the poetic and prophetic capacity to transcend the tragedy of an individual and capture it in becoming a conversation, not with the specific reader but rather with "the Other." In the poetic word, the poetic voice becomes a witness to/for the other (Gadamer, 1997).

Close to poetic sensitivity is the mystical vision. Poets and thinkers are privileged by Heidegger for their compelling engagement with what shows itself. It is this ability to hear the roaring sound of truth and dwell in its air that is necessary for Dasein in its being in the world. And precisely into this world entered the Son of God, who said of himself: I am the Way, the Truth, and the Life:Ἐγώ εἰμι ἡ ὁδὸς καὶ ἡ ἀλήθεια καὶ ἡ ζωή (J 14:6). Jesus uses the self-revelatory formula "I am," ἐγώ εἰμι, recalling the self-revelation of God to Moses in the burning bush. (Ex 3:14) He continues speaking to people, just as God addressed human beings and placed his creation in language (*in die Sprache stellen*) (Rosenzweig, 1988). Language (*Sprache*) is always an address (*Ansprache*). It is a conversation sui generis. Hence, Friedrich Hölderlin, in the bliss of poetic inspiration, can say, "We are a conversation, and we listen to each other"[5]. In partnership with God, the human being received the world as language (*Sprache*). The quest to hear the voice of God's self-revelation and self-manifestation will remain the infinite task of interpreting the nearness of truth and our dwelling in this revealing and concealing nearness. "If anyone has ears to hear, let him hear" (Mk 7:16, KJV): εἴ τις ἔχει ὦτα ἀκούειν ἀκουέτω. The verb ἀκούω refers to the faculty of hearing, listening, and comprehending by hearing. Matthew, in his Gospel, quotes Jesus: "ὑμῶν δὲ μακάριοι οἱ ὀφθαλμοὶ ὅτι βλέπουσιν, καὶ τὰ ὦτα ὑμῶν ὅτι ἀκούουσιν": "Blessed are your eyes, for they see: and your ears, for they hear" (Mt 13:16 KJV). This clearly means that having eyes and seeing and having ears and hearing are not necessarily the same. Without going into the rich Tradition of the Hebrew Bible, with a strong accent on listening to the voice of God versus Greek emphasis on ocularity, we can point out the importance of understanding that goes beyond the faculty of seeing and hearing.

A poem (*ein Gedicht*) is a particular case of conversation. Martin Buber, the philosopher of dialogue, understands a poem as that which is being spoken (*Gesprochenheit*) (Buber, 2003, pp. 125-138). The word stands on its own. The poetic word brings the holding of nearness into the experience. The fleeing of time is brought to standstill in the poem. In its essence, the poetic

[5] "Seit ein Gespräch wir sind und hören voneinander" (Hölderlin, 1946; cf. Wierciński, 2011).

word is always a response. In the transience of time, the word survives and endures as the persisting nearness, which opens access to the Open. Poetry is not determined from the perspective of traditional poetics or as a style of literature. It is asserted from the side of thinking as a "saying in the way of a showing revealing" (*weisende Offenbarmachen*).

As such, poetry is concerned with ontology and truth, grasping the meaning of what it is to be a poet, what a poem is, and what makes up the enormous calling power of the poetic word (*Rufmacht des dichterischen Wortes*). The poet says what shows itself. In this sense, the poet brings it out of concealment into language. This does not mean that it will be brought into unconcealment. Rather, it is bringing into the Open. Therefore, and not despite of it, the claim of poetry is to say the truth. In that sense, the poetic word calls its listener into a relationship. Thus, being in a relationship is the happening (*das Ereignis*) of the word. Reading a poem is not objectifying, surveying, or classifying it, not distancing from the Other, but entering the relationship that is demanded by its imperative claim. A genuine conversation with a poem can only happen when there is no other means in sight apart from an encounter with the Other. Interpreting or reading poetry needs to keep the unique revelatory meaning of poetry undisturbed in its infinite call for understanding. The fundamental task is to understand a human being in their opening toward Transcendence and not in the negation of Transcendence in order to reduce the discovery to the explanation of the immanent world.

Interpretation (*Deutung*) is the art of pointing out in the Open (*Zeigen in das Offene*). To disclose something (*etwas deuten*) is not the same as to point at or toward something (*auf etwas deuten*). The poet is someone who, by pointing out into the Open, is a sign (*ein Zeichen*) of the reality that is the realm of poetry. Moreover, the poet is, *par excellence*, the interpreter of the happening of poetry, this powerful pointing out (*das Deuten deuten*). The interpretive pointing out (*ein deutendes Deuten*) of poetic reflection is inseparable from poetry. In contrast, literary and philosophical analysis presupposes the transition within σοφία from the wise man's original role as a poet to a new role as a thinker. The poet as the wise man will no longer be called σοφός, but φιλόσοφος.

Understanding *what* is said in the poem and *how* it is said is in no way sufficient to find ourselves in the realm of poetry. Poems are not casual pieces of writing that require some scholarly deciphering and interpretation. Understanding a poem is not a matter of correctly deciphering all the words and parts of the poem. There may be a rapture in understanding (*Bruch im*

*Verstehen*) that requires corrective or explanatory action. However, reading poems demands a fundamental attitude toward poetry as the revelation of Being that discloses something to us that we cannot gain from any other sources. In that sense, poetry rules over us and calls us to be the life-bearer and witnesses of the power of poetry (Miłosz, 1983).

The power of poetry resides in exposing the historical being of human Dasein to that which exists (*das Seiende im Ganzen*)[6]. Therefore, the bigger the claim of poetry, the more resilient the reader's attitude to recognize its privileged mode of disclosing Being in its being Being. The task of understanding the power of poetry is to listen to its revelatory voice and not to work toward constructing an image of the world (*Weltbild*) and its representation. Heidegger encourages us to discover the metaphysical place of poetry (*metaphysischer Ort der Dichtung*) from and toward which poetry's power opens up and remains prevailing in its revelatory capacity. We gain insight into this metaphysical place of poetry from within the prevailing mood (*Grundstimmung*), which Heidegger summarizes as "the necessity, which is holy mourning, and yet clearly present (*die heilig trauernde, aber bereite Bedrängnis*)"[7]. In this fundamental mood in which Dasein is open to itself and its *Lebenswelt*, the opening of Being happens (*ereignet sich*), and the truth shines forth. The founding power of poetry (*stifftende Macht der Dichtung*) is precisely the capacity to create the prevailing mood, a mode of disposedness (*Befindlichkeit*) as the horizon of the revelation of the truth of Being. Poetry is primary discourse (*Gespräch*), and, as conversation, is the origin of language (*Sprache*). As lingual (*sprachliche*) beings, we are able to listen to what is said, and the discourse is primordial with saying.

Like poetic speech, encountering the work of art is an event (*Ereignis*) in which the work of art speaks to us, thus inviting us to a conversation. The

[6] Heidegger often speaks of the power of poetry (*Macht der Dichtung*): "Der Anspruch und die Macht der Dichtung eröffnen sich immer befremdlicher. Aber — unsere Zweifel und unser Widerstand steigern sich ebenso. Denn: Mag auch in Wahrheit das Wesen der Dichtung darin beruhen, daß sie das geschichtliche Dasein des Menschen dem Seienden im Ganzen aussetzt, so bleibt doch fraglich, inwiefern gerade ein Sprachgebilde, ein bloßes Gespräch, dergleichen in so ursprünglicher Weise soll noch leisten können." (Heidegger, 1999, p. 59).

[7] "Wir wollen erst einmal in den Machtbereich dieser Dichtung Eingang finden, also nicht vielerlei von den Gedichten kennenlernen, um daraus ein Weltbild zusammenzubauen. Innerhalb des Machtbereichs der Dichtung müssen wir zuvor den Ort bestimmen, aus dem her und auf den zu die Macht der Dichtung sich eröffnet und mächtig bleibt. Dieser metaphysische Ort der Dichtung ist umgrenzt durch das, was wir als die Grundstimming heraushoben: die heilig trauernde, aber bereite Bedrängnis." (Heidegger, 1999, p. 139).

work of art lives in the world we inhabit. It is our common *Lebenswelt*. In this shared belongingness to the world, we also belong to each other. Living with the work of art happens in the horizon of witness and testimony, in which the reciprocity occurs and is at work not only at the conscious level but far beyond our wanting and doing—hence, the enormous significance of the work of art in *Bildung* as formation.

**The dialectic of prayer**

In our spiritual world of experience (*seelische Erfahrungswelt*), we encounter another mode of understanding the word that is spoken (*das Wort, das gesprochen wird*). It is the word that speaks to the Other (*anspricht*). Understanding of this word is exegesis, par excellence, ἐξήγησις, a reading from, an exercise of ἐξηγεῖσθαι, of leading out toward the disclosure of the possible meaning of the text. Similarly to the interpretation of poetry, biblical exegesis cannot aim at redescribing the original in order to simplify access to the intended or expected meaning. It is rather a meticulous attempt to grasp how the text can be experienced and understood by the Hearer of the Word (*Höhrer des Wortes, Rahner*)[8]. Here, the German *vernehmen* can be literally translated as understood. However, we can render it with listening to (*gehört*), if we follow the old Hebraic tradition of the hermeneutic ear attuned to God's word in his self-revelation and manifestation. A particular instance of speaking to God in one's own being addressed by him (*Ansgesprochensein*) is prayer.

A beautiful narrative composed by Judith (Jdt 9:11) as a prayer uncovers the dialectics of power. At the time when "the incense of that evening was offered in Jerusalem in the house of the Lord, Judith cried with a loud voice" (v. 1). In a congenial rendering of the King James Bible, the simplicity and sweetness of her prayer receive an extremely powerful effect: "For thy power standeth not in multitude nor thy might in strong men: for thou art a God of the afflicted, a helper of the oppressed, an upholder of the weak, a protector of the forlorn, a savior of them that are without hope." (v. 11) Judith's speaking of God compiles a stunning catalog of divine names: God of the afflicted (ταπεινῶν εἶ Θεός, *Gott der Schwachen*), helper of the oppressed (ἐλαττόνων εἶ βοηθός, *Helfer der Geringen*), upholder of the weak (ἀντιλήπτωρ ἀσθενούντων, *Beistand der Armen*), protector of the forlorn

[8] Rahner (1963, p. 88): "Der Mensch aber ist Geist (welche Bestimmung sein ganzes Menschsein trägt) und hat so ein offenes Ohr für jegliches Wort, das aus dem Munde des Ewigen kommen kann."

(ἀπεγνωσμένων σκεπαστής, *Beschützer der Verachteten*), savior of them that are without hope (ἀπηλπισμένων σωτήρ, *Retter der Hoffnungslosen*). It took the wisdom of a gorgeous and bright widow not to be complacent with realizing that the poor will always be among us (Mt 26:11, Mk 14:7), but instead to openly proclaim the vision of the benevolent God, who is our Emmanuel, God with us. Judith knows very well that the power of God is not in multitude (οὐ γὰρ ἐν πλήθει τὸ κράτος σου), nor is the might of God in strong men (οὐδὲ ἡ δυναστεία σου ἐν ἰσχύουσιν), but (ἀλλὰ) he is the God of the dejected (ταπεινῶν εἶ Θεός), helper of the poor (ἐλαττόνων εἶ βοηθός), protector of the weak (ἀντιλήπτωρ ἀσθενούντων), shelter for the desperate (ἀπεγνωσμένων σκεπαστής), and the savior of those in despair (ἀπηλπισμένων σωτήρ).

With her striking litany of humility, dignity, and desire, Judith expresses her faith in God, whose strength is not in number and whose reign does not depend on the strong. Βασιλεία τοῦ Θεοῦ, which will become the foundational notion of Christianity, emphasizes the ruling activity of God over the physical meaning of God's kingdom. Even though Judith uses the word ἡ δυναστεία while speaking of God's governing over people and the created world, she is convinced that the way of God's protecting and taking care of creation does not depend on the power of the strong (ἡ δυναστεία σου ἐν ἰσχύουσιν). Judith's insightful prayer is an event, a καιρός, that irrupts in the midst of an already sacred time, piercing the tension between tradition and revelation in a fusion of hierophany and kratophany. Judith lets the power of the καιρός happen to her, move her, speak through her, and she shares it with others, letting them hear and see it in the moment of its happening. God's reign does not depend on the power of the strong, but rather is disclosed through the address and the beholding of the validity of the lived experience.

The dialectic of power discloses the divine logic that is based on the relationship with the Creator. The depth of this logic lies in recognition of the futility of merely human endeavors, like in the enchanting beginning of Psalm 127, again in King James's translation: "Except the Lord build the house, they labor in vain that build it: except the Lord keep the city, the watchman waketh but in vain. It is vain for you to rise up early, to sit up late, to eat the bread of sorrows: for so he giveth his beloved sleep."

What is so inspiring and remarkable in the careful reading of this Psalm is that it discloses the belonging together (*das Zusammengehören*) of building, dwelling, and thinking in its impenetrable relationship to the beginning (ἀρχή) and its eschatological fulfillment (ἔσχατα). From the very

beginning (ἀπ ἀρχῆς, Mt 19: 4), from the foundation of the world (ἀπὸ καταβολῆς κόσμου, Mt 25:34), means here the actual beginning and also the vantage point from which the purpose of creation will be seen in its complexity and fullness. Creation and consummation are not just the marks of chronological or sequential time (χρόνος), but belong essentially together and have to be thought together. The beginning and the end are always there in their primordial relationship. Even if we are aware of their inseparability, we must think them in their oneness. The Evangelist Matthew gives us a powerful lesson in thinking time in its divine provenance when the beginning (*Anfang*) cannot be separated from the end, and thinking together the beginning and the end is not a genius discovery of the thinker, but rather a humble reading (*ablesen*) from the disclosure that presents itself to us in the self-manifestation of the trinitarian God. What happens (*sich ereignet*) between the beginning and the end, ἀρχὴ καὶ τέλος, is this mysterious entrusting and belonging to each other, when the positioning and repositioning is the perpetual dance that proceeds without losing anything that is unique and irreplaceable in each of them, and, at the same time, without adding anything to them, since they belong to this simple primordial unity, which is perfection in itself. In Rev 1:8, we read: "I am the Alpha and the Omega," says the Lord God, "who is, and who was, and who is to come, the Almighty" —Ἐγώ εἰμι τὸ Ἄλφα καὶ τὸ Ὦ, λέγει Κύριος ὁ Θεός, ὁ ὢν καὶ ὁ ἦν καὶ ὁ ἐρχόμενος, ὁ Παντοκράτωρ. The Lord God speaks of himself using the well-known formula "I am", ἐγώ εἰμι. What is indicative of him is that he is time, time is his, and his time frames us, shapes our experience, and becomes our time.

The actual power of human beings is to recognize that it is God who lets them dwell (*Seinlassen and Wohnenlassen*) in the world with others and work on building (*Bauenlasssen*) and thinking (*Denkenlassen*). Thinking is not so much what we do, but what is happening in us and to us when we dwell in our pursuit of a good life and happiness. Blaise Pascal (1958) magnificently summarizes the paradox of the human search for happiness:

> What else does this craving, and this helplessness, proclaim but that there once was in man a true happiness of which now remain to him only the mark and empty trace, which he in vain tries to fill from all his surroundings, seeking from things absent the help he does not obtain in things present. But these are all inadequate because the infinite Abyss can only be filled by an infinite and immutable object, that is to say, only by God Himself.

Pascal died at age 39, "being perfected in a short time, he fulfilled long years" (Wisdom 4:13). His genius was to recognize the infinite Abyss in the human heart that can only be filled by the divine. It was the actual work of a δαιμόνϊον, the Spirit that dwells in the genius[9]. Pascal firmly believed that only the personal God, not the God of the Philosophers, can satisfy the human hunger for more. This fulfillment is the promise, ἐπαγγελία, that we can treasure at the times of burning joy, the foretaste of the eternal joy to come. The Greek ἐπί, on or upon, and αγγελία, a message, announce what is fitting. St. Paul was very eloquent in expressing that this promise is not something, but rather someone who became the Incarnated Word, who himself pointed out for the Paraclete to be sent to those who believe in order to clothe them with power from on high (Lk 24: 49). The word ἐνδύω means literally to sink into the garment that is, unlike any man-made cloth, the power from on high. This power, δύναμις, is the empowerment (*Ermächtigung*) of a human being to apply godly abilities in an intimate relationship with the divine. Here, δύναμις is a fundamental term encompassing the commission of human nature to perform great deeds in the divine assignment. Actualizing this δύναμις, Pascal became a dialectical philosopher who, instead of striving to overcome opposites and intricate intellectual and existential challenges, found the courage to face them and live amidst conflicting interpretations as an honest man (Mueller, 1945). The honest man (*l'honnête homme*) is precisely the art of living the unity of opposites in the absolute attention to their claim (*Anspruch*). Understanding what makes oneself an honest and integral "I" is the fundamental task of human life. Opening to reality and sensitivity to the facticity of life makes Pascal and anyone who follows him a true hermeneutician who knows of the greatness of human capacities and the limitations in their complementary irreducibility and exclusiveness[10].

[9] Macnaghten (1914, p. 189): "The word δαιμόνϊον when used in connection with Socrates' claim: (I) when used substantivally should be translated by the English word 'deity' (or 'divinity'); (2) when used adjectivally should be translated by the adjective 'divine.'"

[10] "In the expression "*Hermeneutik der Faktizität,*" the genitive is to be understood as *genitivus obiectivus* (interpretation of facticity as a hermeneutic problem) as well as *genitivus subiectivus* ("self-interpretation of facticity")." (Wierciński, 2019, p. 189). For Heidegger, "the problems of philosophy touch upon Being-as-it-occurs in factual life. In this respect, philosophy is principally ontology, that is to say, that the particular individual worldly regional ontologies take on their reason for being a problem or an explanation of why they are a problem from the ontology of facticity. The problems of philosophy touch upon Being-as-it-occurs in life, in the respective "how" of its being addressed or interpreted. This means that philosophy, as ontology of facticity, is at the same time the categorial interpretation of being addressed and interpreted, and that means, it is logic." (Heidegger, 1989; cf. Gadamer, 2002).

**The hermeneutic circle of understanding**

The hermeneutic circle of understanding challenges the limits of intelligibility by opening up the world. Our lived experience and self-understanding lead us toward recognizing the nature of understanding that finds its fulfillment in the innate capability (*l'homme capable*) to understand the Other.

Meditating on καιρός, we cannot avoid the question: How does an age, a century, come to expression in a single person? How does somebody like Hans-Georg Gadamer illuminate an epoch in and through his individual life and work (Malpas et al., 2002)? Gadamer reminds us constantly that the power of the enormous progress of science cannot blind a human being from seeing that there is more to life than uniformity, functionality, and acclaimed success (Gadamer, 1983). The task of understanding embraces the whole of what is to be understood (*Universalitätsanspruch der Hermeneutik*), thus essentially transgressing what can be determined by science as worthy of questioning (*fragwürdig*). Therefore, the call for thinking reminds us that with freedom, we also have radical personal responsibility that nobody can take away from us.

To face this radical responsibility, a human being needs to open up their personal horizon to learn what it means to learn and how learning is happening in the unique history of an individual Dasein. Learning to learn is definitely more challenging than acquiring specific knowledge. It is an exercise toward allowing things to happen in life (*Sehenlassen, Hörenlassen*). It is a matter of understanding that the task of learning to learn is to be a wise person, to find the right measure (*das richtige Mass*).

In his long and fulfilled life as a philosopher, Gadamer was very keen to conceive of apprenticeship as the blessed time when our senses are sharpened toward the hermeneutic eye, the hermeneutic ear, the hermeneutic touch, the hermeneutic taste (Gadamer, 1987). An apprenticeship is not predominantly a matter of being under the supervision of someone skilled and knowledgeable, but rather the time of developing toward personal maturity and the ability to face new experiences, precisely because of having learned from the past) experience. This maturity is a question of wise judgment (*Urteilskraft*), of the capacity to see the light: "For with you is the fountain of life; in your light do we see the light." Psalm 36:9 in the Septuagint translates this verse as ὅτι παρὰ σοὶ πηγὴ ζωῆς ἐν τῷ φωτί σου ὀψόμεθα φῶς, and in the Vulgate: *quoniam tecum est fons vitae in lumine tuo videbimus lumen*. The critical capacity to differentiate between lux and lumen is the purpose of sharpening our senses toward recognizing the plurivocity of meaning and the

metaphoricity of language.[11] Philosophical apprenticeship is an experience stretched throughout the entirety of human life, since it brings into light what our *Lebenswelt* teaches us about our being in the world with others. It is a matter of treasuring and preserving all that calls for understanding in our hearts, even or especially when understanding is not on the horizon.

**Introduction as leading and being led**

Introducing this collection of papers on the dialectic of power directs the very first gaze toward the meaning of "introduction." *Intro*, "to the inside" and *ducere*, "to lead", express the intent of bringing together what needs to be considered in the task of addressing the subject matter. An introduction stands in the nearness of the conclusion. This is how the beginning (*Anfang*) builds with the end (*Endzeit*) the totality of what needs to be understood. Looking back (*Rückblick*) and looking forward (*Vorsicht*) find their καιρός in the now of seeing.

As leading into the inside, to the *Sache*, an introduction is a form of preparation and invitation. It discloses to us that we are led through what needs to be thought. It is the capacity of a human being to be guided (*sich Führenlassen*). The experience of learning requires trust that the suggested ways of thinking enrich our understanding. It also develops our confidence in our own power of judgment (*Urteilskraft*) and the indispensability of listening to the Other, including the Other of ourselves, to unfold our personal identity. Our Lebenswelt teaches us to be ourselves and reminds us to constantly remain alert. This alertness, ὑπόμνησις (*Wachhalten*), is a matter of remembering and recollecting the proper disposition of the mind, εἰλικρινής διάνοια (2 P 3:1). It is the art of dialectical thinking that literally reaches across to the other side of a matter.

Intro-duction (*Ein-führung*) is a guide (*Führung*), the art of leading in which the leading person is also led. It reminds us of Gadamer's genius insight into the conversation that places the participants of the conversation under the spell of the event: The conversation that we are is a dialogue in which we are "far less the leaders than the led" (Gadamer, 2020, p. 383). The logic of question and answer that makes a conversation is a hermeneutic logic that cannot be methodologically established but only experienced in a genuine exchange of insights that lead to other insights. Only retrospectively can we recognize the *how* of the question calling for an answer that

[11] In the Nicene Creed, we proclaim *Deum de Deo, Lumen de Lumine*. Here, *lumen* refers to the light of God, rather than to the plain sense of light (*lux*).

becomes a question for the following answer. As diligent students of Plato, we acknowledge the brilliance of the way Socrates engaged people he met in life:

> The maieutic productivity of the Socratic dialogue, the art of using words as a midwife, is certainly directed toward the people who are the partners in the dialogue, but it is concerned merely with the opinions they express, the immanent logic of the subject matter that is unfolded in the dialogue. What emerges in its truth is the logos, which is neither mine nor yours and hence so far transcends the interlocutors' subjective opinions that even the person leading the conversation knows that he does not know. As the art of conducting a conversation, dialectic is also the art of seeing things in the unity of an aspect (sunoran eis hen eidos)—i.e., it is the art of forming concepts through working out the common meaning. What characterizes a dialogue, in contrast with the rigid form of statements that demand to be set down in writing, is precisely this: that in dialogue spoken language—in the process of question and answer, giving and taking, talking at cross purposes and seeing each other's point—performs the communication of meaning that, with respect to the written tradition, is the task of hermeneutics. (Gadamer, 2020, p. 361).

The dynamic of giving and taking emphasizes that neither is a passive role: Partners in a genuine conversation are leading the Other, are being led by the Other, and together are led by the event of conversation (*das Ereignis des Gesprächs*). If we follow Heidegger in his understanding of a human being as Dasein that is concerned with itself (*sich sorgt*), then existence is care (*Sorge*). Being in the world means taking care of oneself seriously: The what and the how will form and transform us. The ability to imagine otherwise is the first step to overcoming existential barriers. It is a capacity of nurturing us with an insight into ourselves that is not easily accessible to us without a serious determination to discern the meaning of the polyphonic voices that (dis)closing the totality of being a human being in the world with others.

De val van Icarus by Pieter Bruegel de Oude (https://fine-arts-museum.be/nl/de-collectie/pieter-i-bruegel-de-val-van-icarus)

The importance of understanding the fleeting moment, something that can easily be not noticed in the midst of our busyness (*Geschäftigkeit*) and restlessness (*Rastlosigkeit*) is particularly relevant for meditative being in the world (*besinnliches Denken*) to counterpart the prevailing calculative life (*berechnendes Denken*). Icarus's flight into freedom convincingly depicts the essence of our human in-betweenness: Between the human and the divine, humility and pride, invincibility and weakness, magnificent dreams and modesty. This in-betweenness calls for a permanent deliberation on the power of being a human being in the world with Others and dialectical thinking of how to be oneself, also as the Other of oneself, and with the Others. The Falling of Icarus is a compelling commentary on the world of pain and suffering that seems to be indifferent. Apparently, the death of Icarus does not make any difference to the figures in the painting, who are busy with their mundane tasks. The dialectic of power of reading the painting allows for a deeper phenomenological and hermeneutic access to the understanding of καιρὸς as the event (*Ereignis*) of discovering meaning in the moment which becomes a bliss, an instant of grace. In an instant, looking at the painting means being looked at, letting-see, and being radically responsible and responsive to the experience of the moment as well as the experience it means for one's whole life. As human beings, we are questioned by life: The Word of God and Tradition question us, and in being addressed, we have an opportunity to exercise our responsibility in the innermost core of who we are.

The dialectic power of καιρὸς demands from us the absolute concentration of attention to what is there, an awareness that is not pernickety and enslaves us by the devotion to the magnitude of information wanted to be managed but the blissful moment of vision, a truly transformative instant. The co-crucified κακοῦργος missed obviously his καιρὸς. Here, we see the powerful meaning of the *now and maybe never again*. Following Kierkegaard (1998, p. 338), we can say: "The moment is when the man is there, the right man, the man of the moment."

The concentration of attention is the intense experience that allows for radical decisiveness and is far away from any simple complacency with the flow of events. It is the art of seeing and listening to the voices that ring out in our *Lebenswelt*. Like in Kierkegaard's experience:

> As though I were out of the body, wafted with them into the ether above - and the hoarse screech of the gulls reminded me that I stood alone, and everything vanished before my eyes, and I turned back with a heavy heart to mix in the busy world, yet without forgetting such blessed moments. - I have often stood there and looked out upon my past life and upon the different surroundings which have exercised their power upon me… Seen thus in perspective only the broad and powerful outline showed, and I did not, as so frequently happens to me, lose myself in the moment, but saw everything as a whole and was strengthened to understand things differently, to admit how often I had blundered, and to forgive others. (Bretall, 1946, pp. 3-4).

Sharpening our hermeneutic senses can help us to recognize the power of the dialectic of seeing with reference to Bruegel's painting. It is almost an idyllic painting when everydayness witnesses the events of human history. The blessing of different perspectives, different languages, and different sensitivities calls us to be attentive to what needs to be understood. Among beautiful landscapes, beautiful shapes and colors, a momentous event is happening. It is our task to notice it and translate it into something meaningful for our lives. As such, it is always (only) an experiment in thinking (Denkversuch). Maybe a small contribution (Beitrag), which can turn into the power to carry us (uns tragen).

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# René Girard and the phenomenology of mimetic desire

**Abstract:** René Girard has been critiqued for failing to ground his theory of mimetic desire in a discursive and philosophically robust framework. In order to meet this objection, I argue that René Girard's theory of mimetic desire can be successfully motivated by a phenomenology of the emptiness of selfhood and intersubjectivity. After grounding Girard's theory in a phenomenology of no-self, I reconstruct Girard's argument that violence is a necessary consequence of internally mediated mimetic desire[1].

**Keywords:** Mimetic Desire, Imitation, Selfhood, Otherness, Violence

## I. Introduction

While the strength of René Girard's thinking lies in his interdisciplinary approach, his theory of mimetic desire lacks a well- developed philosophical ground. In his Vagaries of Desire, Timo Airaksinen points out that René Girard's theory of mimetic desire is literary, heuristic, and suggestive, but fails to provide a discursive account of desire[2]. I aim to fill this theoretical

[1] My gratitude goes out to Takeshi Morisato, Nahum Brown, Edward Kwok, Hayden Kee, and Dan Zahavi for their comments on some of the initial formulations of the ideas developed in this paper.

[2] Regarding Girard's writings, he writes that "They tend to be heuristic rather than analytical, suggestive rather than convincing, and literary rather than discursive. He is more like an inventor than an architect of ideas, and a preacher rather than a teacher. Here I approach his writings as if his grand vision of desire were a theory, however impolite that may be. However, it is clear that the mimetic theory is interesting because it postulates triangular desires and, thus, we should focus on it" (Timo Airaksinen, 2019, p. 89-108).

gap by providing a discursive and systematic framework for Girard's theory of mimetic desire. By drawing on a variety of phenomenological and existential sources on the themes of selfhood and otherness, I demonstrate that Girard's heuristic and suggestive method can be re-configured as a robust and discursive approach to intersubjectivity[3].

I begin by analyzing the meaning of mimetic desire and discuss some examples of the phenomena from modern literature. Because Girard's theory of mimetic desire is that process whereby the human being attempts to transcend the emptiness of the self, in order to provide a discursive groundwork for Girard's theory, I begin by showing that the self is an inherently *elusive* phenomenon[4]. After elucidating the insufferable condition of the emptiness of the self, I show how mimetic desire functions as a way to fulfill the desire for selfhood. Thereafter, I explicate how mimetic desire can function as a source for many malevolent dispositions in human life. While Girard claims that all desire is mimetic, here I focus on establishing Girard's claim that mimetic desire is essential to human selfhood.

**II. Mimetic desire**

Traditionally, desire has been conceived as a twofold relation between a subject and an object. In this twofold relation, the desirability of the object by the subject may be derived from an intrinsic quality of the object. For example, we might follow Plato, and proclaim that what we deem beautiful is what attracts us, and this we consider to be beautiful. For Plato, it is the 'Beautiful itself', in virtue of its intrinsic beauty, attracts the subject—regardless of whether the subject knows that it is in fact so drawn (Plato, 1997b, p. 211 a-d). If modern philosophy tends to reject this conception and privileges the subject as the factor that grants desirability, this does not necessitate abandoning the twofold structure of desire. Indeed, the common pedestrian view that 'beauty is in the eye of beholder' appears to entail that the object becomes desirable because it enters into some relation to the subject whose perspective upon it grants it desirability. Indeed, we might follow Nietzsche and proclaim that man himself creates beauty:

[3] I should note in advance that this philosophical grounding of Girard's approach is my own, and by no means should it be understood as a reconstruction of Girard's philosophical views.

[4] Here I follow Heidegger's sense of 'phenomenon' as that which shows itself (Martin Heidegger, 2001, p. 51).

> Man believes that the world itself is filled with beauty—he forgets that it is he who created it. He alone has bestowed beauty upon the world—alas! Only a very human, all too human beauty…Man really mirrors himself in all things, that which give him back his own reflection he considers beautiful […] (Nietzsche, 2003, p. 29).

Whether the desirability of the object is conceived as primarily emanating from the object, the subject, or the relationality of each to the other, a dominant paradigm of desire is to conceive of it as constituted by a two-fold relation.

Rene Girard's conception of mimetic desire challenges the two-fold depiction of desire by re-conceiving desire as triangular (René Girard, 1976, p. 2). Mimetic desire is quite simple: the subject desires the object because another desires the object. Thus, mimetic desire is threefold: there is the subject, the object, and the mediator in virtue which the object is deemed to be desirable. Rather than consider desire to be an immediate relation of subject to object, mimetic desire posits a third term that connects the object to the subject. In the case of mimetic desire, the object could not be connected to the subject without the mediation of the third party. If mimetic desire is at least one kind of desire, conceiving of desire as merely a twofold relation of subject to object would not be sufficient to determine the eidos of desire per se.

That mimetic desire is at least a kind of desire is evident from the observation of young children. It is a common observation that a young child may initially be indifferent to the existence of a particular toy in the playroom in which they are happily engaged. Unfortunately, this contentment is quite often short lived. A second child, similar in age to the first, who is engaged with the world at a similar stage of development, finds great interest in this toy to which the first child was initially indifferent. Suddenly, the first child, quite inexplicably, appears to have acquired a great interest in this same toy. The object has not undergone any change in virtue of which it would suddenly attract the child. While everything else about the situation appears to have remained the same, a fundamental difference has been introduced into the situation. The difference, of course, is that the second child finds the toy desirable. Thus, it is plausible to infer that the first child desires the toy because the second child desires it. The object, or the toy, becomes desirable to the first child because of the mediation of another agency. The simple fact

that this second agency desires the toy is sufficient to produce a desire in the first child for the very same object[5].

Why call this kind of desire 'mimetic'? It is 'mimetic' because one agency imitates the desire of the other. Accordingly, the mediator models what ought to be desired. Girard defines the model as the "mediator of desire" (Girard, 1976, p. 2). As a model who confers value upon the object of desire, the model is an object of admiration to be imitated. Yet, the very same object of admiration cannot help but be transformed into a rival or enemy, for the object cannot be possessed by them both. As Girard states, "two desires converging on the same object are bound to clash" (Girard 1979, p. 146). Thus, the mediator is both admired and despised. Accordingly, mimetic desire can be defined as follows: "the subject desires the object because the rival desires it" (Girard 1979, p. 145). The mediator confers value onto the object through his desire and possession of it, yet that very possession in virtue of which he confers value to it transforms him into a stumbling block or obstacle that stands in the way of his acquisition of the object desired by the subject. Of course, the result is conflict: the subject and the mediator vie for possession of the object.

Many adults will readily admit that the child is subject to these kinds of desires. Indeed, Girard infers that the Romantic concept of the "autonomous childhood" is a myth for adults (Girard, 1976, p. 34). The desires of childhood do not become transparent to us if we insist that the child's desires are autonomous or unmediated. But such desires might be explained away by proclaiming the child to be immature. Certainly, we do not often witness the mature adult overtly behaving this way. Girard, however, argues that it is the genius of the great novelists, (rather than the philosophers or scientists) such as Cervantes, Flaubert, Stendhal, Proust, and Dostoyevsky, who have uncovered the illusion of the autonomous self (Girard, 1976, p. 38). In order to highlight the ways that adulthood is also saturated with mimetic desire, I will briefly relay two stories Girard identifies as paradigmatic cases of mimetic desire from Stendhal's *The Red and the Black* (1830) and compare them with the form of mimetic desire in *Don Quixote* (1615).

In *The Red and Black*, M. de Renal, the mayor of Verrières, desires to hire a tutor for his children. Valenod—both his rival and an object of his admiration, is the richest and most influential man in Verrières. M. de

[5] For Girard, what subjects one imitates is contingent, but is certainly influenced by a number of various factors, such as exposure. One never imitates certain desires because one is never exposed to them.

Renal desires to hire Julien Sorel because he imagines that his rival Valenod also desires to employ Julien Sorel. The worry is raised that "Valenod has no tutor for his children—he might very well steal this one from us." Being clever, Sorel denies the initial offer of M. de Renal. Sorel proclaims that "we have a better offer." This response further hardens the mayor's conviction that Valenod is attempting to acquire the tutor for himself (Girard, 1976, p. 6). As Girard states,

> The ever-increasing price that the buyer is willing to pay is determined by the imaginary desire, which he attributes to his rival. So there is indeed an imitation of the imaginary desire, and even a very scrupulous imitation, since everything about the desire which is copied, including its intensity, depends upon the desire which serves as its model. (Girard, 1976, p. 6).

According to Girard, M. de Renal is a vain person, who desires the object "so along as he is convinced it is already desired by another person who he admires" (Girard, 1976, p. 7). Unlike in the case of the child, who competes with another child who actually desires the same object, for M. de Renal, it is of no consequence whether his rival, Valenod, actually desires to hire the tutor. What matters is that Renal believes this to be the case. Indeed, one can imitate an imagined desire.

Let us consider another story from the same novel, this time concerning the mimesis of erotic love. Julien Sorel desires to win back the love of his beloved, Mathilde de la Mole. In order to achieve this end, he contrives a scheme: by arousing the desire of another woman, he intends to arouse the desire of Mathilde. Sorel successfully seduces Marèchale de Ferraque, so that Marèchale is aroused with desire for him. Just as Sorel had hoped, Mathilde imitates Marèchale, and Julien successfully wins back his beloved (Girard, 1976, p. 7-8). As is evident, the success of the scheme depends upon mimetic desire. Mathilde takes Marèchale as her model and imitates her. Indeed, it is not any inherent quality of her beloved that draws her. On the contrary, it is the fact that her model desires the man that she does too. Naturally, this transforms Marèchale into her rival, for they cannot both be the one one-and-only beloved of Julien Sorel. Fittingly, she must overcome her rival in order to be with her beloved. The drama unfolds by means of mimetic desire.

Having considered *The Red and Black*, also consider *Don Quixote*. Having decided that he is a knight, Don Quixote does not have desires that are auto generated. Rather, he desires what his model, Amadis of Gaul, desires. As Girard states, "he no longer chooses the objects of his own desire—Amadis

must choose for him" (Girard, 1976, p. 1). Quixote is self-consciously a disciple of the master. The objects of his desire are determined by the "objects determined for him by the model of chivalry" (Girard, 1976, p. 2). For Quixote, according to Cervantes,

> […] Amadis was the pole, the star, the sun for brave and amorous knights, and we others who fight under the banner of love and chivalry should imitate him. Thus, my friend Sancho, I reckon that whoever imitates him best will come closest to perfect chivalry (Girard, 1976, p. 1).

Since his model is imaginary, or a fictional character from a chivalric romance, it is evident that his mimetic desire undermines his sense of reality, and his capacity for accurate judgment is "paralyzed" (Girard, 1976, p. 4).

Although the case of Don Quixote is quite different from the case of Renal and Mathilde, there is nonetheless a common feature: in each case the mediator's prestige is "imparted to the object" and gives it value (Girard, 1976, p. 17). The desire in each of these cases is not autonomously generated by the subject but heteronomous and mediated by means of another agency—real or imagined. For the subjects of mimetic desire, each is determined by a desire according to another, rather than a desire according to themselves (Girard, 1976, p. 4). The unity of mediation in these stories is the fact that the object is transfigured (Girard, 1976, p. 23) for the subject by the belief that the mediator desires it. As Girard eloquently states, the mediator is as an "artificial sun" that makes the object shine (Girard, 1976, p. 18).

Unlike in the case of Stendhal's characters, Don Quixote does not fall into rivalry with his model. Although Quixote is constantly quarreling with others in virtue of his imitation of Amadis, he does not become the enemy of Amadis. Stendhal's characters fall into conflict with their rivals. What are the principles which enable this conflict? In order to clarify the conditions which make the rivalry possible, Girard introduces the distinction between external and internal mediation. On the one hand, the mediation is external when the "distance is sufficient to eliminate contact between two spheres of possibilities" (Girard, 1976, p. 9). Quixote's mediator is "enthroned in an inaccessible heaven," (Girard, 1976, p. 8) which precludes the possibility of conflict. In other words, in the case of external mediation, the model transcends the domain of being that is occupied by the subject[6]. Amadis

[6] Naturally, even in cases of external mediation, the model is still accessible as a model. For this reason, all models can be said to be 'immanent' in one's lifeworld, in the

transcends the domain of being and action occupied by Quixote. He exists in an imaginary space that is inaccessible to Quixote. Accordingly, Quixote will never become Amadis' rival. In addition, Quixote openly worships his model; he does not attempt to hide the fact that he imitates him. On the other hand, internal mediation occurs when "the distance is reduced to allow these two spheres to penetrate each other" (Girard, 1976, p. 9). In the case of Renal and Mathilde, their mediations do not transcend their domain of being and action. Their models are immanent within the same sphere of possibility as themselves. In Stendhal, the mediator is "down to earth" such that the difference is small enough to permit a rivalry of desires (Girard, 1976, p. 8-9). In the case of these stories of internal mediation, the participants tend to conceal the object of their desire, as well as their admiration for the model in virtue of whom they have that desire.

The distance of which Girard speaks is not always simply a physical distance, as is obvious already in the case of Quixote, since there is not a physical distance between the fictional and non-fictional. Nonetheless, physical distance can play a crucial factor in the kinds of conflict that is generated between rivals. Girard speaks of "social" and "intellectual" distance (Girard, 1976, p. 9). In order to fall into rivalry with one's model, the model must be immanent within the subject's own cultural lifeworld in which there is a life that is shared in common. Most generally, it is because a person shares a life in common that they can in principle fall into conflict. For example, if they have common ambitions, and they both belong to a certain social and economic class, wherein it is common to hire tutors for our children, they may find themselves more likely to fall victim to mimetic rivalry, as is the case with M. Renald.

To summarize, Girard makes it painfully clear that mimetic desire can affect not only children but also adults. What is more, Girard uncovers a typology of mimetic desire, in which we can distinguish between internal and external mediation. However, must all mimetic desire of the internal type necessarily devolve into conflict? Indeed, in the cases we have explored, it appears that the object desired cannot be simultaneously possessed by both persons. In the case of the children, the toy is a particular, or one in number. Likewise, in the case of the rival lovers, each desires a monogamous relation, which by definition cannot be polygamous. Even if children and adults are subject to the threat of rivalry posed by some mimetic desires, if the objects

most minimal sense that they can operate as models.

desired did not preclude the possibility of a shared possession, rivalry could in principle be avoided.

As a literary anthropologist, Girard is at times opaque about the philosophical grounds of his own claims. By drawing on existential phenomenology, in the following sections I will offer a phenomenological motivation for Girard's account of mimetic desire. In the following section I will argue that even if some objects can be shared in common, the emptiness of the self makes mimetic desire, and the conflict generated by internally mediated mimetic desire, unavoidable.

**III. The emptiness of the self**

Girard claims that human beings desire what others desire because they lack being:

> […] he desires being, something he himself lacks and which some other person seems to possess. The subject thus looks to that other person to inform him of what he should desire in order to acquire that being (Girard 1979, p. 145-146).[7]

Because Girard's theory of mimetic desire begins from the experience of the emptiness of the self, it is very natural to approach Girard's theory via phenomenology, since its methodology is primarily concerned with the description of experience. I learn that I am a subject of desire by feeling my own desires. Because this feeling, the longing characteristic of desire, is a form of experience, my knowledge of my own desire would be impossible without experience. Likewise, if one subtracted all experience of other persons, one would undermine the conditions that make possible knowledge of the desires of others. Without my capacity to perceive, observe, imagine, or conceive others, I would not know that they are desiring agents. Because experience is impossible without consciousness, knowledge of desire presupposes the fact of consciousness. Only a conscious agent can experience desire. What is more, I can only ask 'what is consciousness?' from the standpoint of consciousness itself. The question 'what is consciousness?' cannot be approached from a non-conscious position. 'What is consciousness?' is a question a conscious agent asks about itself from within itself.

What is consciousness? As is well known, classical phenomenology teaches that consciousness is always directed towards an object—what Husserl calls intentionality. If I perceive, but perceive nothing, then I am

[7] Girard,

not perceiving. Perception can only be on the condition there is something towards which it is directed. Whether I am perceiving, imagining, or speaking, I am perceiving something, imagining something, or speaking about something. In his *Ideas* I, Husserl argues that "a basic and essential difference arises between Being as Experience and Being as Thing" (Edmund Husserl, 1975, p. 120). Although the perceptions of the table change as one moves around the table, one continues to perceive the very same table. Because the perceptions of the table continually change, but the table one perceives remains the same, Husserl infers that the object one perceives is essentially distinct from the perceptions or the experiences of that very table (Husserl, 1975, p. 117)[8]. Husserl infers that the thing transcends consciousness: "Thus, the Thing itself, simpliciter, we call transcendent. In so doing we give voice to the most fundamental and pivotal difference between ways of being, that between Consciousness and Reality" (Husserl, 1975, p. 121). Husserl is very clear that this "essential difference" between Consciousness and Reality does not just apply to perceptual experience, but to "any possible consciousness" (Husserl, 1975, p. 120) such as the "consciousness of others" (Husserl, 1975, p. 121).

As is well known, Sartre too follows Husserl by emphasizing the transcendence of the object:

> All consciousness, as Husserl has shown, is consciousness of something. This means that there is no consciousness which is not a positing of a transcendent object […].[…] The first procedure of a philosophy ought to be to expel things from consciousness and to re-establish its true connection with the world, to know that consciousness is a positional consciousness of the world. (Jean-Paul Sartre, 1993, li).

'Consciousness of,' implies that consciousness is aware of an object that is not consciousness. As such, consciousness is of an object that is distinct from consciousness. For Sartre, intentionality has the further implication that consciousness is aware of an object that completely transcends it[9].

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[8] Naturally, the unity of the table can only be noticed by employing recollection: one must be able to recollect one's past perceptions of the table and compare them with one's occurrent perceptions. Husserl gives a similar argument (in this case with a box) in the *Logical Investigations* (Husserl 2001, p. 221). There he concurs with the Ideas that "the experienced content, generally speaking, is not the perceived object."

[9] Sartre reads Husserl's understanding of intentionality to imply that "consciousness is constitutive of the being of its object." Sartre argues that this definition of intentionality is inconsistent. See Sartre, 1993, lx. Since Husserl makes the noema "an unreal, a correlate of the

However, if the object transcends consciousness, the intentional structure of consciousness raises a problem for self-consciousness. If experience always involves the consciousness of a transcendent object, how in principle can one experience consciousness itself?

Sartre offers a famous reflection that problematizes any naïve approach to self-knowledge:

> The reduction of consciousness to knowledge in fact involves our introducing into consciousness the subject-object dualism which is typical of knowledge. But if we accept the law of the knower-known dyad, then a third term will be necessary in order for the knower to become known in turn, and we will be faced with this dilemma: Either we stop at any one term of the series—the known, the knower known, the knower known by the knower, etc. In this case the totality of the phenomena falls into the unknown; that is, we always bump up against a non-self-conscious reflection and a final term. Or else we affirm the necessity of an infinite regress (idea ideae ideae, etc.) which is absurd. Are we obliged after all to introduce the law of this dyad into consciousness? (Sartre, 1993, p. lii.).

Sartre argues that if one assumes that all consciousness is a form of self-consciousness, then self-consciousness cannot be reduced to reflective self-consciousness[10]. As a result, he introduces a form of pre-reflective self-consciousness that makes consciousness of an object possible. Phenomenologically, Sartre's argument against the duality of consciousness is well-motivated and can be appreciated without adopting all of Sartre's distinctions, and his various positions regarding self-consciousness. If we simplify Sartre's

noesis, a noema whose essence is percipi," "he is totally unfaithful to his principle" (Sartre, 1993, p. lxi). Sartre seems to have in mind passages in which Husserl characterizes the Thing in Itself as something that is "never out of relation to consciousness and its Ego" (Husserl, 1975, p. 134) and when Husserl speaks of "pure consciousness as "a system of Absolute Being, into which nothing can penetrate, and from which nothing can escape" (Husserl, 1975, p. 139). I do not mean to adjudicate the legitimacy of Sartre's reading or decide between these two interpretations of the intentional relation. Here it is enough to indicate that intentionality always implies the non-identity of consciousness and its object. For more on the connection between Sartre's interpretation of intentionality, the emptiness of consciousness, and Sartre's critique of the Heidelberg school, see (Zahavi, 2020, p. 132-33).

[10] According to Sartre, "If we wish to avoid this infinite regress, there must be an immediate, non-cognitive relation of the self to itself." (Sartre, 1993, p. lii-liii).

argument, we discover that there are strong phenomenological grounds for Girard's position on the self and mimetic desire.

Because consciousness is directed toward an object that transcends it, every act of conceptual reflection is also burdened by this opposition. As a result, when I ask, 'who am I?' consciousness encounters itself as an object. However, since consciousness is directed towards a transcendent object, the I about which I am reflecting is an object that transcends it and is thereby other than consciousness. Hence, consciousness does not encounter itself in self-reflection. Indeed, it is of no consequence how often one performs the reflection, for in each case the self that appears—the I—is not the consciousness that asks the question. The empirical self, whether this be a physical, psychological, or pyscho-physical self, can only ever appear as an object for consciousness. The so-called transcendental I—the condition that enables the givenness of that empirical self, always goes missing. The self fails to show itself—it is a phenomenon of absence. One can continue to posit oneself without end, i.e., infinitely, and the self will fail to appear. Or one can simply cease to self-reflect, in which case the series must bottom out in a consciousness that is unconscious of itself. Naturally, a consciousness that is unconscious of itself cannot encounter itself.

Because Sartre thinks it is absurd for consciousness to be unconscious of itself, for him all reflective self-consciousness is conditioned by a pre-reflective self-consciousness. Although it appears that consciousness cannot appear as a determinate thing or activity within reflective self-consciousness, can the conscious self even appear as a distinct and determinate being in pre-reflective consciousness? It cannot. When I do not reflect upon myself, my consciousness is directed towards something other than myself. For example, while reading the *Critique of Pure Reason*, I am not thinking that 'I am the one reading the *Critique*.' To the contrary, I am absorbed in the reading, and I do not attend to the fact that I am the one reading. Of course, if someone interrupts me and asks, 'what are you doing?' I can tell them that I am reading. For Sartre this is enough to indicate that I am aware of myself (although not reflectively) in such states of absorption. However, even if Sartre is correct on this point, in such pre-reflective states the conscious self never appears as distinct from that in which consciousness is absorbed. Therefore, the self is empty, i.e., the self never appears as a distinct or determinate being—neither

a determinate thing nor a determinate activity. While consciousness or the self certainly is, that selfhood is only ever indeterminately present[11].

If the determinate conscious self can neither appear in reflective nor non-reflective consciousness, then qua the self-conscious self it cannot appear at all. However, this would be absurd, for consciousness is aware of itself as that which is directed toward an object. Ironically, it is only on the assumption that consciousness transcends its object that one cannot encounter it. If consciousness really does transcend the object, then it must be distinct from it. However, it is the same distinction in virtue of which consciousness fails to appear. Thus, how can consciousness even appear to us as that which transcends the object?

If our reflections ceased here, we would certainly have failed to appreciate the depth of the phenomena. In every case of reflection, consciousness appears the very same way, namely as that which fails to be a distinct being. Consciousness can only ever appear to us in reflection as "a being, the nature of which is to be conscious of the nothingness of its being" (Sartre 1993, p. 47). Simply put, consciousness does in fact appear to us in every reflection, but as that which is not any distinct entity or act—it is not whatever it is said to be. Insofar as consciousness never finds itself in its object, in reflection it always appears as other than and distinct from any beings to which it is intentionally related. However, this description is a contradiction. Since consciousness is always distinct from all intentional objects, consciousness must also transcend itself when it has itself as the object of its intentional relation. Consciousness must transcend itself. Consciousness cannot even be 'that consciousness which fails to be a distinct being.' In conclusion, our experience of failing to know the distinct character of consciousness reveals consciousness to be constituted by self-contradiction.

As long as we acknowledge that we are conscious, and that consciousness is constituted by the intentional relationship whereby the object transcends the consciousness of it, consciousness cannot appear to reflective self-awareness except as something that is not consciousness. Thus, intentionality can only appear to reflective self-consciousness as a form of self-contradiction[12]. The claim that 'consciousness is intentionally constituted'

[11] Zahavi recounts a number of critiques, including one argument that Sartre re-introduces duality into pre-reflective awareness, thereby contradicting his position on the non-duality of pre-reflective self-awareness. (Zahavi, 2020, 135.)

[12] For readers of Hegel, this result should come as no surprise. *The Phenomenology of Spirit* begins with the assumption of the difference between knowing and its object that

is a self-contradictory claim. Through the failure of reflective self-knowledge, self-consciousness is revealed to be a contradictory unity of subjectivity and objectivity. Ironically, through failing to objectify the self, reflective self-awareness does appear to reveal the character of the self to be something trans-objective and contradictory[13].

We have described the phenomenon of self-consciousness in negative terms as the nothingness of being. However, the negative description implies a positive description. Insofar as the self never appears to have any being of its own, it simultaneously appears as a being whose determinate identity always lies beyond it in another. In other words, the 'I' that appears to consciousness appears as other to it. In reflecting upon the 'I', the 'I' appears as transcending one's own conscious self, and appears as an I distinct from itself. Thus, one's own 'I' always appears as an other I. The only discrete self I can ascribe to myself is the selfhood of another. Accordingly, the self-contradiction burdening the appearance of self-hood can be re-formulated as follows: the I is the I of another. Self-alienation is our essential condition. Whenever I encounter myself as a being of substance, I relate to myself as though I were being gazed upon by another.

To summarize, the emptiness of the self signifies that the determinate self is always absent. The determinate self cannot appear to any reflective or pre-reflective consciousness. When the determinate self does appear, it can only appear as the self of another. However, this only signifies that the determinate self is present for me as self-transcending or inherently contradictory determinacy—as something inherently indeterminate.

Naturally, one might worry that there are significant epistemic issues to confront here. If there cannot be true contradictions, how in principle could this be the case? One might be inclined to doubt that we are conscious at all. However, as Descartes showed, that cannot succeed—by doubting that we are conscious, we are certainly conscious that we are doubting. Perhaps it would be more promising to simply deny that intentionality is essential to

constitutes intentional consciousness, and shows how this distinction collapses in absolute knowing.

[13] If we allow the phenomena to guide our thinking, we should seriously consider whether the phenomenology of self-consciousness does not give us good reason to adopt a *paraconsistent* logic—one that allows the *possibility* of true contradictions, such as Priest's logic of paradox. Here it is enough to indicate that there are perfectly viable logics that can accommodate the position. Indeed, while the result may be unsettling, and may indicate that self-consciousness is an absurd experience, the presence of contradiction alone does not necessarily entail that the position is logically absurd.

consciousness. Although some have taken this route[14], it certainly seems that at least reflective consciousness (whether this be imaginative or conceptual) is intentional. Whether I imagine or conceive myself, I reflect upon something[15].

The 'hard problem of consciousness' nicely illustrates the contradiction that befalls selfhood. On the one hand, consciousness is not a body, for it transcends all entities whatsoever. It is empty. On the other hand, spatial consciousness is only possible if consciousness occupies some space. For example, one cannot see the trailhead without occupying a position in space from which the trailhead can be made visible. In short, spatial consciousness requires consciousness to be embodied—it cannot completely transcend the body. Hence, consciousness appears contradictory, for it transcends all entities, and thereby all embodiment, and must simultaneously be embodied. Note that this formulation of the problem neither contains a reference to the 'what it's like' to experience the world, nor can it be easily evaded by absolutizing one side of the contradiction. Complete naturalization would undermine the transcendence of consciousness, while complete negation of the naturalized self would render spatial consciousness impossible. Because an adequate description of the phenomena of the conscious self appears to require contradictions, it would be a mistake to attempt to resolve it by absolutizing one side of the opposition.

Although the self must appear empty to itself in acts of self-reflection, the same fate does not appear to befall the I as other. Exactly because all consciousness is consciousness of something, the other self can only appear to the I as the object of consciousness. Hence, as long as the other subject appears to consciousness as another subject, it must also appear to the I as a separate unity of subjectivity and objectivity—as a non-empty ego[16].

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[14] For instance, see Nishida (1992), where experience is construed as fundamentally non-intentional in character.

[15] Rather than abandon intentionality or argue against the existence of consciousness or self-consciousness, in order to evade this self-contradiction, it may be more fruitful to challenge the definition of intentionality as the consciousness of a *transcendent* object, since it is this specific definition which leads to this paradox of self-consciousness. However, it is difficult to see how intentionality could be consistently conceived in such a way that consciousness and its object would be indistinguishable, for in this case the subject would not be a subject, which would be a contradiction. What is more, one would be forced to abandon Husserl's "essential" distinction between Consciousness and Reality.

[16] At this level of description, I do not distinguish between I as thou, the second person singular, and the I as the third person singular, he, she, etc. Whether the other subject I experience is encountered as a 'thou' or a 'she', they must appear as a subject that is simultaneously an object, otherwise they cannot be an intentional object. Further, Buber is

Although critical self-consciousness makes the I appear as nothing to itself, the I does appear as an object for others. Insofar as the other is a subject with intentional experiences, the I cannot appear to the other subject except as an object of consciousness. In short, if I appear to the other as another subject, and a subject can only appear as an intentional object to others, then I can only appear to others as a subject that is also an object, i.e., as a unity of subjectivity and objectivity.

Rather than survey all the varieties of theories of other minds in phenomenology, here I give special attention to Ernst Cassirer's theory of the experience of other minds, since it offers an attractive theory by which our experience of others may be explained. Regarding the expressive function, Cassirer observes that our experience of others is defined by an expressive function (Ernst Cassirer, 1955, 79), which is characterized by a fundamental indistinction: "Its particular privilege is precisely that it does not admit of a difference between image and thing, the sign and what it designates" (Cassirer, 1955, p. 92-93). In the case of other minds, the experience of others neither admits of a distinction between the subject and the object nor the mind and the body that one encounters. Via the expressive function "[…] that form of knowledge by which the reality not of natural objects but of other subjects is open to us" (Cassirer, 1955, p. 79)[17].

The term for expression, 'Ausdruck', articulates this well—the subjectivity, which is not an object, is pushed outward into the object and is thereby expressed by it. This philosophical description corresponds to our experiences in the everydayness of our lifeworld. Consider one's everyday engagements with colleagues in an office setting. Upon arriving at the office, one may greet them with a friendly "It's good to see you." One sees the body, but the greeting does not say 'It's good to see your body.' The thou with whom

quite right to distinguish the I-Thou from the I-It relation. However, Buber denies that the Thou is a thing that can be experienced: "But where You is said there is no something. You has no borders. Whoever says You does not have something; he has nothing. But he stands in relation" (Martin Buber, 1970, p. 55). For Buber, one does not experience the Thou, one has a relation to it. However, since one can experience the Thou, the I-Thou relation both cancels and preserves the I-It relation within itself.

[17] Cassirer's *Ausdrucksfunktion* is close to Scheler's *Ausdruckseinheit*, or expressive unity. Cassirer is with Scheler that "For we certainly believe ourselves to be directly aquianted with another person's joy in his laughter, with his sorrow and pain in his tears, with his shame in his blushing, […] If anyone tells me that this is not 'perception', […] I would beg him to turn aside from such questionable theories and address himself to the phenomenological facts" (Scheler, 1954, p. 260).

I interact is not distinguished from the objective, and in this case, the bodily presence of the other person[18].

Naturally, the "indistinct" presence of the other in our pre-reflective experience does not mean that they only appear as objects. They appear as subjects who can understand and respond to our greeting. We do not ordinarily greet our office door with "It's good to see you." The other appears as an object who is also a subject—an indistinguishable unity of subjectivity and objectivity. Moreover, since subjectivity is never reducible to an object, to appear as a subject means that the other cannot appear identical to any object one encounters, such as a body in space and time. Cassirer notes that in the phenomenon of otherness, "its 'givenness' and 'visibility' makes itself known to be inwardly animated" (Cassirer, 1955, p. 92). I always already understand that the other subject has an "inner world" to which I do not have immediate access, that is expressed and articulated in and through their body. When I observe a grimace on the face of my friend, I may ask, out of interest and care, "how are you feeling today?" In the question I implicitly acknowledge that their subjectivity transcends that experiential content to which I have immediate access[19].

Both self-consciousness and other consciousness are experiences of contradiction: both self and other are contradictory unities of subject and object. The self is always that being which is not any particular being. Since consciousness of the other subject is consciousness of a self, and the self

[18] Ernst Cassirer would agree with Stein that empathy is a kind of perception. "Thus empathy is a kind of act of perceiving" (Edith Stein, 1989, p. 11). A further comparison of Cassirer and Stein would be warranted, for although they do not agree on all points, both reject theories of the consciousness of others based on analogy. Stein is close to Cassirer when she writes that empathy is "the experience of foreign consciousness in general" (Stein, 1989, p. 11). Simulation theory, which is the "grandchild of the argument from analogy" (Gallagher and Zahavi, 2008, p. 172) does not do justice to our ordinary engagements with others. As Zahavi and Gallagher point out: "A simple phenomenological objection to explicit ST is that when I interact with or come to understand another person, there is no experiential evidence that I use such conscious (imaginative, introspective) simulation routines. That is, when we consult own common experience of how we understand others, we don't find such processes" (Gallagher and Zahavi, 2008, p. 176).

[19] Stein further analyzes the experiences of others in terms of primordial and non-primordial content. As Stein would put it, one's consciousness of the other is a primordial experience without primordial content. Although I do perceive the other, or the other's pain, the pain I experience is not my own. In this case, I experience the pain of the other as their pain. Stein writes, "And while I am living in the other's joy, I do not feel primordial joy. It does not issue live from my "I"" (Stein, 1989, p. 10-11).

is not an object, consciousness of the other cannot be consciousness of an object. However, since consciousness is always of an object, consciousness of the other is a consciousness of an object. Hence, the other cannot appear except as an object that is not an object—it too appears to be self-contradictory[20]. Descartes' problem of other minds doubts the existence of other minds because other minds, unlike the self, are not given immediately to consciousness. However, this problem has a totally different formulation: given that the consciousness of other minds is inconsistent[21], how in principle can one be aware of others? If the philosopher holds that contradictions cannot be true, the philosopher will struggle to simply accept the presence of self and other as true contradictions. On the one hand, one can affirm the existence of others as miraculous. Cassirer quotes Klages: "The world is governed by a magical power which may be regarded equally well as corporeal or spiritual and which is totally indifferent toward this distinction" (Cassirer, 1955, p. 103). If self and other are contradictory, the self and the other may be miracles—miracles that neither the philosopher nor the scientist can grasp. Such a response may place self and other squarely in the domain of religious experience. On the other hand, in order to preserve the coherence of the theoretical worldview, one can preserve the consistency of one's experience by denying the existence of others[22]. Of course, we can consider this as a logical possibility, but we cannot believe it. I write this article because I expect another to read it. This can only be the case if there are others. Indeed, the public character of meaning demands it.

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[20] Although Cassirer would not agree with Sartre's description of consciousness as a kind of nothingness, he insists that consciousness is the 'window' by which objects are visible and cannot itself be an object. Consciousness is ultimately a basis phenomenon that makes possible our consciousness of objects. (Cassirer, 1998 p. 133,138).

[21] Levinas is right to characterize the expression of the Other in contradictory terms. The expression of the Other is […] a coinciding of the expressed with him who expresses, which is the privileged manifestation of the Other, the manifestation of a face over and beyond form. Form—incessantly betraying its own manifestation, congealing into a plastic form, for it is adequate to the same—alienates the exteriority of the other. The face is a living presence; it is expression. […] He at each instant undoes the form he presents (Levinas, 2016, 66). I do not mean to endorse all of Levinas' claims concerning Otherness, but he is right to describe the experience of others in terms of contradictions. Naturally, this leads to contradictions in his own descriptions, such that "The Other alone eludes thematization" and "he overflows absolutely every idea I can have of him" (Levinas, 2016, p. 87).

[22] Such an attitude may be nicely captured by what Levinas calls "atheism," whereby there is a separation of the self from the Other "so complete that the separated being maintains itself in existence all by itself." (Levinas, 2016, p. 58).

Rather than simply deny the existence of other minds or declare them to be miracles, philosophers might instead deny the absolute coincidence of subject and object in the experience of others. By taking this route, philosophy could attempt to evade the contradiction and achieve a consistent understanding of others. However, this approach has severe difficulties. On this model, one can be directly conscious of an object, e.g., a body, but only indirectly conscious of a mind or subject connected to that body. By comparing the object that appears with oneself, one could attempt to establish the existence of others by analogy[23]. However, by dividing the subject from the object in the consciousness of the other, the other could not in principle appear, since consciousness would only ever be aware of the object, never the subject—not even indirectly. As a result, Cassirer is right to be skeptical that the theoretical worldview could produce knowledge of others (Cassirer, 1955, 81)[24]. For the same reason, one cannot save the consistency of self-consciousness by invoking the absolute non-coincidence of subject and object, for consciousness would never encounter itself as subject, but only ever as an object[25].

The contradictory character of the appearance of self and other depends upon a critical self-reflection that attends to the critical gap between consciousness and its object. In naïve self-reflection, in which one does not attend to the difference between consciousness and its object, this problem does not appear. Without attending to the critical gap between consciousness and its object, the self may appear to the mind as an object as it happens to appear in naïve naturalistic or psychological attitudes towards selfhood.

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[23] Cassirer also discusses a variety of strategies that employ such a distinction, such as the appeal to empathy whereby one simulates, e.g., via the imagination, what it might be like to be the other. See (Cassirer, 1955, p. 80-82).

[24] Cassirer argues that the operation of theoretical consciousness must assume the existence of others and can only operate on the presupposition of this assumption. Cassirer agrees with Scheler that the evidence of others is a certain and irreducible fact (Cassirer, 1955, p. 85). Cassirer would be sympathetic with the critique of the theory theory of mind as stated by Zahavi and Gallagher. If one needs a theory to understand others, then children in their first three to four years of life should not have any understanding of others, which they in fact do. See (Zahavi and Gallagher, 2008, p. 175).

[25] The options Cassirer considers here are unsuccessful ways of attempting to make knowledge of other minds consistent and is not intended to be a complete catalogue of all the ways philosopher account for knowledge of others. Although Cassirer thinks one cannot solve the problem by remaining within theoretical consciousness, he argues that one can avoid the contradictions by adopting or living into the expressive relation, rather than attempting to conceive it (Cassirer, 1955, p. 102).

Likewise, because I appear to others as a plenum of being, I am regularly treated as though I were a substance or had substantial being. Because I am routinely treated as a thing, I may be inclined to treat myself the same way. Indeed, in everyday life the self is not treated as though it were empty, for both the I and the other routinely appear as a plenum of being. Accordingly, without self-reflection, a person may labor under the presupposition that self and other are ordinary things that can be consistently articulated.

**IV. The desire for selfhood**

Girard's theory draws upon the emptiness of the determinate self and presupposes that the self-contradiction of the self is insufferable. Having established the emptiness of the self, in order to ground the theory of mimetic desire, we must also establish the insufferability of that emptiness. An alien species might imagine that human beings are the kinds of beings who not only lack determinate selfhood but are also content or satisfied with that emptiness. The phenomenology of love shows the inherent discontent human beings have with their own emptiness, and their inherent desire for determinate selfhood.

From a Girardian point of view, the phenomenology of love is not only consistent with the phenomenology of self-consciousness, but concretely exemplifies the contradictory structure of self-consciousness in lived experience. In the case of love, the desire for another is also a desire for oneself. Indeed, whether it be erotic love, familial love, or friendship, the desire for another is inseparable from one's own sense of self-identity.

To begin with, romantic love, ἔρως, is a kind of discriminatory love. People do not fall in love with everyone. Romantic love is directed towards a particular person or particular person(s). As all good existential phenomenologists know, by losing the beloved, either to death or to a rival lover, for example, one feels a sense of self-loss—as though one is not oneself, and indeed—cannot stand to be who one is. Kierkegaard speaks of the impotent desire to "eat oneself up:"

> So to despair over something is not yet properly despair. It is the beginning, or it is as when the physician says of a sickness that it has not yet declared itself. The next step is the declared despair, despair over oneself. A young girl is in despair over love, and so she despairs over her lover, because he died, or because he was unfaithful to her. This is not a declared despair; no she is in despair over herself. This self of hers, which, if it had become "his" beloved, she would have been rid of in the most blissful way, or would have lost, this self is

> now a torment to her when it has to be a self without "him"; this self which would have been to her riches (thou in another sense equally in despair) has now become to her a loathsome void, since "he" is dead, or it has become to her an abhorrence, since it reminds her of the fact that she was betrayed. Try it now, say to such a girl, "Thou art consuming thyself," and thou shalt hear her reply, "Oh, no, the torment is precisely this, that I cannot do it" (Kierkegaard, 1941, p. 28-29).

This kind of existential crisis is a common portrayal in film: the forlorn lover never leaves the house, ceases to clean, and fails to take out the garbage. The external observer agrees, for we tend to idiomatically express their condition as a case of self-alienation. We say that the forlorn lover is no longer "himself." Consider Romeo and Juliet. Romeo's death means that Juliet must die. She feels that she cannot live without him; she is not herself without him—without him her being is intolerable.

This phenomenon is not isolated to instances of romantic love but appears to affect all forms of discriminatory or preferential love, namely forms of love that privilege particular objects over others[26]. Take the case of familial love—στοργή. Parents love their children preferentially—they tend to privilege the well-being of their own children over others. If someone harms one's kin (such as one's daughter), one perceives this as a threat to one's very being. In particular, it is a threat to one's being as a parent. The anxiety or unsettledness that one feels about one's own being does not require that another actually harm one's kin. Rather, it is enough for one to simply imagine the thought of another harming one's child. Indeed, it is not even necessary that a real threat exist. Even the simple consideration of the possibility of harm to one's child is sufficient to instigate a feeling of anxiety about the potential loss not only of one's beloved, but of one's own identity, in this case, as a parent.

Finally, consider the case of friendship, φιλία. As Aristotle says, "friendship is reciprocated good will" (Aristotle, 1999, p.121). Whether that reciprocated good will is primarily concerned with utility, pleasure, or virtue, in each case of friendship one shares a common end. On the classical understanding of friendship, friendship too is also a form of discriminatory love, for we do not find all equally useful, pleasurable, or conducive to the cultivation of virtue. Studies have shown that the same parts of the brain that

[26] Agape, or divine love, would not fall under the rubric of 'discriminatory love', for it applies to all without preference. In Chinese philosophy, the Mohist concept of love (or universal care) is also a good exception to this rule.

signal a threat to oneself are also activated when one imagines one's friends being harmed (Lane Beckes, James A. Coan, and Karen Hasselmo, 2013, p. 670-677). This is certainly not to say that love is completely determined by neurological structures. Rather, it indicates how the conscious experience of the self's relation to one's friends is reflected in the biological structure of the body itself.

How do these cases of discriminatory love show the intolerability of the empty self? In these cases of heartbreak, the self originally identifies itself with the other. Since the other appears as a subject who is also an object, the self identifies its own selfhood with the objective selfhood of the other. By losing the other, one experiences a loss of oneself—a loss of one's own objective being. The loss of one's own objective being produces grief for the loss of the beloved, but also grief for the loss of the objective self. Having lost one's own determinate self, one feels fundamentally unsettled by the indeterminacy and non-objectivity of one's own selfhood. As Kierkegaard reminds us, even the possibility of lost love provokes anxiety in us, for anxiety is nothing other than this unsettledness before the indeterminate. In the case of lost love, one desires the lost other—the other self.

In sum, the phenomenology of discriminatory love shows not only that human beings experience the loss of their beloved as a loss of their own objective selfhood, but that this loss of selfhood is experienced as an intolerable state characterized by grief and anxiety. Thus, the phenomenology of discriminatory love shows that in those cases where human beings experience a loss of objective selfhood, human beings desire to overcome their own sense of non-being and reclaim the determinate, objective selfhood with which they originally identified.[27] Although I certainly can be without the other, in these examples of heartbreak, the I that can be without the other is felt to be an indeterminate state rife with anxiety—it is a self in despair—a self one cannot stand to be.

In order to stave off self-loss, a person must protect the other in whom one has invested themselves, and they are willing to harm others in order to protect ourselves individually and collectively (as a family, community, nation, etc.). The defense and protection of the loved one, the romantic partner, the family, or the friend, is not just the defense of the other, but a kind of self-defense.

This brief study of the forms of discriminatory love indicates that even when I do not take up an intellectual or reflective attitude toward myself,

[27] Sartre calls this desire of the self to be 'in and for itself' the desire for God.

in the experience of heartbreak, one's own self appears empty of objective, determinate being whenever it is separated from the beloved. Indeed, it is just this experience of the life world—the loss of good fortune—that so often elicits self-consciousness in us (Kierkegaard, 1941, p. 81). Through repeatedly experiencing the loss of myself as a consequence of the loss of my beloved, I can learn the same truth gleaned from the theoretical pursuit of self-knowledge: the indeterminacy and paradoxicality of one's own selfhood.

**V. Mimetic desire: the singular metaphysical desire**

To summarize our reflections: first, the human being is a self that is empty of determinate, objective, selfhood. Second, the human self is discontent with its lack of determinate selfhood and desires the selfhood that it lacks. Given the emptiness of self, and the desire to negate that emptiness, how in principle can that desire for objective being be fulfilled?

In our search for determinate selfhood, we discovered that the objective and determinate self—the I—could neither consistently appear reflectively nor pre-reflectively. Instead, the objective self could only appear as a self that is other to oneself, as another self-outside oneself. It is true that the objective self appears to itself in reflective self-consciousness as a representation of an alien ego. However, before the human being relates to itself via reflection, in childhood the human being is already pre-reflectively self-consciousness. Moreover, because the longing for selfhood is endemic to the human condition, the longing for selfhood must already be at work in pre-reflective self-consciousness—long before a person reflectively encounters themselves. We would do good to remember that self-consciousness of one's own objective selfhood cannot be achieved within pre-reflective self-consciousness alone, for in pre-reflective self- consciousness the objective I never appears as a separate, determinate being alongside the transcendent objects of intentional experience. Thus, from within the pre-reflective position, the objective self can only appear as an object that is completely external to one's own pre-reflective being.

Because the selfhood of the self can only appear as external to the self, it will either appear as an external object that is not a subject, or as an external object that is also a subject. One cannot discover one's objective self-hood by looking to other objects inherently devoid of selfhood, such as a planet or a stone. Thus, only one other possibility remains: in order to discover their own selfhood, human beings must discover their selfhood in the selfhood

of another subjectivity—such as other human beings[28]. To be sure, Girard would not dispute that independently of the other self, the human being is always already a self. But for Girard, this independent self is constituted by the desire for the selfhood in another. Mimetic desire signifies just this longing to find one's own selfhood in another self. Mimetic desire is Girard's term for what is traditionally understood as the 'social nature' of humanity.

From within pre-reflective self-consciousness, the I cannot appear to itself as a determinate object. However, the self can appear as a determinate object to others. In virtue of being recognized by others, the self can appear as something that has some objective being. As a result, for the self that longs for objective selfhood, the other self appears to have the power to grant determinate selfhood through their power of recognition. For this reason, the determinacy of selfhood initially appears intersubjectively, for in mutual recognition each 'I' already contains a reference to a thou, thereby constituting a 'We.' Through the *mutual recognition* of each by the other, each self appears to every other I as a plenum of being[29].

If the other I appeared to be totally empty of determinate selfhood too, they would not appear as a source of selfhood for pre-reflective conscious life. Unlike one's own self, however, the other I does not appear empty of determinate selfhood, for the other I occupies the object position within consciousness, and thereby appears as a determinate subject. For pre-reflective human life, the other self not only appears to have the power to confer being onto the empty subject through its power of recognition, but the other also appears as an object—as a substantial being. For the pre-reflective subject (who is unaware of the emptiness of all human subjects), the other I appears both as a being and as someone who can confer being. Simply put, the other appears as a source of selfhood—a self whose desire for selfhood has been fulfilled and who can confer objective selfhood onto the self.

While the ego's desire for determinate selfhood is unfulfilled, the other appears to have fulfilled their desire for selfhood. Hence, in order to acquire

[28] Note that human beings are not the only kind of subject in which human beings may search for their selfhood. They may also search for themselves in the selfhood of other living entities or God(s), for example.

[29] We see this intertwinement of I and thou in the German Idealist tradition. Fichte writes, "no Thou, No I, no I, no Thou" (Johann Gottlieb Fichte, 1982, p. 172-73). As Hegel would put it, each I is a We, and each We is an I (G.W.F. Hegel, 2018, p. 76). While Girard would agree that the thou is necessary for the I to complete its striving for selfhood, for Girard the I nonetheless has its own being independently of that other. It can only desire the other's desire because it is other than the other.

selfhood, the human being must learn what to desire from the other self. By taking the desire of the other as a model for what to desire, the human being can learn what to desire and how to overcome the emptiness of their own desire for selfhood. In short, by imitating the desire of the other, the human being aims to fulfill their desire for objective selfhood, and thereby learn who they are. Because pre-reflective self-consciousness is anterior to reflective self-consciousness, before one can attempt to discover one's selfhood via reflection one must first seek one's selfhood in the selfhood of another[30].

According to Girard,

> Once his basic needs are satisfied (indeed, sometimes even before), man is subject to intense desires, though he may not know precisely for what. The reason is that he desires being, something he himself lacks and which some other person seems to possess. The subject thus looks to that other person to inform him of what he should desire in order to acquire that being. If the model, who is apparently endowed with superior being, desires some object, that object must surely be capable of conferring an even greater plentitude of being (Girard 1979, p. 145-146).

The model, the one whom one imitates, appears to have being exactly because their desire for selfhood has an object. The imitator feels a lack of being exactly because their desire fails to have an object, while the model's object appears to have the power to grant being to the subject of desire. Accordingly, the imitator is drawn to desire what the model desires, for the model has the being that is absent in the imitator. Hence, Girard reasons that as soon as the human being has desire it is mimetic desire. One learns what one ought to desire by modelling one's desire on the desire of another. The desire for selfhood is mimetic—it is heteronomous and triangular.

[30] While reflective self-consciousness enables the self to relate to itself as an object, this self-relation is posterior to pre-reflective self-consciousness whereby the other treats the self as an object. Indeed, the reflective self-relation that arises in the question 'who am I?' depends upon language. The subject cannot learn language without the education of others. Indeed, it is only via the relation of the others that I can learn to speak. Hence, the inter-subjective relation to others is a condition for one's capacity to reflect upon themselves via language. In principle, there is good reason to affirm that one cannot relate to oneself as a determinate object in reflection without first being recognized as a determinate object by the other. In short: I must first be named by the other before I can name myself. In any case, even if there are non-linguistic forms of reflective self-consciousness, this would not undermine the argument that pre-reflective self-consciousness requires mimetic desire.

Girard boldly claims that "as soon as there really is desire, […] we find the mediator" (Girard 1976, 21)[31].

The inter-determination of self and other in the constitution of the human being is also mirrored in the neural structure of human brains. Scott Cowdell points out that mirror neurons are consistent with and reflect the inter-personal aspect of selfhood undergirding Girard's theory. Mirror neurons are a kind of neuron that activates both when a person performs a certain motor-act and when that same person observes the same action being performed by another person. As Cowdell summarizes, while various kinds of monkeys have such neurons, they are more sophisticated in human beings:

> It turns out that F5 in the human frontal cortex also contains mirror neurons, but more sophisticated ones than monkeys have. As brain mapper Marco Iacoboni puts it, they "fire when an individual kicks a soccer ball, sees a ball being kicked, hears a ball being kicked, and even just says or hears the word 'kick.' Also, F5 in humans, and Broca's area, where language is generated, are close together, which supports a theory of language developing from gestures rather than from prelinguistic sounds, along with language being acquired mimetically (Cowdell, 2014, 222).

[31] Girard generally reserves the term 'desire' for this specific longing: the longing for selfhood. Girard further distinguishes between in-born appetites and desires. Appetites are directed towards particular objects—hunger is directed towards food, thirst towards water, etc. However, in order for these appetites to constitute our selfhood, they must pass through the fires of mimetic desire, which is not indexed to a particular object (except selfhood in general). Naturally, these appetites are not fulfilled independently of culture. Indeed, how the appetite is fulfilled is inseparable from the practice of culture, which is not pre-determined by our biological species-being. Although appetite might have a fixed object, the realization of our humanity as a social and cultured being cannot be realized by biological impulse alone. Indeed, although the survival of the organism depends upon appetitive inclination given in advance, the form of human life that distinguishes it from other organisms—central to which is its cultural diversity—must be acquired in a different way. For Girard, what one desires as a human being cannot be exhaustively determined by biological species being. Although humans are biologically inclined toward imitation (as are other beings), selfhood is not prescribed in advance by our biological species-being. For Girard, while the object of the appetites, one's basic needs, may be given in advance, the object of desire—the self—is indeterminate and is discovered by means of imitation.

Emotional life too is deeply affected by the presence of mirror neurons:

> We now know that this MNS underpins human empathy, with a brain pathway connecting F5 via the insula to the amygdala and other parts of the limbic system, where emotions are experienced, such that witnessing and simulating emotions in others lights up the brain as our own experience of the emotion would do (Cowdell, 2014, 222-223).

Mirror neurons give further evidence that selfhood cannot be fully constituted in isolation from others but is co-constituted through the interplay of self and other.

What I should desire to be as a man, as a son, as a Christian, etc. depends—in some fundamental way—on the imitation of others. By means of the imitation of others, one conforms oneself to some form of culture through some form of enculturation. Of course, that human beings learn what to desire by mimesis is nothing novel—it is an ancient idea. Learning as mimesis is, for example, central to the education of the guardians in Plato's *Republic*. In order to raise virtuous guardians, who excel in the art of war, the guardians ought only to be exposed to stories of virtue, which they must imitate, in order to learn what it is that they should desire (Plato, 1997a, p. 1022, 386a-c)[32].

In summary, without the desired object (selfhood), the human being is deprived of their own self-identity. Secondly, what they desire cannot be garnered except by means of the imitation of others. Thus, since the object of desire would fulfill their desire for selfhood, the object appears as that which would constitute their selfhood. Hence, they can only learn who they are by learning what to desire. Since they learn what to desire by imitation, they can only learn what to desire, and who they are as a human being, by means of the imitation of the desires of others.

Although Girard's theory of imitation is born from reflection on literature and philosophical analysis, it is also consistent with the most recent scientific literature on imitation. Like Girard, Michael Tomasello observes that imitation is a human universal:

[32] Since human beings desire the selfhood of the other, Girard's account of mimetic desire can explain why one might invest our own selfhood in others, and can thereby explain why one might enter into certain relations of discriminatory love in the first place. Accordingly, one may love a woman because one's model loves the woman, and the attachment to that woman is a consequence of one's imitation of one's model.

> Children in different cultural contexts may be differentially prone to imitation, and adult behaviour may influence this as well, but the basic way that children imitatively learn from others is very likely a human universal—indeed, something that is necessary for the creation and maintenance of distinct cultural groups in the first place (Tomasello, 2019, p. 146).

Girard does generalize about the character of learning across cultures, but as Tomasello notes, this is not inconsistent with our best scientific research, for there are "no findings demonstrating qualitative difference in children's imitative learning across different cultural contexts" (Tomasello, 2019, p. 146).

The strength of the human drive toward imitation is especially evident in the phenomenon of "overimitation." In a study by Haun and Tomasello (2011), children were asked to identify the larger of two elephants. When three of the children had publicly declared the smaller elephant to be the larger elephant, the fourth child would also say the same thing. However, in private the fourth child would change their answers (Tomasello, 2019, p. 144). The drive to conformity in these cases outweighs our desire to speak the truth.

Tomasello reasons that children are prone to imitate adults not only to learn something useful, but also because imitation "facilitates social bonding" (Tomasello, 2019, p.143). Although this is perfectly consistent with Girard's account of mimetic desire, mimetic desire not only facilitates social bonding, but it is also the means by which the human being seeks to construct their very selfhood. This is also consistent with a study by McGuigan and Stevenson, in which they show that children are more prone to conform "more strongly with adults than peers" (Tomasello, 2019, p. 145). Because the desire to be can only be satisfied by the imitation of the other, the desire to be is identical to the desire for what the other desires. However, because the desire of the model constitutes the being of the model, the desire for what the model desires is nothing less than the desire to be another, or more specifically, the desire to be the model. Naturally, as the model, the model is an object of admiration.

Not all desires are mimetic, for mimetic desire itself is not born from mimesis: "Imitative desire is always a desire to be another. There is only one metaphysical desire but the particular desires which instantiate this primordial desire are of infinite variety" (Girard, 1976, p. 83). As is evident,

mimetic desire itself cannot be the product of imitation[33]. Because imitative desire drives us into relations of mimesis, it cannot be grounded in mimesis itself. If one learned mimetic desire by imitating the desire of another, then mimetic desire would exist before it could arise. However, this would be absurd. Accordingly, Girard infers that there is at least *one metaphysical desire*, the desire to imitate the being of the other. This means that there is at least a minimal self that is not constituted by the other—the self that desires the other.[34]

The human self is that self who is not satisfied with its own being but desires the selfhood of the other. The desire to be the other is the desire to be heteronomous. Girard thinks that though human beings can become aware of this process of mimesis, human beings are generally unconscious of this mimetic process—they imitate without knowing why. This unconscious disposition to complete themselves via the imitation of others leads to violence.

**VI. The violence of mimetic desire**

Having established that mimetic desire is that process whereby the human being seeks their being, Girard demonstrates why it is that people are inclined towards jealousy and hatred. The factors constitutive of mimetic desire, understood in this existential way, show why mimetic desire—internally mediated—inclines one towards conflict.

Girard grounds his account of the emotions of jealousy, hatred, and ressentiment on internally mediated mimetic desire, such that all human beings are inclined, in virtue of who they are, to be drawn into the feelings of jealousy, hatred, and ressentiment.

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[33] Doran too observes a similar regress: "If the desire for "positive role models" is itself mimetic, are we not caught in an infinite regress?" (Doran, 2005, p. 176).

[34] Arguing against strong tendencies in anthropological research to reduce the self to a socially constructed identity, Zahavi argues that there is a minimal, non-constructed self that makes experience possible, and which further enables the possibility of the socially constructed self. (Zahavi 2022, p. 398). While Girard is certainly not committed to the Husserlian underpinnings of Zahavi's argument, Girard certainly acknowledges the existence of Zahavi's minimal non-constructed self. Mimetic desire itself is not socially constructed and constitutes at least one fundamental aspect of the non-socially constructed self. However, mimetic desire offers a way to explain the connection between the non-socially constructed self and its socially constructed identity. Because humans are constituted by mimetic desire, humans are impelled to model themselves on others. In short, the appearance of the socially constructed self is, at least in part, highly motivated by the other-oriented character of the non-socially constructed self.

First, because one's being is empty, one desires to have one's own autonomous being. Yet, since this being can only be acquired by desiring the very being of the model, one can only become oneself by acquiring the being of another. Thus, one is thrust into seeking out one's own autonomous being in the being of another, in a being that is not one's own.

The self is a particular self; it is one in number. Because it is one in number, in order for the self to be one's own, it cannot be shared in common with the being of the model. Since one's being is in the being of the other, in order to acquire the self one must wrestle one's being from the model. Their possession of the object expresses—from the perspective of the imitator—an affront and challenge to one's very being. Accordingly, in order to acquire one's own being, one cannot tolerate the model's possession of the object of desire. The model thereby becomes an obstacle to the realization of one's being. What is worse, it is the very fact that they are the model for one's being that they become one's rival—the one who prevents one from realizing one's being.

Selfhood is scarce, for it is singular, and cannot be shared in common. However, mimetic desire, at its root, does not only generate conflict on account of the fact that the objects desired are scarce. It generates conflict because I can only have my being from someone else—but I am not the other—and so must stand opposed to them. To put it tersely: my singular being cannot be shared and be my own. As long as the model, whom I imitate, possesses their object, they deny me my very being. As Girard states, "one cannot be the role model without appearing to act as the obstacle" (Girard, 1976, p. 7). Naturally, seeking one's autonomous being in another is a performative contradiction, and reflects the contradiction that constitutes the selfhood of self and other. In virtue of being the model, the model is no longer the model, but the obstacle.

As is clear from the analysis, Girard makes vanity the cause of the rivalry for those subjects whose models are immanent or internally mimetic: "The mediator is the rival, brought into existence by vanity, and the same vanity demands his defeat" (Girard, 1976, p. 7). The vanity, it seems, consists in the desire to be oneself or to "desire according to oneself." As long as one aims to desire according to be oneself alone, one will be impelled toward transforming one's model into a rival. The vanity that generates the conflict between master and disciple is constituted by a pride in one's own being—a pride that is ultimately undeserving. And deserving of the name 'vanity,' for the subject has no being without the model, whom he means to punish. Rather than giving thanks, the vanity of the subject moves her to hate

her model. We might expect that "desiring according to oneself" might be a kind of desire that would eschew the violent tendencies of internal mediation. However, the opposite is the case: wanting to desire according tooneself alone is exactly the principle by means of which the conflict between model and rival is generated[35].

Because of the ubiquitous presence of mimetic desire, Girard discovers mimetic desire and the violence born from it to be prevalent throughout human society. One finds it in the relationship between academic advisor and advisee—the imitation of the advisor brings often brings with it a hostile relationship between advisor and advisee—one need only think of famous examples such as Husserl and Heidegger. In academia, there are many who desire what the elites desire—they measure the quality of academic work by the extent to which it is desired by others whom they privilege as a model—irrespective of the quality of the work itself. Generally, mimetic desire can be easily discernable in snobbery. The snob is a slave to fashion, who desires what a privileged person or class of persons deems desirable. Such snobbery is certainly not foreign to the academy.

For Girard, hatred and jealousy are various terms for "internal mediation." The true object of hatred, ala Girard, "inspires a desire in us and yet prevents us from fulfilling it" (Girard, 1976, p. 10-11). The model inspires in us the desire for the object, but his possession of it prevents us from fulfilling it. Thus, the model becomes an object of hatred. The model, having become an enemy, a rival for the desired object, is an object of hatred. In the subject of mimetic desire, one finds two opposing tendencies: "the most submissive reverence" and "intense malice" toward the mediator of desire who is the model/rival (Girard, 1976, p. 9).

In addition to hatred, the model becomes an object of jealousy. Jealousy is the desire to possess what another has, and the model possesses what I want. Hence, I am jealous of the model. But in the case of envy, o ought to further add that there is a feeling of helplessness or powerlessness that accompanies the feeling. Girard agrees with Scheler that envy is a "feeling of impotence which vitiates our attempt to acquire something, because it belongs to another." And further, envy occurs when "our efforts to acquire it fail and we are left with a feeling of impotence" (Girard, 1976, p. 13). Indeed, a person may both desire the same job, and having lost the competition,

[35] Unfortunately for virtue ethics, modelling one's own virtue on a virtuous person might have the ugly consequence that one finds oneself *viciously* pit against the virtuous model.

one might feel impotent in respect to the desired object, and envious of the person who received the job offer. In the fundamentally existential situation of mimetic desire, jealousy and envy are directed towards the very being of the model. I may feel a profound helplessness that the being I desire is occupied by another. Of course, on Girard's account, Scheler is very much correct that "there is a tendency in all men to compare oneself with others" and that jealousy is based on that comparison (Girard, 1976, 14).

Against Scheler, however, Girard posits the mediator or rival as the principle of jealousy and envy—not the object that the subject desires. If we suppose that the jealous person directly or immediately desires the object, we can account for why the person expresses hostility towards the person of whom they are jealous, since the person of whom they are jealous happens to stand in in the way. However, we may wonder why the jealous person also (at least secretly) always admires the person of whom they are jealous.

Girard suggests that if we approach jealousy through the lens of mimetic desire, we can see that the reason the subject desires the object is because the rival desires it. On this account, we can explain why jealousy always contains some admiration or fascination with the rival. Because I admire the person of whom I'm jealous, I desire what they have, and thereby come into conflict with them—they are simultaneously an object of love and hate. Jealousy, envy, and hatred are "triangular emotions"—endemic to (internally mediated) mimetic desire (Girard, 1976, p. 12). Mimetic desire accounts for the jealous and envious person in their admiration and disdain for the person of whom they are jealous.

Girard, like Scheler before him, recognizes self-deception at the heart of jealousy. But Girard generalizes this self-deception. For him it is a feature endemic to internally mediated mimetic desire. The vain person desires to possess an autonomous being, a being determined "according to oneself," not according to another. Accordingly, vanity, the desire for independent being, demands of us that one views the rival as external to our own being. Our vanity cannot allow us to acknowledge that the rival is the model of our being. Instead, vanity externalizes the being of the rival. By externalizing the being of the rival, vanity does not allow the subject to understand that her desire is mediated through the rival. Rather, vanity engenders a profound self-deception, namely the illusion that the subject desires the object without mediation from the rival.

Accordingly, it is not just the Don-Quixote type, in his imitation of the fictional character, Amadis, that leads one to lose a sense of reality. Vanity, the fundamental disposition that leads to conflict in cases of internal mediation,

also imperils our sense of reality, but in a different sense. By concealing the mediator's role, vanity also conceals its own imitative relation to the rival. It is imitative, but it considers itself autonomous. Having uncovered the source of conflict in (internally mediated) mimetic desire, we can now understand why it is that internally mediated desire in the stories of Stendhal and others is generally concealed.

Given this profound self-deception, the vain person cannot admit to themselves that they admire their rival. Rather, because of the externalizing of the rival from their own being, the subject views "the rival's possession of the object as evidence of his alleged hostility towards him" (Girard, 1976, p. 8-9). In part due to his intense focus on the rival as the primary cause of the problem, perhaps it is not surprising that the obsessed man has very little self-knowledge but appears to have extensive knowledge of his rivals (Girard, 1976, 74). But even knowledge of the rival is lacking, for he does not know the true place of the rival in his own desire. Having done nothing more than possess an object desired by another, the model becomes the enemy. Their possession is viewed as a deliberate attempt to degrade and humiliate the subject. Thus, vanity leads the subject not only to imagine that they first desired the object and then fell into rivalry with the other, but also to square responsibility for the rivalry solely and completely on the other—not on oneself. Vanity obfuscates—it only sees the rival, not the model, and so misjudges the reality of the situation. If we tend to think about jealousy, envy, and hatred in these terms, it may be because we view the jealous person as the jealous person would view the situation—not as it really is (Girard, 1976, p. 12). Vanity leads a person to critique the other (who is not wholly responsible) and exempt themselves from responsibility, while they, in point of fact, share responsibility for the rivalry. Simply put—vanity scapegoats the rival[36].

By challenging the mediator, the subject forces the model to lay claim to the disputed object. By affirming their right to possession, they strengthen their own attachment to the object. Moreover, having affirmed their right to the object, the subject is revealed to be a rebellious force, who threatens to steal away what is not their own[37]. The model—having attracted a rival—must now rival their own rival.

[36] Scapegoating is central to Girard's theory of myth and his critique of myth. For more on the role of scapegoating in mythical life and ritual, see *Violence and the Sacred*.

[37] A common phenomenon, the imposter syndrome, is a symptom of a deeper problem, namely the fact that the self is essentially an imposter.

In order for the model to acquire and maintain one's most prized possession, it is counter-productive to announce to the world what one truly wants. As Girard states, "Every desire that is revealed can arouse or increase a rival's desire; thus it is necessary to conceal desire in order to gain possession of the object. Stendhal calls this concealment 'hypocrisy' (Girard, 1976, p. 103). Julien Sorel, for example, succeeded in winning back his lover by lying. He acted as though he did not love Mathilde. While he truly loved Mathilde, he behaved as though he loved another woman—his true desire failed to correspond with his action—he was hypocritical. Yet, wielding that hypocrisy was central to winning back his beloved. Not only is the vain person self-deceived, but the rival must conceal their true desire in order to win their object and thereby their self-fulfillment. In order to avoid attracting rivals, one can always lie about what one wants, and by such misdirection, one can diminish the rivalries that would truly impact one's capacity to win or maintain the object of one's desire. As Girard succinctly states, "The secret of success, in business as well as in love (perhaps also in academia?), is dissimulation. One must hide the desire one feels and pretend a desire one does not feel. One must lie" (Girard, 1976, p. 107).

The rivalry that ensues transforms each person, both the model and the subject, into an image of the other. Now the model must be the rival of the subject—each becomes the enemy of the other. By rivaling each other for the object, each aims to deny the right of the other to the object. Each is now a rival of the other and shares a common goal: negate the being of other. Both model and subject have been transformed into rivals: there are now two rivals. Upon rivaling each other, these two rivals also become models for one another. Each imitates the rivalrous action of the other—each takes on the character of the other as a rival, and a discipleship of rivalry ensues. In an initial stage of conflict, one might engage in small acts of sabotage to undermine their rival's capacity to hold onto the object. In an advanced stage of the conflict, "negating the other" might mean exactly that: to commit an act of violence against their person or kill them and/or their loved ones. Although the conflict may at first appear to concern itself primarily with a beloved object of desire, it culminates—in the worst case—with a violent struggle to the death[38]. If there is no interceding force to slow the advance of

[38] Here Girard comes close to Hegel's master-slave dialectic. As Hegel writes in his *Phenomenology of Spirit*, "self-consciousness achieves its satisfaction only in another consciousness." "In the other" it "sees its own self" and attempts to "sublate this otherness of itself." "In so doing it proceeds to sublate its own self, for this other is itself" (Hegel, 2018,

conflict, internally mediated mimetic desire culminates in mimetic violence, wherein each imitates and mirrors the violence of the other[39].

Thus far we have only spoken of external conflict between persons. But for Girard mimetic desire, and mimetic violence, is more profoundly a phenomenon that affects the internal life of the human being. The conflict between model and subject—mentor and mentee—arises within the self alone. Girard speaks about how mimetic desire is the fundamental cause of ressentiment. Ressentiment is, most minimally, as Scheler points out, a reactionary attitude toward another (Girard, 1976, p. 10-11). In Girard's reflections, ressentiment arises from mimetic desire, and is a reactionary attitude toward one's model.

The Master (the advisor) has a disciple (a PhD student). As the model for the disciple, the master commands the disciple to "imitate me!" Yet, the disciple is also a rival-in-potential. Accordingly, the master must conjoin his first imperative with another. "Do not imitate me!" Were the student to imitate the master, the student would be at risk of falling into rivalry with the master. We do, indeed, have plenty of examples to think about when we consider academic models who have become the rivals of their students. This is what Girard calls the "contradictory double imperative" which for him lies at the basis of all human relations. The model has what the student needs—the student should imitate the model. Yet, if the model does not want to fall into rivalry with the student, he must also encourage the student not to imitate. The model transmits contradictory signals (Girard, 1979, p. 147). Ressentiment is the internalization of the contradictory double imperative. The internalization of the contradictory double command is a psychological self-poisoning. This contradiction is a further concretization of the contradiction that burdens self-consciousness.

We can conceptually explicate the features of ressentiment in Girard's account by simply returning to the very basic opposition that constitutes

p. 76-77). Like Girard, Hegel's dialectic is born out of desire. Unlike Girard, in Hegel's dialectic is cancelled and preserved in reason which no longer looks on the self as one in number, but as a universal that can be shared in common. Insofar as each recognizes the universal as what constitutes the selfhood of the other, and the universal can be held in common, Hegel can eventually solve the problem of mimetically born violence through the mutual recognition of the rationality of each person in the moments of Reason and Spirit. See (Hegel, 2018, p. 95-96).

[39] Such violence is also reflected in the neural structure of the brain. As Cowdell points out, "The MNS (mirror neuron system) turns out to be involved in the communication of violence, the power of suggestion in advertising, and the reinforcement of prejudice" (Cowdell, 2014, p. 223).

mimetic violence. The subject lacks being and looks to their model to acquire the being which they lack. They internalize the command 'imitate me!' This is necessary, for otherwise they have no being. On the other hand, this is not their being—it is the being of the model, and as a consequence it cannot be theirs. They internalize the claim "do not imitate me!" They find themselves poised against themselves. They identify their own being with the model, yet they cannot be who they desires to be—for the being is that of another. Who are they? They are the being who is alienated from their own being (Girard, 1976, p. 43). They have internalized the model and identified it as who they are—in this way they certainly admire themselves, for they admire the model. But this self whom they admire teases them with being while simultaneously withholding it from them. They hates themselves. Who do they become? To employ Nietzsche's phrase from the *Twilight of the Idols*, their desires have become mutually antagonistic. They are certainly a decadent—very much in the sense of Nietzsche. Unlike Nietzsche's philosophy however, there is no overman exempt from this process—decadence is not merely a feature of herd morality.

Girard claims that the implications of the scandalous violence that arises due to mimetic desire is identical to the implications of a notion like Nietzsche's concept of ressentiment. This internal ressentiment is inexplicable without the acknowledgement of the specific way that the subject and model interact. Indeed, the subject's being is contingent upon the negation of the being of the master. Their being is not self-determined, for it can only be acquired in a reactionary way. The value of the master, whom they secretly admire, is inverted—the master becomes bad, an enemy who deserves punishment, while the subject who rivals the master takes itself to be good—even a victim of the master's prowess. Moreover, in order to negate the being of the master, and win the power, they must formalize the use of cunning, hypocrisy and lies as essential tools to overcome the obstacle in order to mis-lead and mis-direct the rival. Finally, at the height of the crisis of violence, the master will be transformed into an image of the subject—each becomes a decadent if they were not both so already—the model themselves transformed into a mirror image of the decadent.

Internally mediated mimetic desire turns us against each other, and it turns us against ourselves. Since all human beings are subject to the pressures of mimetic desire, decadence is not a wholly modern or novel phenomenon. This capacity to turn against oneself, according to Girard, is a fundamental disposition of the human being. Earlier we noted that the vain person conceals the presence of the model within. Thus, the decadent may be decadent

without knowing that they are such—they may be at odds with themselves without knowing why.

Indeed, one who is self-conscious of one's condition might find oneself in a deep existential despair. Having a heightened self-consciousness, and having seen the ugliness of one's own being, one cannot help but be disgusted at oneself. We find such a person in Dostoevsky's *Notes from Underground*. In the underground, the man hates himself, and is incapable of action. His heightened self-consciousness about his own decadence has brought him underground with a cold greeting of resentment towards the world. The protagonist exclaims: "I swear to you gentlemen, that to be overly conscious is a sickness—a real, thorough sickness" (Dostoevsky, 1994, p. 6). He may consider his own fate particular to him—a cursed being—while everyone else he might suppose, does not feel this internal split in the soul. He may consider the ailment to be his own alone, without necessarily recognizing that this is a contagion that has spread throughout his society. The great novelists from Cervantes to Dostoevsky, recognized these trends of mimetic desire. Culminating with Dostoevsky, we discover a heightened sense of self-alienation and despair—the height of modern ressentiment. In sum, internally mediated mimetic desire brings violence against oneself as much as it brings violence against the other.

As we stated earlier, mimetic violence appears as a kind of uniformity, for each person now takes on the same role: each is the rival of the other. The differences between the persons in the relation has subsided. As Girard notes, they are monstrous doubles (Girard 1979, p. 56). Ironically, although they have a uniform goal to negate the other, in order to negate the other they must differentiate themselves from the other, and separate themselves from their rival. Given the impulse to overcome their rival, creative acts of negation may arise. I say 'no' to my rival, and create a scheme or engage in a creative act of cunning in order negate the other. Accordingly, escalating mimesis can give birth to reactionary creativity. As Girard notes, in a world of internal mediation, "the contagion is so widespread" that "everyone could be his neighbor's mediator without understanding the role he is playing" such that in "being tempted to copy his neighbor's desire" his desire becomes a "copy of a copy" of his original desire.

In a society in which human beings primarily desire by means of internal mediation, the source of the conflict is not necessarily one pair of models and subjects. Rather, in such a society one can expect a number of rivalrous pairs, each of whom instigates their own sequence of violent mimesis. If there is no interceding force to slow the advance of mimetic conflict,

internally mediated mimetic desire culminates in mimetic violence, wherein each actor imitates and mirrors the violence of the other. The violence itself is contagious in the sense that violence itself becomes the object of imitation, for it becomes the ideal after which the subjects strive. Here the performative contradiction is deepened: by negating the other I copy the other.

Even our acts of reactionary creativity work to re-enforce the uniformity of our mimetic violence. Ironically, our reactionary negativity, rather than create distance from the rival, brings us into a more intimate and violent uniformity with our rival. Violent opposition is the signifier of ultimate desire. It is the position of one who feels himself at the cusp of divine self-sufficiency (Girard 1979, p. 148). Such self-sufficiency is despair, for the self is not absolutely autonomous, and "builds castles in the air" such that "The Self is its own lord and master, so it is said, its own lord, and precisely this is despair […]" (Kierkegaard, 1941, p. 111).

**VII. Concluding remarks**

In conclusion, Girard's theory of mimetic desire has a solid philosophical grounding in the non-being of human selfhood. Mimetic desire is the disposition by which one seeks selfhood in others, a longing that always leads to violence as long as one seeks one's selfhood in other persons. If we continue to pursue one's selfhood in other persons, one is inherently disposed to fall into violence with one's neighbors. The contradictory character of that violence reflects the contradictory character of one's very selfhood. Only by becoming aware of mimetic desire, and the violent consequences of internal mediation, can one begin to seriously consider how the violence born from that desire might be extinguished.

First, we must become aware of the emptiness of all human subjects, and their need to locate their subjectivity beyond themselves via mimetic desire. Second, the solution to the problem of such violence does not necessarily demand relinquishing all desire. Rather, Girard calls us only to relinquish internally mediated desire. Indeed, let us not forget the case of Don Quixote. Don Quixote desires according to an external mediator, who is "enthroned in an inaccessible heaven." Because the model transcends the domain of being that is occupied by the subject, Quixote never falls into rivalry with his model. To escape the travails of mimetic desire, we might do well to reconsider the wisdom of Quixote, whose foolishness is not without its merits[40].

[40] Girard himself never lays the blame for violence on mimetic desire itself. To see why, one must only remember that mimetic desire must not be internally mediated. In order

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to avoid the rivalry and violence at the heart of mimetic desire, Girard will argue that one must have an external mediator with whom one cannot in principle compete. Because human beings are finite creatures lacking their own selfhood, they cannot compete with God, for God is an infinite and perfect Other. Unlike Quixote's model who is violent, Girard calls us to imitate the God of the New Testament, in which Girard discover that God is love. If God is love (agape), as the New Testament teaches, then by desiring God one would desire agape—a form of non-discriminatory love. The content of agape is thoroughly and radically non-violent. Hence, Girard argues that by imitating the transcendent God of love, the subject can stop the cycle and contagion of violence born from internally mediated mimetic desire. While Girard solves the problem of mimetic desire by appealing to the Christian faith, there are other possible solutions, which Girard does not consider that must be taken into careful consideration. For example, rather than re-directing mimetic desire to God, as Girard argues, an alternative Buddhist response might advocate for the absolute detachment from all forms of mimetic desire.

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# Girard and Nietzsche's phenomenology of victims

**Abstract:** In this paper I argue that Nietzsche and Girard provide, for the first time, a phenomenology and genealogical account of the victim as both an ontological and moral category. First, I lay out Girard's mimetic theory and show how it culminates in a phenomenology of victims and victimization. I then turn to Nietzsche, in particular Girard's consideration of Nietzsche as the most important theologian of recent past, to show that Girard's phenomenology – of victims, violence, and scapegoating – already exists within Nietzsche's philosophical framework, albeit with a significantly different interpretation. It is my hope to problematize the seemingly self-evident and axiomatic character of the category of the "victim" by highlighting its specific genealogy within the Judeo-Christian tradition in order to further a much broader discussion on the hermeneutics of violence in general.

**Keywords:** Mimetic Theory, Girard, Nietzsche, Violence, Phenomenology.

According to Rene Girard, despite all appearances that contemporary Western society is post-Christian and postmodern, there nevertheless remains one indissoluble moral absolute: the *concern for victims*. For Girard, this concern reigns supreme despite all theoretical reflections that would case the cultural landscape as relativistic. This absolute value, the concern for victims, is so self-evident, so axiomatic, and so intuitive that one is rarely even aware that such a value exists. It is precisely this value, this religious, Judeo-Christian value for Girard (and for Nietzsche), that binds together and regulates the contemporary moral and political culture of the West. In this paper, I want to discuss precisely why according to Girard and Nietzsche (Girard's reading of Nietzsche) that this is the case by offering

a phenomenology[1] of the victim[2]. My argument will be simply to show how Girard and Nietzsche provide, for the first time, a genealogical account of the victim as both an ontological and moral category. I first will briefly lay out Girard's mimetic theory and show how it culminates in a phenomenology of victims and victimization, in what Girard calls the scapegoat mechanism of the mythic sacred. Next, I will turn to Nietzsche, in particular Girard's consideration of Nietzsche as the most important theologian of recent past, in order to show that Girard's phenomenology – of victims, violence, and scapegoating – already exists within Nietzsche's philosophical framework, albeit with a significantly different interpretation. It is my hope to problematize the seemingly self-evident and axiomatic character of the category of the "victim" by highlighting its specific genealogy within the Judeo-Christian tradition in order to further a much broader discussion on the hermeneutics of violence in general[3].

Where ought a phenomenology of victims and of victimization to begin? Indeed, what is a victim exactly? For Girard, the phenomenon of the victim must be traced historically, genealogically, through the process of victimization, which Girard thinks remains, in the end, synonymous with religious scapegoating. That is, for Girard, victimization is itself a fundamentally religious phenomenon, or perhaps even more strongly put: victimization is a *sacred* act. Thus, any phenomenology of victims must begin with an historical understanding of religion. As we shall see, the category of victim is revealed in and through a religious process that Girard calls sacred violence or mythic scapegoating.

Now Girard's thesis concerning victimization and sacred violence remains fairly straightforward: violence, victimization, remains the very essence of religion and the very meaning of the sacred itself. For Girard, the sacred is always (or was always) tethered to violence, in particular sacrifice and sacrificial scapegoating. Whether it be human sacrifice (which Girard

[1] I use the term "phenomenology" in the Heideggerian, as opposed to the Husserlian, sense and understand it to mean simply the process by which a thing is made to disclose itself. In this sense then, phenomenology is synonymous, as it is for Heidegger, with the process of *aletheia*, or truth as a disclosure.

[2] Portions of this paper appear in Duane Armitage (2021). Printed with Permission.

[3] The thesis that mercy and compassion were uniquely an innovation of Christianity has already been put forth by Rodney Stark, as well as E. A. Judge. However, the precise philosophical foundations of this innovation, I believe, were first unearthed by Girard and Girard's reading of Nietzsche. See Rodney Stark, 2011, pp. 105-120. See also, E. A. Judge, 1986, pp. 107-121.

thinks was original) or animal sacrifice, the blood of the sacrificial victim is essential to the sacred and its sacrificial acts, as the word sacri-ficare suggests: to make sacred. Yet this sacred victimization is wholly concealed to those who practice it, i.e. to those who victimize, and for this reason such victimization is ipso facto scapegoating. Yet given the initial self-concealed nature of scapegoating, the process of victimization, for Girard, is conditioned by a certain anthropology, namely one that understands violence and victimization as necessary for the formation of human communities.

Human violence is inevitable for Girard precisely because of human beings' mimetic (imitative) nature, which tends to eventuate in rivalry and conflict. That is, as human beings learn their desires from each other, mimetically, such mimetic desires lead to violence, in part, due to the scarcity of physical objects, but even more so because, in the end, desire is not, for Girard about the object(s) desired, but about those who desire them; that is, I seek ultimately to possess the other who models my desire (Girard, 2014, p. 12). Regardless, human communities always and inevitably become violent. The question becomes then, for Girard, how have human beings evolved in order to cope with their inevitable violence? That is, how have human communities survived this long without destroying themselves? The answer lies in religious victimization.

For Girard, religion functions as a cathartic mechanism through which the human community can, so to speak, "let off steam" and channel its pent-up frustrations and hatred (born of mimetic rivalry) toward a single individual – a victim – who is then collectively persecuted – effectively lynched – by the community qua the collective mob. It is essential that the community sees this victim as the cause of all of prior strife; that is, the victim must be considered guilty, and even evil, and must therefore be purged from the community in order, so the community thinks, to rid itself of this violent contagion. The guilty victim allows for communal unification in the name of justice and the banishment the evil, and from such unification a cathartic peace is achieved. The community is bonded together over and against the single victim such that harmony is restored to the once rivalrous and strife-laden community.

For Girard, this tells us something striking about human beings, namely that the main foundation of inter-subjective, communal experience lies in persecuting, in victimizing. Humans feel united collectively in their victimizing, which explains the human propensity to gravitate toward the mob phenomena.

But how exactly do victims originate? How are such victims selected? Girard's insight regarding the selection process of victims is not only edifying in itself, but it also allows for further penetration into the nature of the victim itself. Girard argues that the same process that enables mimetic desire and rivalry also conditions the selection of victims, namely *undifferentiation* (Girard, 1986, pp. 17-18). That is, as humans begin to mimic each other, and, in turn, become more rivalrous, they also become more similar. Differences between people dissolve. Strangely, Girard thinks that violence is ultimately caused not by difference but by sameness. As differences between people dissolve, groups inevitably form, and such groups form around the escalation of the conflict wrought by *mimesis*. In short, mimetic rivalry leads to a communal crisis that is at the same time coterminous with group selection and formation – undifferentiation. Such undifferentiation, however, further differentiates itself from that which is other than the group, and it is within this newfound space – of differentiation amongst undifferentiation – that victims arise. Victims arise, are differentiated, then through the process of undifferentiation, which means quite simply that as groups form, so too do victims.

Victims are an eventuality of group formation and thus of human community. Victims, for Girard, often represent the weakest members of a community, such as those who are disabled, those who suffer from some physical malady, ethnic or religious minorities, etc. However, since victim selection ultimately hangs on difference, often the scapegoated victim can even be a king or someone in the upper tier of a communal hierarchy. Regardless, victims are selected based on their inability to assimilate into an undifferentiated group. Victims thus are those differentiated by the undifferentiated community, climaxing in the scapegoating process of the mob versus the single victim, wherein this violence scapegoating enables even further social cohesion. The foundation, again, for intersubjectivity, for Girard, lies in such collective victimization. In short, victims are inevitable wherever human communities form.

Yet, the victim for Girard is a kind of *pharmakon* – a poison and a remedy. The very thing that makes human community possible must also be violently purged; in fact, the purging itself ultimately contributes to a community's stability. Moreover, the scapegoated victim, originally perceived to be the very cause of all of the community's evil, is later, due to the collective peace that ensues, deified. Thus, Girard can write "[t]he peoples of the world do not invent their gods. They deify their victims." (Girard, 2001, pp. 70). These deified victims are those around whom mythology and ritual

sacrifice revolve, insofar as such myths and rituals reenact victims' original persecutions via the mob. Every ritual, every sacrifice, and every mythic tragedy, recollects (unconsciously, of course) a founding persecution and victimization of one who was deemed guilty, but later revealed to be divine. Thus, for Girard violence is, in a very real sense, the "sacred." That is, the sacred necessitates fear and awe precisely because of its confluence with violence. Ritual sacrifice then keeps human violence "in check." This sacrificial mechanism, for Girard, is essential to not only the formation, but also the continuation of any and every culture. Ritual sacrifices in effect prevent further violence from extreme escalation. According to Girard, this logic of sacrifice makes little sense outside of a proper understanding of a founding murder, a founding victimization. And yet, for Girard, the real logic to sacrifice remained *concealed* to those who offered it.

The recollection of the violent sacred that is reenacted in ritual is called myth. However, the most crucial element of myth is not simply that it is the recounting of victimization, but that it is a recounting *from the mob's perspective*. That is, myth is the recollection of the death of a victim from the perspective of the persecutors. What if, however, a "myth" were to be told, not from the persecutors' perspective, but rather the victims'? What would an inverted mythical account of sacrifice look like? For Girard, the Judeo-Christian tradition, beginning with the Hebrew Bible and culminating in the Passion of Jesus exemplifies this inversion, and even deconstruction, of myth. The victim's perspective *deconstructs* myth precisely due to the revelation that the victims of sacrifices were never guilty, but rather always *innocent*. This innocence remained wholly *concealed* from mythical accounts of the sacred, and the Biblical tradition begins to reveal such concealment and thus reveals what Girard refers to simply as the *scapegoat mechanism.*

For Girard, victims, all victims, are *always* innocent scapegoats. This much is revealed by Judeo-Christianity. Indeed, in the Bible, both the scapegoating of the innocent, as well as the mimetic rivalry due to envy, are precisely made explicit. For example, the story of Joseph, who is victimized by his brothers due to their envy, or Cain's murder of Abel, who was murdered because "his own deeds were evil, and his brother's righteous" (1 John 3:12). The Jewish people themselves, through their continual persecution, represent a constant reminder of the scapegoating of the innocent. The Gospels present Jesus as the scapegoat par excellence, the innocent victim of a collective mob lynching. Indeed, for Girard, since the Gospels speak consciously about scapegoating, they therefore ipso facto deconstruct it, for scapegoating is contingent upon its own concealment. Girard even reads the budding

friendship between Pilate and Herod, who are said "to have become friends on that very day" (Luke 23:12) as indicative of the scapegoat mechanism's ability to unify otherwise opposed parties (Girard, 1014, p. 32). Moreover, we see also the power of the mimetic mob, so powerful that it overtakes Peter to deny Christ.

In sum, for Girard then the Bible represents the beginning of the end of mythology, as it is the absolute antithesis of mythology. Furthermore, the Bible exposes the singular lie of mythology: the victim as guilty. Rather, in reality, the victim is always innocent. There are no guilty victims, only innocent ones; it is rather the mob that is guilty. This truth remains concealed from mythology, as does the essential scapegoat mechanism inherent in religion and to the very notion of the sacred. In other words, within Judaism and later Christianity then, the *victim qua victim* comes to fore and is permitted to appear for the very first time in cultural history. For Girard, prior to Judaism, victims were not seen *as victims*, that is, as those who are unjustly scapegoated. The idea of a victim itself then arises by way of the Judeo-Christian deconstruction. Moreover, and perhaps most importantly, a new ethic emerges, namely one of concern for victims (Girard, 2001, pp. 160-169). Compassion and mercy begin to eclipse pagan virtues that often exhibit the strength and power of the hero[4]. This original Judaic ethic of *concern for victims* is universalized and spreads to the entire Western world by way of Christianity. For Girard this universalization and spreading of the Jewish ethic is the single greatest event in shaping Western culture.

We see then Girard's original insights with regard to the beginning of a phenomenology of the victim, insofar as Girard offers us, in a sense, a historical genealogy of how victimization, and in turn, the victim qua victim arose not only as an ontological category, but, more importantly as the fundamental ethical force of Western culture. In sum, victimization is inevitable in the formation of any social group, and, in fact, group formation is predicated upon unconscious victimization, or the scapegoat mechanism of primitive, mythic religion. Yet it is not until Judeo-Christianity's deconstruction of such mythic religion that the victim itself can arise thematically as a metaphysical and, more importantly, a moral category.

[4] Consider the Aristotelian or Platonic virtues – temperance, courage, magnanimity, etc., all which indicate strength over that of weakness; even Latin the word *virtus* itself, means essentially "power," and the Greek *arête* comes from the same root as "aristocratic" or "noble," which indicate superlative superiority (*aristos*).

Strangely, Girard noticed that his insights into not only the mythic sacred's victimization, but Judeo-Christianity's overturning of such victimization already appear a century earlier in the work of Nietzsche. In fact, Girard praises Nietzsche as *the* thinker who discovered this "anthropological key" to religion and to Judeo-Christianity, namely the defining of the meaning of the victim, and, in turn, the vocation of concern for victims (Girard, 2001, pg. 171). That is, Nietzsche knew the *facts* of the collective persecution of mythical traditions and Judeo-Christianity to be the same; however, the essential difference that Nietzsche noticed was the difference in interpretation of the facts, namely the moral interpretation of the meaning of collective violence with regard to the victim. The key passage of Nietzsche for Girard comes from Nietzsche's *Will to Power* 1052:

> Dionysus versus the "Crucified: there you have the antithesis. It is *not* a difference in regard to their martyrdom – it is a difference in the meaning of it. Life itself, its eternal fruitfulness and recurrence, creates torment, destruction, the will to annihilation. In the other case, suffering – the "Crucified *as the innocent one*" – counts as an objection to life, as a formula for condemnation (emphasis mine; Nietzsche, 1968a, para. 493).

In other words, Dionysus approves of the mob violence and lynching of the victim, in the name of life, vitality, and recurrent cycles of necessary violence as a part of "life" itself; Christianity however condemns violence of any kind in the name of the "innocent" one, Jesus. The difference lies not in fact, but in interpretation. For Nietzsche, it is a matter of the affirmation versus the denial of life vis-à-vis suffering and violence. Dionysus dismembered is the promise of life, of continual rebirth from destruction and violence. Nietzsche therefore affirms Dionysus *over and against* Jesus, the "Crucified." Nietzsche further writes,

> Through Christianity, the individual was made so important, so absolute, that he could no longer be sacrificed: but the species endures only through human sacrifice…Christianity is the counter-principle to the principle of *selection*. If the degenerate and the sick ("the Christian") is to be accorded the same value as the healthy ("the pagan")…then unnaturalness becomes law…Genuine charity demands sacrifice for the good of the species – it is hard, it is full of self-overcoming, because it needs *human sacrifice*. And this pseudo-humaneness called Christianity wants it established that *no one should be sacrificed* (Nietzsche, 1968a, para. 246).

Nietzsche here, for Girard, sees the uniqueness of Christianity: it is an obsession and concern for victims, for the weak, the sick, and the ill constituted. Nietzsche simply despises it. "Unnaturalness," in the Darwinian sense, "becomes law" in Christianity. Moreover, Nietzsche sees the primary necessity of human sacrifice in the foundation of human culture and society. Thus, Nietzsche sees the same insight as Girard – scapegoating is foundational. Nietzsche however affirms it, where Girard, following Christianity, overturns and abhors it.

It is a matter then of perspective. From Dionysus' perspective (here understood as the mythic writ large) the "persecuted" are weak, full of resentment and hate toward the healthy and the powerful; from the perspective of the "Crucified," the persecuted victims are innocent, the scapegoats of the collective mimetic contagion of the angry mob. It is indeed a matter of which perspective one chooses: the mobs' or the victims'. Girard believes Nietzsche sides with the former and thus despises the latter. For example, in *The Anti-Christ*, Nietzsche writes,

> The weak and the ill-constituted should die off [sollen zu Grunde gehn]: first principle of our philanthropy. And one shall help them to do so. What is more harmful than any vice? –Active sympathy for the ill-constituted and weak –Christianity.…(Nietzsche, 1968b, para. 2)

Aside from the obvious inflammatory rhetoric, Nietzsche nevertheless shows his cards in his hatred for Christianity's ethic of victims. It is not just victims, but the *concern* Christianity has for them that Nietzsche criticizes. That is, Christianity, for Nietzsche, remains most obsessed with the virtue of compassion or pity (*Mitleid*). Later, in *The Anti-Christ*, Nietzsche's critique of compassion takes a more Darwinian – even Social Darwinian – turn. That is, Nietzsche comes to despise compassion not simply because it "denies life," but because it is also lauds weakness. Nietzsche writes: "Christianity has taken the side of everything weak, base, ill-constituted, it has made an ideal out of *opposition* to the preservative instincts of strong life" (Nietzsche, 1968b, para 4). As opposed to this, for Nietzsche, Dionysian festival gives the benefits of ecstasy and intoxication, primordial unity, by celebrating all aspects of life, especially strength and vigor, without affirming weakness *qua* weakness. In one of the most outrageous passages in Nietzsche's entire corpus, Nietzsche equates Christian compassion with the preserving of that which *ought* to be destroyed:

> Christianity is called the religion of *compassion* [*Mitleid*]… Suffering itself becomes contagious through compassion…its morally dangerous character here appears in a much clearer light: compassion on the whole thwarts the law of evolution, which is the law of *selection*. It preserves what is ripe for destruction, it defends life's disinherited and condemned. (Nietzsche, 1968b, para. 7).

Nietzsche links compassion to the defense of the condemned, i.e. the victims. Compassion affirms what is weakest and most ill fit for life and is therefore *hostile to life*, to Dionysus as the celebration of life in all its circles of birth and decay and violence.

Finally, in the *Genealogy* Nietzsche notes the positive, *cathartic* effect of inflicting punishment, not because it corrects some abstract, metaphysical injustice, but rather because punishing enables the release of primitive, violent emotions. Indeed, watching the sufferings of others is in fact *good* for human beings. Nietzsche writes,

> To see others suffer does one good, to make others suffer even more: this is a hard saying but an ancient, mighty, human, all-too-human principle … Without cruelty there is no festival: thus the longest and most ancient part of human history teaches – and in punishment there is so much that is *festive!* (Nietzsche, 1989, 2:6).

Nietzsche here seems to come close to Girard's point about ancient mythology's scapegoat mechanism and its use of sacrifice and violence in order to abate humanity's primitive emotional constitutions. There is indeed, for Nietzsche, something purgative about violence. Cruelty is the *essential* aspect to "festival," or we could say, to religion. This passage amounts to Nietzsche's almost unequivocally saying that "violence is the sacred."

Nevertheless, for Girard, Nietzsche's insights penetrate not only then into the essence of religion and mythology, but into the very essence of Judeo-Christianity and its distinctiveness vis-à-vis all mythology. Nietzsche understands quite well that original religion is about victimization and persecution, and that with Judaism and Christianity this victimization is inverted, deconstructed, and transmuted into a new ethic of concern or compassion for victims. In other words, Nietzsche's philosophy corroborates Girard's. Both agree that Judeo-Christianity launches an ethic of victims that overtakes Western culture effectively establishing the victim as an ontological and moral category. The only disagreement concerns whether this is positive or negative.

That Nietzsche saw so clearly into Christianity's essence, while also rejecting it, is for Girard simultaneously Nietzsche's genius and madness. Thus, Girard writes that, "Nietzsche's only error, a properly *Luciferian* error (in the sense of "bringer of light"), was to have chosen violence against the innocent truth of the victim, a truth that Nietzsche himself was the only one to glimpse…"(Girard, 2014, p. 135). For Girard, Nietzsche's descent into madness results from his choice of perspective, his siding with Dionysian mania against the weakness of victims, whom he regarded as inferior. For Girard, Nietzsche paid for this choice with his life (Girard, 1988, p. 76).

Nevertheless, Nietzsche calls into question our simple and axiomatic acceptance of the virtue of mercy toward victims and the moral status of the victim itself. That is, Nietzsche highlights that mercy is not in any way a self-evident or obvious ethical truth, but rather one that has a very particular and contingent history inherited from Judeo-Christianity. According to Nietzsche and Nietzsche's "ontology," if reality is simply about power, will to power, inequality in such power, in strength and weakness, will be an inevitability. Why then assume it is best or virtuous to side with the weak, with the victim? Why assume their perspective? Why not rather the strong perspective? What we consider to be a seemingly obvious and even innate moral tendency, namely to feel pity and compassion for the persecuted, is, for Nietzsche, nothing more than the result of 2000 years of cultural catechesis in Christianity.

Returning then to our initial aim, namely the genealogical account of the victim through Girard and Nietzsche, we see then that both thinkers disclose, in different fashions, the necessity of scapegoating and victimization in order to form social cohesion. Moreover, both thinkers recognize a fundamental shift with Judeo-Christianity, namely the recognition of the victim qua victim, and the ethic of mercy, over and against the lynching mob.

What then is a victim? We can say now that a victim is one who is differentiated in and through the process of undifferentiation. Victims arise when groups are formed. Initially, victims are not recognized as victims, but rather as the other, the weak, the disabled, the deformed, the evil – as that which must be expelled from the community. It is this very act of expulsion itself, with its cathartic effect, that cleanses the community and allows for social order and further group formation. It is not until Judeo-Christianity, for Girard as well as for Nietzsche, that we see a culture growing in its awareness of this cathartic, victimizing mechanism. Indeed, the fact that this mechanism becomes thematic leads to a radical new ethic of mercy, one which condemns the act of victimization in favor of the vindication of

the victim, thus leading to the phenomenological disclosure of the victim as, again, an ontological and moral category. While Nietzsche saw such disclosure as ultimately nihilistic and decadent in its vindication of weakness, Girard marks such a disclosure as the essential foundation of Western culture. The victim, as martyr, for Girard is essentially a witness, a *martyros*, that is, one who testifies against victimization, and, in and through such testimony, discloses and thus deconstructs the victimizing process itself (Girard, 1986, pp. 198-201). The witness that began with Judaism culminates for Girard with Christ, as, in a sense, the ultimate martyr, the final witness, who in turn simultaneously inaugurates the universalizing of the victim ethic, while also establishing the martyrdom tradition.

The insights we can draw from here are several: our postmodern culture is not as secular or as relativist as it thinks itself to be. It axiomatically accepts the ethic of concern for victims, and thus remains still deeply rooted in a specific genealogical history, namely Judeo-Christianity. Indeed, the only moral absolute in postmodern culture appears to be the defense of victims. Western culture remains obsessed with victims. One needs only to glance at contemporary American culture and its politics to see its victim obsession. It is in many ways the fundamental element that structures political discourse. The "Right" and the "Left" are perpetually engaged in a "battle over victims," a battle over *who* the victim *really* is: is it minorities, members of the LGBTQ community, women, etc. (as the Left argues), or is it the white, blue-collar worker, the "forgotten man" (as the Right argues)?

Yet, in America at least, this ethic exists as strange caricatural, hyper-Christianity where the ethic of victims has become unhinged from any metaphysical grounding, and fused, in a way, with the Dionysian affirmation of violence, insofar as this ethic is now not only an ethic of concern for victims, but also at the same time, an ethic of the necessity of persecuting (even violently) victimizers *in the name of victims*. Moreover, there appears to be a kind of collective *catharsis* felt in publicly shaming and condemning the guilty, those perceived to be *victimizing*. The media consistently parades before us guilty victimizers that are to be judged by the "court of public opinion." There exists a certain satisfaction and even pleasure we take in watching these guilty people be judged, condemned, and publicly shamed. Indeed, it is *cathartic*. It even remains culturally permissible to judge, condemn, and shame, *so long as* it is done "in the name" of defending victims.

Thus, in postmodernity, we witness two rather mystifying phenomena: (1.) the uprising of persecution (often violent) *in the name of victims*, and (2.) simultaneously, in response, the *repudiation* of the concern for victims

altogether, where "victims" and "the victim mentality" are pejoratives. The latter repudiation of victims, it seems to me, amounts to a neo-Nietzscheanism, a resurrection of fascism and its need to eradicate the weak in the name of power, in the name of making America "great." And yet the former – persecution in the name of victims – confirms Nietzsche's worry about slave *ressentiment*, namely when violence or persecution is excused in the name of "defending the persecuted."

In other words, due to the death of God, this victim ethic is now detached from its metaphysical foundation, and in turn, has taken on a life of its own. One specific concern, for Girard, as well as for Nietzsche, remains the re-wedding of this victim ethic to the mythic sacred, that is, to the process of victimization, in its victimizing of perceived victimizers. In this religious parody, the violence of the mob remains, except now it is directed at the perceived "lynchers" of the innocent, thereby still achieving catharsis through victimization and violence, and thus forming social cohesion. Violence is used to control violence. The insight of Judeo-Christianity only works, for Girard, if it is non-violent, lest it slide back into the mythical-Dionysian – and fall prey to Nietzsche's critique of Judeo-Christianity as laced with *ressentiment*. This genealogical phenomenology of victims thus serves an important regulatory function, namely the illumination of the origin of the victim ethic as one distinct from the ethic of violent scapegoating, which can, in turn, guard against further violence and victimization, even if done *in the name of victims*.

For both Girard and Nietzsche, human beings are unable to transcend their religious history. Our concern for victims is contingent upon the ontological status of the victim itself, a truth revealed by Judeo-Christianity. Therefore, it would seem that, according to Girard and Nietzsche, furthering any discussion concerning the hermeneutic of victimization and violence would require first acknowledging its Judeo-Christian heritage.

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# Should we take sides?: Girard, Mouffe, *et al* on graceful divisiveness

**Abstract:** This paper interprets the rhetoric and social phenomena of "taking sides" and "scapegoating" amidst radical societal division. Exploring the social mechanics of unity and division, I visit the work of René Girard and Chantal Mouffe, who offer a lucid ambivalence regarding the dilemma that neutrality is a practical impossibility. And in turning to implications of their shared paradox—that to be genuinely "peaceful" may require graceful divisiveness—I consider cases and theory on nonviolently fomenting conflict. In contrast with certain liberal social theories of transcending division, this paper treats the desire for politics beyond hegemony—or politics without a scapegoat—as something of an eschatological ideal, toward which Girard, Mouffe, and others offer a tension-filled, crypto-Augustinian, agonistic pluralism.

**Keywords:** René Girard, Chantal Mouffe, Agonism, Division, Divisiveness, Unity

*If you want the truth to stand clear before you, never be for or against.*
*The struggle between 'for' and 'against' is the mind's worst disease.*

Seng-T'san (d. 609 BCE)

(Conze, Horner, Snellgrove and Waley, 1954, p. 296).

**Introduction**

Amidst increasing political polarization in our day (Klein, 2021), T'San's wisdom would seem to raise before our consciousness the human propensity to scapegoat others and invite us instead to abandon our tribalism, deescalate rivalries of us versus them, and embrace our shared humanity. It might call to mind Christ's breaking down barriers between people and his prayer that "they may be one," or St. Paul's exhortation to live in peaceful accord with one another. And it may seem to affirm Jean-Jacques Rousseau's tolerance-maxim of social harmony: "anything that destroys social unity is useless" (Rousseau, 1997, p. 147). One of the great recent peace activists, Thích Nh□t H□nh, similarly voiced the need to transcend combative dualism, critiquing even liberation theology's common refrain of a "preferential option for the poor." He writes, "I do not think God wants us to take sides, even with the poor…those with the highest understanding will be able to see the suffering in both the poor and the rich…When we take sides, we misunderstand the will of God" (H□nh, 1995, 79f). Liu Xiaobo similarly gave his Nobel Peace Prize speech, entitled "I Have No Enemies," pointing us beyond adversarial side-taking (Xiaobo, 2010). Some theological works today speak in a similar tone, appealing to a spirituality beyond divisiveness, seeking to create an "us without a them"—like *The Church of Us Vs. Them* (Fitch, 2019), or *Jesus Outside the Lines* (Sauls and Lyons, 2015), or *Life at the End of Us Versus Them* (Rempel, 2017). In all, T'san's renunciation of the for-against disease would seem to be essential wisdom for a world roiling with antagonism, in which one often hears calls to turn down the temperature, find common ground, and cease partisan divisiveness.

But, knowing that "unity" can be poisoned with falsehood and injustice, *how exactly* do we transcend division? Theologian Kristen Deede Johnson (2007), maps out two major categories of answers offered by social theorists regarding the factiousness of difference: liberal-tolerance approaches and post-Nietzschean agonist approaches. If we use this classification, liberal tolerance theory today is particularly manifest in discourse resembling the above irenicism which aims to create a politics without polarization, a politics beyond hegemony. On the academic front of liberal-tolerance, Johnson engages figures like John Rawls, Jürgen Habermas, and Richard Rorty. But

on the public front, liberal-tolerance can take on far less disciplined forms, seen especially in discourse that aims to speak from a position of neutrality, identifying how there are "both sides" to rivalries, and that the speaker stands above the fray. Among recent controversial examples, we might recall responses to the 2017 Charlottesville Unite the Right rally, a maelstrom of Nazi salutes, Confederate flags, counter-protests, fistfights, and a murder. In its wake, then President Trump, in what might be considered an extremist take on "tolerance," avoided taking sides by rhetorically framing the event as a problem stemming from "both sides." In this and other cases, even though he and his vocal supporters have been regularly characterized as "divisive" by critics, one of his movement's chief rhetorical modes has been to invoke *unity* and *peace* while accusing critics of being irascible dividers bent on scapegoating and "witch hunts." For example, advocates of "critical race theory," he has said, are "divisive"—irrationality festering upon past battles. In a similar rhetorical framework, the Georgia State Senate, for example, passed a bill (HB1084) that forbade any K-12 classroom teaching about "divisive" concepts, particularly teaching on race and U.S. history. The bill and others like it aim to prohibit any teaching that could make students feel that they bear personal responsibility for historic wrongs because of their race, color, sex, or national origin (Bernstein, 2022). While these might represent extreme cases among politicians, public polling also evidences an abiding reticence to express political opinions—fearing that divisive remarks could spark social backlash and threaten job security. The Cato Institute, for example, reports an increase in self-censorship regarding political ideas, wherein 62% of Americans feel prevented from speaking their opinions out of social fear (Ekins, 2020.) We might then suggest that, regarding liberal tolerance motifs, we are seeing a contorted public torpor, wherein rhetoric of "unity" and "transcending" partisanism is regularly employed in service of otherwise controversial agendas, while anything "divisive" is regularly freighted with negative connotations. With "tolerance" so regularly deployed in confusing manners, it follows that a generation of social theory has been contemplating the end of liberalism (e.g. Deneen, 2018).

A chief alternative to liberal-tolerance approaches, the *agonistic*, suggests a more paradoxical reading of T'San's exhortation in a facially opposed thesis: that to be against-againstness and strive for truth in our world almost invariably involves *taking sides*. This agonistic approach has been advanced by Bonnie Honig, Stephen K. White, William Connolly, and, prominently, Belgian social theorist Chantal Mouffe, who will be explored below in this paper. Mouffe critiques liberal tolerance approaches as misguided attempts

to create a "politics beyond hegemony." Seeing this as an impossibility, her political agonism resonates with the haunting words of Holocaust survivor Elie Wiesel, who insisted that if we want to transcend division, then paradoxically "*we must take sides*…neutrality helps the oppressor, never the victim…Sometimes we must interfere" (Wiesel, 1986). Martin Luther King Jr. too, as we will see, exhorted that, to build peace, we may even need to *foment* conflict, to bring hidden injustices to the surface. While King is almost universally praised in our day, one cannot help but recall that, at the time of his assassination he was regarded as a *divisive* fomenter of discord, with a disapproval rating of around 75% (Cobb, 2018). In unpacking Mouffe's agonism, we will better see how Wiesel or Dr. King were not misguided in their "taking sides." *A fortiori*, we might also see how the Prince of Peace was not contradicting his pacific teachings in the fractious dictum, "I came *not to bring peace but division*." Rather, Mouffe's agonistic pluralism, I will argue, can help us mediate the reigning antinomy between irenic unity and divisive embattlement that so marks our context.

If Mouffe sifts liberalism's aim to "construct a politics without hegemony," René Girard's mimetic theory, too, presents us with the parallel question of whether we can ever have a "politics without a scapegoat." A wide-ranging scholar, his mimetic theory has been framed in many ways—a theory of comparative mythology, a study of the transition from archaic to revealed religions, a hypothesis on the origins of human culture, etc. But one sure description is that his is *a theory of conflict*, and it is particularly suited toward this problem of "taking sides." In an article examining political conflict through the lens of mimetic theory, scholar Nathan Colborne (2013) crystallized the theory's implications about divisiveness, asking, *can we ever engage in a politics without a scapegoat*? The question stems from mimetic theory's diagnosis that human consciousness is marked by a blindness to our own scapegoating, and this defect has ubiquitously penetrated all of humanity's desires and institutions. As such, mimetic theory seems to demonstrate that we are stuck within "a political, religious, and cultural problem *without a political, religious, or cultural solution*." For any attempt to remedy societal injustices—whether through laws, consensus, inclusive procedures, education, religion, taboos, public shaming, cancelling, even critique itself—will paradoxically manifest as yet another iteration of partisan rivalry. None of our available solutions seem to truly transcend division, for none are neutral. It would seem *any* participation in our political and cultural milieu, any "taking sides," *de facto* leads to scapegoating. Can one engage our political turmoil

without becoming further ensnared in rivalry? Or must anyone sensitized to the mechanics of scapegoating be consigned to irenic, apolitical quietude?

For instance, when I speak with students of mimetic theory, they report a change in perception: they see rivalrous imitation everywhere where it was once hidden—in others and in themselves. They begin to see how we are more often unwittingly driven by unconscious posturing, projecting, and scapegoating. And in beginning to see this, it introduces a temptation to entirely *withdraw* from or "stand above" all social discourse and controversial disagreements—about everything from climate change to racism to vaccines. For, now more aware of our unconsciously imitative psychology, we can see how in many conflicts there is indeed a mirroring dynamic in which "both sides" are party to the escalation. But if we think this way, almost any urge to engage in disputation, education, or advocacy is now checked by an internal interruption: are *you* scapegoating? One is here reminded of Girard's scholarly counterpart, Walter Burkert, who said that enlightenment inescapably impresses *insecurity* upon us: for if every assertion can be contested, we are unsure of where to turn and perhaps secede from all conflictual matters (1991, p. 312).

In the following, I show how René Girard and Chantal Mouffe help illuminate this dilemma about peaceableness and "taking sides." After exploring their conflict theories, in a third and final section I explore practical illustrations of graceful divisiveness, of respectful agonism, via seasoned practitioners and scholars of conflict. In all, I argue that appeals to "unity" and anti-divisiveness in cultural discourse today are dangerously ambivalent while the real challenge before us is one of a love-shaped *agonism*—of struggle oriented by nonviolence, epistemological humility, and patience, even while it may take divisive form. This is a seemingly impossible path, as challenging as being shrewd as snakes and innocent as doves. But I argue that this path has already been walked by many who show us how to purify—not abrogate—our critical engagement with neighbors, adversaries, and even enemies.

**Girard and *containing* violence**

René Girard's mimetic theory and its exponents have argued that humans desire not in a rational and direct way, but in an unconsciously imitative way. This form of desire has been channeled, safeguarded, and abetted—since human origins, for better and worse—through the imitative observance of taboos, myths, and rituals. Such religio-cultural features, he argues, were critical in domesticating *homo sapiens* into a uniquely ultra-imitative species

capable of immense freedom, discovery, and love—as well as Auschwitz, Inquisition, and Hiroshima (see Haw, 2022).

In centering *mimesis* in his anthropology, Girard joins the critique of social contract theory, which has tended to feature rationality as foundational for human sociality. Rather, Girard sees how what often passes for "reason" in a society is not so much the objective *opposite* of violence, but more often a byproduct of the scapegoating mechanics of human organization. Paul Dumouchel thus inflects Girard into political theory: "*The difference between reason and violence, on which we would like to base the unanimous agreement of members of society, does not precede the action that establishes the political order, but flows from it*" (2015, p. xvii). As such, the problem of peaceful coexistence for Girard concerns not merely technocratic applications of law and reason—these *contain* our violence in the double sense of the word. The problem is further upstream, in an anterior, radical, species-wide deformation of our desires.

Like many scholars working at the level of encompassing meta-theory, Girard's capacious oeuvre evidences certain sharp turns, even seeming contradictions. Two such places of friction within mimetic theory are particularly relevant to the problem of divisiveness and being "neither for or against": the concept of "sacrifice," and the phenomena of "violence containment" in societal conflict, ultimately two very related notions.

***Sacrifice: for or against?***

Regarding the first, *sacrifice*, Girard's ambivalence on the concept stems especially from his early, admittedly almost anti-religious sentiment: resonant with methods akin to Durkheim, Freud, *et al*, Girard deconstructed the mechanics at the heart of religion and all human culture to expose it as a "protective misapprehension"—i.e., our species, since its origins, has been subject to a delusional perception of reality and its own consciousness. This delusion concerns the psychological "exteriorization" of our own violence—in the chaotic, naturally-selected transition from primate dominance patterns to human culture—wherein we perceive our violence as an independent Being who secures our unity. Such projecting of group violence, mediated via the sacred (with its taboos, rituals, myths, gods, etc), was generative in our evolution insofar as proto-human groups experienced peace and mimetic *unity* after collective acts of victimage. And thus, in James Alison's gloss on Girard, "human consciousness, culture, and signification came into being with the self-deception surrounding an act of victimization" (Alison, 1998, p. 225). Our sense of the sacred is not an invention—of priests trying to control,

or of early failed-scientists trying to explain—but the midwife of our consciousness. Our consciousness emerged with the sacred, unwittingly, as the turning of our own violence into objective, reified existence, an exogenous agent that eventually became the gods (Girard, 1987, p. 81, 89). The sacred as such was naturally selected as it escorted us through the turbulent decay of alpha male structures into aggressive egalitarianism, birthing our new, especially imitative cultural consciousness (Girard, 1999, p. 94; 2007, p. 65; 1987, p. 94). Humanity is not the inventor but the *byproduct* of the protective misapprehension that we call religion (2007, p. 72, 97). This theory—with its seeming forthright *against-ness* toward the practice of religious sacrifices and the sacred itself, etc.—won certain academic and popular praises, that Girard had developed "the first authentically atheistic account of religion" (Radkowski, 1972).

But soon, to the dismay of his boosters, Girard turned his hermeneutic to Christianity and Judaism, finding in the biblical traditions a radical demystification of the sacred, the original *avante garde*, an attack on religion. He argued that the biblical tradition was slowly developing an anti-sacred movement, a critique of all human culture as rooted in violence and shrouded in religious superstition. Girard argued, as Nietzsche too observed, that this attack is ultimately crystallized in the continued representation of Christ's crucifixion, the unjust mobbing of a purely innocent victim. Finding such an *against-ness* in Christianity, Girard briefly attacked the book of Hebrews (later recanted) because its author seemed to have cast Jesus' death not as a critique of the sacred but as a mystified "sacrifice" offered to the bloodthirsty deity of the sacred. As such, Hebrews would seem to renege on the anti-sacrificial revelation otherwise permeating the New Testament, namely Christ's unwillingness to sacrifice others and his peaceable love of enemies. All of this was an attack upon the delusion of a divinity who requires blood. "So great is the distance between the sacrifice of Christ in this sense and archaic sacrifice that a greater one cannot be imagined" (Girard, 2014, p. 40f; 1987, p. 178-9; Vattimo and Girard, 2010, p. 25).

Notice we have here a stark and triumphalist "*for and against*": Girard reads Christianity's anthropological insight regarding anti-sacrificial nonviolence as "superior" to alternate anthropologies, even adding that this superiority is "scientifically demonstrable" (2007, p. 210; 2014, p. 37).

But Girard qualified the excesses of this antinomy, seeing in Christianity "an exit from religion," which nonetheless manifests "in the form of a demythified religion" (Girard, 2010, 24-25). He admitted of having spoken with exaggeration, and that he wanted to "rectify the error of the so-called

anti-sacrificial argument I made in my first writings on this subject, especially in *Things Hidden*…[bringing] my perspective into closer alignment with traditional theologies" (Girard, 2014, p. xi, 42). In this, Girard had added an epistemological feature of *inescapability* to his analysis, an awareness that even attacks on religion paradoxically become their own religion: Marxism, e.g., does away with God only to deify the State; the Enlightenment did away with parochial reason, in favor of "universals," only to become a Napoleonic European jihad; the destruction of all superstitious taboos simply births new mega-taboos ("thou shalt not say *thou shalt not*"). This inescapability extends even to Jesus' anti-sacrificial program: his attacking of all human culture as rooted in murder and lies, nonetheless manifests as a mimetic *culture*, a "Church," with its obligatory creeds and rituals. We can critique religion, but we cannot escape it, just as there is no escape from culture, ritual, or the contingencies of language (Girard, 2014, p. 126).

So too, Girard insisted, there is no *pure* escape from sacrifice, nor can one be merely "against" it. He argued there is either "sacrifice of others" or *self*-sacrifice, but they are both sacrifice (Girard, 2010, 35; 2014, p. 43, 71f). This coincides with the fact that there is no access to purely objective or absolute knowledge. In Christ refusing to sacrifice others, he engaged in self-sacrifice. Giving up violence involves preparedness to suffer it. Given such inescapability, the modern liberal pretension to utterly "*renounce* sacrifice" or exclusion, and thereby escape the ugliness of violence, he insists, is simply performative purity. For there is no position available that is completely foreign to violence—just as there is no access to absolute knowledge or reason unmediated by a cultural matrix stemming from the scapegoat mechanism (Girard, 2010, p. 216). And thus even though Christ's nonviolence was diametrically opposed to sacrificial logic, it is still called by the same name, "sacrifice": "Use of the same word in each case dispels the *illusion of a neutral ground* where violence is nowhere to be seen." Thus, for Girard, Christianity's using the same word "sacrifice" for *formally similar but substantially opposed realities* "paradoxically hints at going beyond the opposition between them" (Girard, 2014, p. 43).

With this inescapability in mind, and resonant with our Seng-T'san's epigraph, Girard cautioned his readers to not pit Christianity into a for/against rivalry with other religions or the archaic sacred. Any diametric opposition between archaic and revealed religion simply reiterates the very mimetic rivalry one hopes to abolish (Girard, 2007, p. 204). Such nuances have been lost on some of Girard's critics, who lock him into his pre-revised position or misconstrue him, somehow, as an *advocate* of sacrifice or an

ontology of violence (see Eagleton 2018; Jantzen, 2007, p. 271–90; Coakley, 2012, p. 25). Mediating this antinomy on the question of "being for or against" sacrifice, has been explored by various mimetic theorists (e.g. Schwager, 1985; Haw, 2021).

***Containing violence: for or against?***

We can bear in mind Girard's management of this freighted word *sacrifice*—which remains a bit abstract—as we turn to the more concrete and practical topic of *socio-political conflict* and its "containment." On this matter, Girard appears more complicated, even seemingly contradictory. At certain points Girard voices a near full-throated pacifism, a complete renunciation of violence, resonant with his seeming complete attack upon the sacred's sacrificial logic. He urges us all to refuse the logic of the duel and embrace love; we must "abstain completely from retaliation and renounce the escalation to extremes" (Girard, 2010, p. xiv). Or, "The one who believes he can control violence by setting up defenses is in fact controlled by violence." Or, "it is impossible to eliminate violence through violence, to expel reciprocity violently." Our strategies for dealing with societal chaos, he insists, can no longer be military or political. "Politics is in itself powerless to control the rise of negative undifferentiation." Violence can never reduce violence (Girard, 2010, p. 17, 17, 20, 24, 46, 63, 131; 1987, p. 198).

Such emphases draw from Christ's stark injunctions to nonresistance of enemies, underwritten with an awareness of the mimetic contagiousness of violence. Some activists connect this feature of Girard's nonviolence with a social program, as one finds in Vern Redekop (2012, 2002) linking mimetic insights with nonviolent activism, or Duncan Morrow (2015, p. 169-189) analyzing the Northern Ireland conflict, wherein he seeks to stop "the game of dividing between the good guys and the bad guys." For Girard, the abstention from violence takes shape, at least partially, in *Battling to the End*, in his praising Hölderlin, the reclusive poet, who retreats from the Napoleonic frenzy of his day to quietly stare into the abyss of the gods' twilight. Girard reads Christ through a Hölderlinian lens, as one who "withdraws" from the sacred, who lets go of grasping after being imitated as a model; and we must "imitate his withdrawal" (Girard, 2010, p. 51, 120, 122). Left with *only* this Hölderlinian note from Girard, one might feel his socio-political vision strongly tilts toward a secluded and pure pacifism of a befuddled apocalyptist—one who has concluded it is impossible to have any politics without a scapegoat: thus, one must have no politics. Being devoted to refraining

from such sacrificial exertions, we are presented with a model of seemingly near-complete withdrawal from political engagement.

From this perspective, one detects notes of Augustinian pessimism in Girard's voice—about the intractably conflictual human family and how little we can expect law and governance to remedy it (*City of God*, Book XIX. Chapter 5). The bishop of Hippo had spoken of "the Earthly City," a metonymy for all human culture and politics, as being unjustly based upon founding murders, divided against itself by the *libido dominandi* (*City of God*, Preface, Book XI, *et passim*.) With scant indulgence of idealism, St. Augustine regarded governing structures, *sans* justice, as nothing but large gangs (*City of God*, Bk IV, ch 4). From this angle, the Heavenly City—founded in Christ's divine, pacific love—is contrastively pitted "*against* the pagans." And Girard would seem to resonate: "The divine truth is no longer in the ancient city or in a chosen people: it has been expelled from the city of man, along with the scapegoat victim." And while Augustine wrote amidst the collapse of the Roman Empire, Girard adds modern apocalyptic tones, arguing that politics can no longer control war, and history is accelerating beyond our control: "Law itself is finished. It is failing everywhere, and even excellent jurists, whom I know well, no longer believe in it" (2010, p. 50, 53f, 108, 113). One imagines anarchist pacifists nodding vigorously.

But from the other side of Girard's mouth emits a more realist and messy engagement with violence: he also argues there is a severe danger in pacifism: to outlaw war is paradoxically to allow it to spread everywhere (2010, p. 65, 186-7). He speaks of the tragic calculus in which even pacifism bears its own share of guilt, too, in the mimetic rivalries in our world—not the least in the dictum that "weakness is provocative." As Clausewitz was able to intuit, the reciprocal action of war "both provokes and *suspends* the escalation to extremes at the same time" (Girard, 2010, p. 17, emphasis added). Thus Girard admitted there is "a role for national and international institutions in limiting violence" (2014, p. 83, 101)—even if that ability to restrain and suspend escalation has been weakening since Clausewitz. Politics "contains" violence: it simultaneously entails *and restrains* violence. In *The One by Whom Scandal Comes*, Girard strongly critiqued moralist pledges to pacifism, just as he critiqued purist renunciations of sacrifice. He argued that there are no simple socio-political answers to the erratic contagiousness of human violence; and he regards some forms of defense against violence to be legitimate, for we are constrained to consider the use of "lesser violence" (2007, p. 247; 2014, p. 97f, 101, 18ff, 41, 71-72, 131n3).

> We are always in debt to sacrificial violence…and when we get rid of it in a great burst of self-righteous indignation against hypocrisy, it may be a worse violence that, unwittingly, we help unleash…one must refrain from evaluating the influence of the biblical religions and of other religions from the standpoint of a simple opposition between violence and non-violence. The elimination of sacrificial violence is not simply "good" or "bad": it is an ambiguous and ambivalent progress in the struggle against violence. (Girard, 2004, p. 19)

Girard thus counter-balanced his own pessimism about law and politics with a modest realism—a move shared in Augustine. Augustine described how the tenuous peace obtained by the violence of the Earthly City is nonetheless its own minor good (*City of God*, Book XV, chapter 4). Such negative peace might not be the positive peace of charity; but law and order, even amidst their injustices and vicious motives, supply their own modest benefits. Negative peace is not nothing. Augustine thus admitted that participation in governing structures, the sublimated conflict we call politics, may be a regrettable necessity (e.g. *City of God*, Book XIX). In light of this, we can see why Girard stated, "I probably represent an Augustinian reaction against an excess of humanism" (2014, p. 91).

In all, Girard might here be judged as stuck in a contradiction, as speaking from both sides of his mouth. One reviewer laments this perplexing "pacifism-not-pacifism" (Gardner, 2010, p. 452-60; Bartlett, 2016). But a charitable reading might see him as simply making full use of his mouth—or that he is simply identifying the two poles of being as innocent as a dove and shrewd as a snake. More specifically, one might see that he was refusing to ossify his socio-political analysis into a singular, fixed position, "neither for or against" pure pacifism orrJust War theory, neither aloof idealism nor resigned realism, as it were. Girard's refraining from the *absolute* renunciation of violence is his nuanced balancing of the complex factors of violence-containment, an awareness of the impossibility of neutrality, and a refusal to indulge the consolation of easy bifurcations. Thus, he retains a befuddlement about law's ambivalent role in our lurching through the apocalypse, pointing not only toward Hölderlin, but also toward Augustine's combination of pessimistic alienation and realist engagement.

This is all admittedly irritating. Insofar as Girard approximates Augustine's treating the Earthly City's improvement as a necessary feature of the pilgrimage to the Heavenly City, this involves some separating of means and ends; for few improvements of the Earthly City come without controversy, conflict, even violent coercion. In the political realm, this is to set out on

the volatile path of "taking sides" and violating the irenicism of Hölderlinian withdrawal: it can involve, say, becoming a judge (although Augustine notably commanded that Christian judges practice extreme clemency [See, e.g., Fortin and Kries, 1994, p. 246f.)], fighting for a party (perhaps even an army), and, simply, becoming part of the societal fray. Girard's reading of culture and politics as violence-containment mechanisms simply cannot fully align with the serene poetic withdrawal or a comprehensive purification of all imitative rivalry: for *any participation* is to risk taking sides in what could very well be divisiveness.

By my lights, Girard most effectively mediated this antinomy in a 2001 interview with David Cayley (Canadian Broadcast Company, 2016, 12:00). There Girard described our predicament as a "*circular*" dilemma in which we must, indeed, engage in *critique*. Christ's himself engaged in critique; he offered no escape into some depoliticized transcending of divisions. Christ's prophetic ministry of division, as it were, fervently critiqued the world with great political consequence: denouncing the principalities and oppressive religious hypocrites, freely healing in violation of sacred boundaries, and cleansing the temple of its Mammon. This divisive spirit of Christ has historically spread, as Girard notes, in our increasingly critiquing worldly power from the perspective of the victim. This spirit of critique is dangerous insofar as it can weaponize concern for victims and sanctify retributive violence in their name. *But*, as dangerous as this critical spirit can become, Girard insisted *we should not do away with that divisiveness*. In other words, even though we mirror one another, we ought not succumb to seeing the world through both-sides-ism. Rather, he said, we must grasp the paradox of "how critique works" and "purify it with nonviolence." Even so, such purification will never be total. Girard states, "critique embodies part of the same violence—it is always in the same circle of violence." We must thus see the "mimetic *circularity* of the psychic space in which we live." We must critique; but that critique remains susceptible to critique—a critique which also remains open to critique, in an *ad infinitum* contestability. In contrast to this circular view, our minds distorted by scapegoating tend to wrongly view critique as *linear* and neatly distinguishable between individuals—in the judgment that expels or cancels the wicked. But this simplistic, linear view fails to see our circular mimetic situation with epistemic humility: such judgment, Girard notes, "always wants to turn the other into something that would be *solidly posed*, there in front of you and separate from you, because you are good, and they are bad. And in a judicial affair, you have a physical separation between the two." But, stemming from Christ's (anti-)judgment,

and reflecting our mimetic nature, "*Christianity is constantly abolishing this separation*." As contestable mimetic interdividuals, we are in the other, and they are in us.

With no access to a neutral position from which to perfectly judge—or even to *refrain* from judging in some pretension to neutrality—we are all thus daily enmeshed in a certain undecidability. While *Battling to the End*'s theme of apocalyptic escalation might seem remote from most average citizens' daily lives, this simple notion of *critique*—with the prevalent possibility that it curdles into scapegoating—is as close to us as the social-media drenched cell phone in our pocket and quotidian discourse about policies and candidates. We regularly face decisions to separate out alternatives and take sides. Embracing our circular condition, Girard argues, means engaging in critique—which may even manifest as divisive—but purifying this with nonviolence and self-aware contestability.

As to exemplary models in this purified, circular critique, Girard never offered much elaboration. One might retort that he pointed us toward Christ's modeling, of course. But even this was underdetermined in his oeuvre—interpreting Christ through a sometimes narrow Hölderlinian lens—and his otherwise relative silence on offering models beyond Hölderlin is disappointing. He might have pointed us toward numerous other historic, practical actors. Is not the anarchist personalism of Dorothy Day and the Catholic Worker, for example, a practical locus for those who suspect law is apocalyptically crumbling? And how is it that the Civil Rights movement received but a few words in Girard's oeuvre, when its activists often powerfully worked to improve the worldly city's laws employing heavenly means?

Such qualms notwithstanding, one might still appreciate how Girard ultimately leaves his reader with a dynamic awareness fitting to our live situation: Christianity has been diminishing the unifying power of the sacred; and in our own context, Madisonian democracy is *designed* to sustain divisions and polarities to perpetually cross check ambition with ambition (e.g. Madison, 1787); and thus, with unanimous catharsis and unity seemingly out of reach (perhaps for the better), we must learn how to live impossibly as snake-doves amidst such conflict. We must engage in critique that is nonetheless susceptible to further critique; this consciousness of our circular, mimetic situation is essential to purifying critical engagement with nonviolence.

**Chantal Mouffe's agonistic pluralism**

Belgian political theorist of agonistic pluralism, Chantal Mouffe, also understands the problem about "taking sides" paradoxically: the refusal to take sides is its own side-taking. That is, her oeuvre clarifies how there is an inescapable dimension of side-taking that we can call "*the political*." Different from *politics*—which is but the machinations of governing and organizing human life—*the political* refers to the inescapably divisive aspect of all human association, even in its most inclusive of forms (2013, p. 130f, 2, 3; 2005, p. 43). As such, we will see Mouffe interpret "the political" akin to the way Girard does sacrifice.

Mouffe argues that conventional reigning liberal political theorists—including Rawls, Habermas, Benhabib, Arendt, *et al* (2013, p. 10, 55; 2005, p. 91, 29, 47)—have each in their own way sought to overcome the political and create a politics without exclusion—or, we might say, a politics without a scapegoat. Rawls, for example, advocated especially for the construction of an overlapping consensus, to create a society not founded on exclusion but on consent. Creating such an encompassing and neutral basis for social unity—wherein we tolerate objectionable differences amidst our pluralities—would eliminate the political from politics and make society more stable and pacific, not an imposed tyranny. Similarly, Habermas emphasized "inclusive procedures" in deliberative democracy, in which nobody is excluded on principle from organizing society, and all voices are somehow heard. With this value undergirding public life, we can promote the exchange of reason and deliberation as an alternative to the exclusion of opponents, lending "credibility and legitimacy to the democratic process, guaranteeing that such a consensus was obtained by reasoned assent and not mere agreement or subjugation" (2005, 87). In all these great liberal theorists, Mouffe detects an aim to renounce the political and create an inclusive politics beyond hegemony. Readers will detect a parallel with Girard, regarding the temptation to be *against* sacrifice.

In contrast with these figures, while not rejecting their liberalism outright, Mouffe insists that any and every attempt to create an inclusive consensus, an "us," invariably creates a "them." Even the benevolent attempts to create an "us without a them" still engage in the political, in the decisive act of cutting off the acceptable from the unacceptable. That is, even if liberalism's ideals were ever to become fully realized into politico-juridical form it would *paradoxically no longer be liberalism*, at least in any objective sense of inclusivity, pluralism, and openness. Even the most inclusive, plural cosmopolitanism would nonetheless, in practice, be an exclusive hegemony.

Consensus still excludes. This is the paradox of side-taking lost on liberal theorists. Lacking this awareness, liberal theorists have habitually evaded the political and become "depoliticized." They have ignored the fact that "the very condition of the creation of consensus is the elimination of pluralism from the public sphere." In light of this, we ought not imagine that "pluralist democracy could ever be perfectly instantiated, since the condition of possibility of a pluralist democracy is at the same time the condition of impossibility of its perfect implementation" (2005, p. 101, 49, 43, 16).

In the common liberal frameworks, she argues, "the public space is the terrain where one aims at creating consensus." But with the inescapability of the political, it is simply not possible to form a completely inclusive consensus. We must admit that politics involves "necessarily unstable forms" which rationality, procedures, and tolerance simply cannot eliminate (2005, p. 11). This implies struggle, an *agonism*, in which the public space is instead where "conflicting points of view are confronted without any possibility of a final reconciliation" (2013, p. 92). (This is the grounds on which Kristen Deedee Johnson summarized the agonistic alternative to liberal tolerance as *post-Nietzschean*, as it implies a critique of Enlightenment epistemology, problematizing universal reason.) Politics is never the *elimination* of hostility; or even if it were, it would simply reiterate a new hegemony. Rather, politics "consists in domesticating hostility and in trying to defuse the potential antagonism that exists in human relations…there can only be contingent hegemonic forms of stabilization of their conflict" (Mouffe, 2006, 323). We could say politics *contains* hostility in the double sense of the word.

Mouffe's "inescapability of the political" partially draws from the controversial Reich jurist Carl Schmitt. In *The Concept of the Political*, Schmitt critiqued the "humanitarian" League of nations—the post-Versailles liberal world order, the "brotherhood of all humanity"—as not nearly as inclusive as it advertises (Schmitt, 2007, p. 60-71; 43, 25, 32, 35, 37). Even the most inclusive of arrangements ultimately decides who is in and who is out. Liberal democracies just tend to rely on more hidden, depoliticized forms of exclusion—e.g., economically pulverizing sanctions instead of bullets. Schmitt advocated a brutal honesty about this and a vigilance against declaring ourselves on "the side of humanity," which easily leads to viewing the enemy as inhuman. (The irony is admittedly thick here, in that a seeming perspicacity of scapegoating is emitting from within the apparatus of the Shoah.)

While Mouffe strongly rejects Schmitt's abandonment of liberalism, she insists he had a crucial point: liberalism, for all its aspirations, cannot evade the political. Liberalism may *modify* and reshape the constraints of

democracy—emphasizing themes like rule of law, tolerance, inclusion, universal human rights, and respect of individual liberty, all of which constitute her broad definition of liberalism (Mouffe, 2006, 319). But liberalism can never escape taking *political form*. The democratic tradition—which emphasizes different themes, like "equality, identity between governing and governed, and popular sovereignty" (2005, p. 3; 2013, p. 29)—operates more precisely in touch with exclusions of the political, while the liberal tradition has sought to mitigate the restraints and dangers of the political. In all, the democratic and liberal traditions emphasize different, even incompatible, principles.

Once we come to grips with this incompatibility, Mouffe argues not that we *choose* between them, but we instead sustain the two in a never-resolved tension (2013, p. xiii). Mouffe bears no sympathies with the right-wing, anti-liberal goals of Schmitt; she praises what liberalism's ideals have done and can do for expanding the scope and humanity of modern democracies (2005, p. 5, 45). Liberal democracies can seek to create a more plural and inclusive society, more generous and fair applications of law. But these will still inescapably be exclusive hegemonies—contingently interpreting and policing rules and exclusions through contestable referees—not an escape from hegemony. Adherents to liberalism must be chastised of any depoliticized pretentions to transcending division through inclusion. For politics is not the overcoming of division and conflict but their channelization. There is no exit from the for-against dilemma because there is no access to non-hegemonic, non-divisive politics.

Schmitt saw the essential paradigm in politics as the decision between who is friend and who is enemy. But Mouffe plies a subtler distinction: the more common and essential feature of our democratic context is the *adversary*. An enemy is one with whom no founding principles are shared, and they are subject to expulsion/enema from democratic processes; but *adversaries* share founding principles while being opposed in interpreting and employing them. Adversaries fight to implement their interpretation of founding principles, even while respecting their adversary as a legitimate societal member. "Adversaries fight against each other because they want their interpretation of the principles to become hegemonic, but they do not put into question the legitimacy of their opponent's right to fight for the victory of their position" (2013, p. 7). From this view, democracy and political norms are not the cessation of conflict or adversity, but the subduing of enemy antagonism into agonism, the domestication of potential enemies into adversaries (2013, p. xii. See also Springs, 2020).

We can say that Mouffe advances, in analogy to the ethical discourse of Just War Theory, something like a Just Politics Theory—a framework for conducting conflict through the reduced-violence-arena of politics and law. But her approach differs from the usual ethical debates between Just War and pacifism insofar as the latter are both often framed in social contract political ontology. Per the social contract tradition, "war is politics by other means." (I.e., war is seen as a boiling over of the agreed-upon-orderliness of politics; war is the social contract breaking down into the chaos of war. Through this liberal lens, liberal democracy can be wrongly seen as the realm of transcending division, where we all supposedly "get along" and find common cause: the political realm is not where we are pitted in conflict but where we have suspended that conflict.) While war is admittedly the breakdown of common order in a superficial sense, Mouffe, resonating with mimetic theory, invites us to see beyond social contract interpretation. Rather: politics is war by other means. Put more precisely, politics is the domestication of warfare into competition. Politics subdues antagonism into agonism much like, for Girard, sacrifice *contains* chaotic violence with a lesser, ritual violence. Politics is not the suspension of violence but its containment.

If we say Mouffe's agonism is like an extension of Just War logic into politics, she is asking: how does one justly engage in the competing coercions, the violence-containing mechanisms of the political realm, the hegemonic means of legislation, the judiciary, and reasoning itself? When occupied with such questions, contemporary appeals to benanti-divisive" feel as out of touch as telling a warrior to stop being so combative. While Mouffe aims to conduct such struggle with humanizing respect, she insists that any attempt to create a politics beyond hegemony and beyond adversaries is mistaken. Her agonistic pluralism suggests we have no access to a non-divisive perspective from which to definitively found and stabilize a social order. This demands of us a certain pluralism—not merely one of inclusivity-beyond-judgment, but rather an ever-open, agonistic, forbearing critique. She asks not "can't we just get along," but, "can't we just argue?"

**A synthetic note on escapability**

For both Girard and Mouffe, we should note that the "inescapability" of sacrifice, violence-containment, and the political is not a cause for inaction, hopelessness, hawkish pessimism, or hand-wringing withdrawal. Admittedly, on the one hand, both indeed emphasize how division is *in*escapable. With resemblances to Girard, Mouffe argues that all human association is marked by something of an originary division: the formation of a "we" has long been

forged through the formation of a "they." Girard argued more in the evolutionary register, that a certain blind spot to scapegoating has sedimented into human bodies and culture through various manifestations of the victim mechanism. Mouffe speaks more in the register of political theory, arguing liberalism cannot escape the exclusions of the political: it is impossible to constitute a "form of social objectivity which would not be grounded on an originary exclusion" (2005, p. 11). For both, there is no neutral ground devoid of exclusion available to us; there is an ineliminable dimension of exclusion in all sociality; and even if one seeks to transcend exclusivity, this simply reiterates new exclusions, if perhaps more generous ones. And even in the most pacific case of Christ's "non-sacrificial" love of enemies, this incurs the possibility of suffering violence.

But, in another sense of *escapability*, our two authors do *not* trap us in an ontology of violence: we *can*, to some extent, escape sacrificial logic and behaviour—treating it as an error, a mark of our original sin, not some requisite essence of who we are. In Girard's idiom, we might call sacrificial logic a contingent artifact of our natural selection—or, citing the doctrine of Original Sin, that it is "unnatural." In contrast with human norms, Christ modelled an alternative human nature, a new mode of being, more attuned to reality. In Mouffe's idiom, we can and must unearth how society is "the product of a series of hegemonic practices…which conceal the originary act of their contingent political institution and which are taken for granted as if they were self-grounded." That is, habit makes custom seem *natural* and common sense. But this mythic order, while often striking us as sacred and solid, must be unveiled as "temporary and precarious," open to "hegemonic intervention" when needs be (Mouffe, 2019, p. 44f, 88; 2013, p. 90). The political might be unavoidable; but politics are transformable. Per Girard, we must follow Christ to expose our evolutionary formation as a mistaken chain of events that *did not have to happen the way it did*. Far from arguing that the "primordial division" in society's scapegoat mechanism is the essence of humanity, we can historicize and denaturalize it. Per Mouffe, we must denaturalize and contest any unjust divisions that have been mistaken as natural, patiently engaging in the unstable agon to rectify them—even if our contestations are also contestable.

Both authors imply that our predicaments require not the abandonment of divisiveness—which would only reiterate new forms of division—but the agonistic engagement in it. For Girard, such critique must be purified by nonviolence and humble acceptance of our mimetic circularity. For Mouffe, our predicament requires respect toward adversaries; in such engagement,

one affirms the dangerous intolerance embedded in liberalism's inclusivity, its agitation to expand boundaries to embrace a more plural humanism. And yet for both, with eschatological notes of Augustine, *this promised land cannot be reached in this aeon*: in political practice, inclusive liberalism can only be worked out through the hegemonic exclusions of democracy. In all the above, our two figures offer us concepts for navigating the misleading (purist, escapist) hopes of creating a politics beyond hegemony or a politics without a scapegoat. In the interests of rendering their ideals more concrete, I finally turn to a few contemporary models of such a purified agonism.

**Practical notes toward graceful divisiveness**

It would be misguided to see the above considerations of agonism as suggesting an unmitigated "will to power," an unrestrained ontology of violent conflict. To the contrary, the critical agonism discussed above requires a heart purified of malice, a disposition toward patience, and empathic exchange amidst heated divisions. To consider concrete examples of this, I turn to two cases wherein the cheap rhetoric of "unity" clashes against "divisive" movements agitating for racial and economic justice. I finally extend such insights to consider the snake-dove disposition, of gracefully engaging in conflict but purified with nonviolence.

***Case: "the white moderate"***

The paradox of taking sides is supremely dramatized in Martin Luther King Jr's 1963 "Letter from a Birmingham Jail" (Washington, 1992). Cathleen Kaveny, in her incisive *Prophesy Without Contempt*, deems King's letter as "the gold standard of the rhetoric of prophetic indictment" (2016, p. 320). And yet in King's indictments of America's racist apathy, he exemplifies critique purified with nonviolence and patient divisiveness. The letter responds to the accusation that the Civil Rights movement was sowing division. In the wake of public unrest, boycotts, protests, and arrests, Alabama clergymen had argued that the movement had "caused racial friction and unrest," had "incited hatred and violence." And in contrast the clergy appealed to "the principles of law and order and common sense." King's rejoinder was that the absence of conflict, for which the clergy long, is, in fact, not devoid of pre-existing divisions. Rather, the clergy's "common sense" peace and unity is a placid mirage hiding segregation's injustices; and, he adds, the pursuit of justice may in fact require fostering tensions.

But King knew that such tension-fostering requires careful application, and he laid out four steps to disaggregate his agonism. First, one must conduct in depth analysis of the injustice, assuring that one's appraisal of the situation is not haphazard, inconsistent, or mere antagonistic reactivity against rules in themselves. (For it is quite possible to erroneously protest on misinformed grounds and then justify it through valorizing one's underdog-, victim-, or outsider-status etc. One calls to mind St. Augustine's caveat: "it [is] not always right to infer that one is on the better side because he suffers persecution, although that is almost always the case" [Schaff, (1994), 287]).

Secondly, after a thorough analysis of the injustice in mind, one must exhaust all conventional means of negotiation. This would include not only face-to-face encounters, but also legal proceedings. Using such shared, legal avenues for rectification is cfinforcingreinforcing the objective referent of constitutional principles that one shares with adversaries. In this Catherine Kaveny describes how King is exemplary in the American prophetic indictment tradition, for he not only appeals to natural law but a shared, codified politico-legal order. She writes, "would-be prophets ought to orient their normative claims toward the fundamental commitments of *their* political community, not the commitments of a utopian community existing only in their imaginations and hopes." By contrast, she adds, "factionalist prophets pretend to honor a universal and generally applicable law while advancing narrow and particular interests and causes" (2016, p. 323, 331).

Thirdly, King continues, one must purify oneself of any inner hatred. Here, King shows his attentiveness to the Gandhian practice of deep *ahimsa*, wherein purification of internal animosity is essential to the movement's truth and reality. In Girard's words, this purification involves humble awareness of one's own contestability, seeking to purge any merely *rivalistic*, object-free mimesis. In Kaveny's treatment, this involves "kindness toward political opponents," which requires, "resisting the temptation to whip up the audience's hostility by proffering misleading statements and analogies…[refraining] from seizing upon badly worded statements of political enemies…refusing an easy opportunity to treat a fringe element as a central example of an opponent's goals and methods" (2016, p. 330). King here also finds resonance in Thomas Merton, who invited activists to focus on the log in one's own eye: "instead of hating the people you think are warmongers, hate the appetites and the disorder in your own soul, which are the causes of war. If you love peace, then hate injustice, hate tyranny, hate greed—but hate these things in *yourself*, not in another" (Merton, 1997, p. 19).

Engaged in analysis and self-purification, and with all conventional avenues of rectification exhausted, one must, then, fourthly, seek to "create such a crisis" that forces confrontation of the issue—i.e., direct action or civil disobedience. We must note here that this "forcing" the issue is indeed a precarious step into not only divisiveness but nonviolent coercion. Walter Wink interprets such coercion in tandem with Christ's Sermon on the Mount; such enemy love aims to "convert the opponent; failing that, it hopes for accommodation, where the opponent is willing to make some changes simply to get the protestors off his back. But if that too fails, nonviolence entails coercion: the opponent is forced to make a change rather than suffering the loss of power, even though he remains hostile. But Jesus' way does not employ *violent* coercion" (Wink, 1992, p. 192).

Dr. King's three precautions on the way to action (analyzing the injustice, exhausting negotiations, and deep *ahimsa*) purify his agonism. He wants to ensure that those who foment such a crisis, are *not* "the creators of tension. We merely bring to the surface the hidden tension that is already alive" (Washington, 1992). This is a necessary clarification, as he and his fellow activists were often criticized for being divisive and ruining public order; meanwhile those safeguarding the conditions of injustice, "the white moderate," are rhetorically framed as the cool-headed bastions of gentility and unity. In light of this optical illusion, King argues the white moderates who champion "unity" and denounce division are a greater threat to the cause of civil rights than Klansman or the Whie Ciizen's' Ccouncil. For their appeal to "peace" in the context of segregation is a verbal lockdown that quarantines deeper injustices and divisions from rectification. They defer conflict, and thus resolution, under the deceptively serene conditions of reason, law, and order. By contrast, the fourth step into civil disobedience marks a step into what could very well be framed—like Mouffe's agonism—as an application of Just War Theory for nonviolent, civil conflict (see Childress, 1971).

***Case: "the 1%"***

We may also consider the evidently divisive verbal construct of "the 1%." This concept, used by leftist populists like senator Bernie Sanders and others, emphasizes that the richest 1% of the U.S.—the billionaire class—has obtained their outsized share of wealth not merely through hard work but through exploitation and tax evasion. The 1% theme rhetorically constructs an "us" and a "them" so that the "them" might be taxed at more mid-20$^{th}$-century levels. Anyone initiated into mimetic theory may grow anxious about verbally aligning the 99 against the 1, given its resemblance to the ratio of

a lynch mob. It has all the shape of "for and against" and would seem to be a recipe for scapegoating. (On a similar front, senator Sanders rhetorically shapes another "we," saying "we all hate the pharmaceutical companies" [Colbert, 2022]). Are we on the path to pitch forks here?

Conventional liberal theory might be hesitant to employ such us/them categories here, on the putative grounds that it enflames divisiveness by using exclusive verbal social constructions that efface our universal belonging. Par for that liberal course, whenever increasing taxes on the rich is broached, many politicians tend to rejoin, "but we are all in this together." For example, in the 2021-22 political battles about rolling back the 2017 tax cuts for the richest tiers of taxpayers to fund an elaborate climate bill, senators Manchin and Sinema opposed the bill—until it was whittled to a fraction of its initial scope—on the grounds that it was "divisive," saying it did not adequately reach across the aisle or cool the heated polarization. What matters here is less the technical details and more the rhetoric: Senator Manchin opposed the bill citing "unity" and denounced it as divisive—even though such a provision frequently polls very positively (Weisman 2021)—adding, "I don't like the connotation that we're targeting different people…It's time that we all pull together and row together."

But in contrast with such appeals to a supposed unity anterior to conflict, Mouffe's agonistic pluralism suggests we not avoid the rhetorical construction of an "us" who is party to some conflict. Instead, we must carefully employ the language of collective identity formation to define, clarify, and transform conflicts and injustices that are, per King, perhaps hidden. Because of the inescapability of the political, there is no question as to *whether* we should use identity constructs or verbal reifications. Linguistic divisions—i.e., interpretations of the situation—are undoubtedly *always-already there*. The question is, *how* are divisions operating? Interpreting and using language to decide who is an "adversary" on this tax provision is undoubtedly *political*—that is, it is the imposition of a linguistic cutting, a *de-cision*. But neutral decision-lessness is unavailable to us; even leaving the 2017 tax cuts in place is also a partisan decision. Thus, Mouffe affirms, for example, the rhetoric employed by a social movement like Via Campesina—an international peasant's movement fighting for environmental justice, water, land, and migrant rights. Like the 1% construct, Via speaks of a "them" by opposing itself to "big multinational agribusiness corporations" (2013, p. 63). Is this politics with a scapegoat? Mouffe suggests that insofar as Via is not dehumanizing their opponents but *opposing them as adversaries,* they are engaging in a just agonism devoid of antagonism. (More ply, their taing

a the 1% refrains from treating them s *enemies*, insofar as they seek not for their removal from society but their increased taxation).

It is very telling to recognize that our Manchin/Sinema example is not an outlier, but party to a larger historic rhetorical pattern of wealthy parties framing any economic conflict—whether waged via unions or tax policy—as divisive. The common liberal framework, put bluntly, is often averse to any reference to "class war." Dorothy Day, for example, observed in her day that the predictable ethical positions of Just War oddly flip when "class conflict" or "class war" is broached. The rich, she says, are usually reliable defenders of Just War theory, regularly asserting that sometimes we must resort to violence to settle disputes. But these warriors mysteriously turn into idealist pacifists once class war is raised. She says, "they even pretend that the conflict is not there" (1942, p. 1). Day here resonates with Mouffe and King in unearthing the hidden, sedimented divisions of class war. William Cavanaugh has similarly observed a playbook in public discourse regarding tax cuts for the ultra-rich: first, a myth of national "unity" is invoked by proponents; and then any critics are framed as "sowing divisiveness" (2004, p. 264). In a simple verbal construct, conflict is whitewashed while contingencies are reified as natural; thus any effort to name the conflict is denounced as divisive—which is univocally taken to mean "deleterious."

***On being a snake-dove***

I lastly turn from these cases to consider the disposition of gracefully engaging in division. If agonism is the domestication of antagonism into political conflict, it requires what we might call a "snake-dove" mind, with reference to Christ's famous dictum. This disposition involves a critical divisiveness shaped by extreme patience, discipline, compassion, charity, humility, and the ever-contestable mechanics of human behavior.

A variety of psychologists and practitioners have explored the subtleties of engaging in conflict across seemingly intractable divisions. One the most influential of which today is Jonathan Haidt. Amidst various emphases, his work has explored the best rhetorical practices of persuasion. This involves speaking not only to people's "rationality" (*logos*), which is but a tiny "rider" on a massive elephant. Rather, we must speak to peoples' "elephant": borrowing from Aristotelian categories, this includes peoples' *pathos* and *ethos*, emotions, empathic responses, humor, mimetic rapport, finding common ground, etc (Haidt, 2006, 2013). Far more than rational, ideological structures, these are seen as the more elephantine factors in conflict; and from the gut and heart, persuasive energies tend to filter *upward* to the "brain" only

afterward, in an anti-gravitational feat as it were. As a model in employing pathos and ethos mingled with logos, some have highlighted Fred Rogers' master class address to a Senate panel on May 1st, 1969, wherein he spoke with an exquisite combination of generosity, connection, and non-combative firmness that melted his infamously trenchant listener (Schroder, 2017).

Such approaches are readily attested in other literature. Neuroscientist Tali Sharot, for example, outlines how "facts don't win fights," but connection, empathy, and personal engagement are the more fitting tools for changing minds, however slowly and imperfectly (O'Neal, 2017; Sharot, 2017a, 2017b; Sharot and Sunstein, 2020, p. 14-19). Or, psychologist Janet Lansbury advocates a posture toward conflictual communication in which one refuses to take offense at an interlocutor's aggression and combativeness (Landsbury, 2014; Klein, 2022). This posture, which refrains from mirroring or internalizing the antagonism of one's adversary, is an insight well attuned to the danger of rivalry's mimetic contagiousness. Others who have left white supremacist groups, like Christian Picciolini (2017; Davies 2018), have clarified that relational connection, not reasoned argumentation, is what helped him shed his delusions. Indeed, he testifies that "undeserved compassion" is what truly changed his heart and mind. Such cues are especially helpful in tending to those today involved in rationally-unhinged conspiracy theories—where we have lost any sense of shared reason—by nurturing connections through our shared humanity (Warzel, 2020; Basu, 2020).

Mahatma Gandhi extensively analyzed the psychological dynamics of conflict. In his volatile, colonial context he insisted upon trying to convert enemies into friends. Why? Because if they defeat their adversaries "there is no rancor left behind... That was my experience in South Africa and General Smuts. He started with being my bitterest opponent and critic. Today he is my warmest friend" (Gandhi, 1997, 88). But at no point should this feature of Gandhi's disposition be taken as dimming his agonistic "againstness": "No man could be actively nonviolent and not rise against social injustice no matter where it occurred." And, echoing our comments on inescapability, he spoke of how "perfect nonviolence is impossible…but we have to endeavor." A votary of *ahimsa* "can never become entirely free from outward *himsa* [violence]…it is impossible to eschew violence completely." And regarding critical engagement, he insisted:

> false notions of propriety or fear of wounding susceptibilities often deter people from saying what they mean and ultimately land them on the shores of hypocrisy. But if nonviolence of thought is to be evolved in individuals, societies, or nations, truth has to be told, however harsh or unpopular it may appear to be for the moment. (Gandhi, 1997, p. 81, 83, 5, 91)

Here the snake and dove coexist.

The Buddhist writer mentioned in the Introduction, Thích N. H□nh, also endeavored tirelessly to purify his heart of antagonism amidst conflict. He sustained dangerous humanitarian work during the Vietnam war, earning him a Nobel peace Prize nomination from Dr. King Jr. And in the decades following, he taught about essential spiritual work amidst division. As noted, he objected to "taking the side of the poor"; but, nuancing this, he points toward an enemy love that leans *into* engagement, not away from it:

> Even if our enemy is cruel, even if he is crushing us…we have to love him...There is only one way—to understand him. We have to understand why he is that way, how he has come to be like that, why he does not see things the way we do. Understanding a person brings us the power to love and accept him. And the moment we love and accept him, he ceases to be our enemy. To 'love our enemy' is impossible, because the moment we love him, he is no longer our enemy… The idea of 'enemy' vanishes and is replaced by the notion of someone who is suffering and needs your compassion. (H□nh, 1995, 84f, 79f)

Extending from his perception of all things being inter-related, H□nh seeks to understand the suffering of his enemy, even visualizing himself within the enemy—that he shares in their nature. This enlightens us to the awareness that, "we could have become exactly like him," (1995, 83; 2005) transforming the energy of anger into compassion, turning the enemy into brother or sister.

In a final, humorous example of the snake-dove disposition, we can consider an ad hoc activist group by the name Coup Clutz Klowns. In one of their more famous manifestations, they visited a KKK rally in Knoxville, May 2007. But the clowns feigned misunderstanding of the advertised theme on the flyer, white power. They, innocent as doves, hoping the best in others, thought that what was being promoted was a "white flour" rally. This excited all the clowns to uproariously engage in a messy flour fight right in the middle of the klan. Upon finding they were mistaken, they again misheard that the rally was, in fact, really about "wife power." At this point, a dozen more

clowns clad in bridal gowns joined in the festal rally, hoisting and parading around their spousal-clowns in their arms—again to the consternation of the serious rally goers. But, amidst all the gay flurry, however, it turns out the clowns had again misheard: the rally was actually about "white flower." Re-announcing this clarification to all clowns, they gleefully distributed dozens of white flowers to all present. This went on with several such comical iterations, all to such a disruptive degree that the KKK called the rally off early (LaMotte and Hales, 2012; Claiborne, 2012).

One is here reminded of Kaveny's *Prophecy Without Contempt*, particularly her chapter on "Best Practices" regarding prophetic indictment marked by compassion and humility. While envisioning critique shorn of contempt, she nonetheless affirms the conflictual tradition of prophetic indictment. She even suggests that prophesy is a form of "verbal warfare"; and just as we might temper war via Just War Theory, we too must weigh what constitutes Just Prophesy (2016, p. 321). Drawing lessons from the prophets and some of the great American prophets, she outlines how just prophetic critique may include lamenting, preaching divine mercy along with divine judgment, envisioning a shared future with those being critiqued, judiciously employing humor and irony, and vulnerably displaying humble honesty, reluctance, and ambiguity when necessary. And if such prophesy is ever tempted toward the simplification of a "sinful you and a righteous us," it will aim to express empathic co-identification with the sinners being denounced (2016, p. 371; 375ff). We might call this all an attempt to engage in critique without a scapegoat—even while it remains its own contestable critique, indictment, and intervention.

**Conclusion**

The psychological virtues above are animated by an ability to refrain from what René Girard calls *scandalization*. Scandal involves the internalization of offense felt by another, a desire that escalates rivalry, which then *tends toward expulsion*—that is, an *un-shared future*. As such, scandal is oriented around the cathartic friend-enemy distinction. Scandal is indeed a deeply habituated orientation of our species. But its antidote is well summarized in the Proverb, "A fool shows his annoyance at once, but a wise person overlooks an insult" (12:16). Our models explored here, I think, suggest how to resist indulgence in scandal without watering down critical, prophetic indictment. There may indeed be exceptional enemies—occasions which beckon their own exceptional kind of treatment, whether through the pacifist's enemy love, or the expulsion from a constitutional order. But, as Mouffe suggests,

the most common temptation for most of us concerns scandalization toward an *adversary*, not an enemy. But *how* to relate to an adversary—how to purify critique in contempt-free engagement, even competition—is the crucial issue raised here. As we have seen, this can involve not only persuasion and empathic connection, but also conflict-evoking civil disobedience, courageous nonviolent encounters with violent combatants, or the political competition for victory. These must remain viable, however dangerous and divisive, avenues. Instead of themes advocating "moving beyond us-vs-them," my thesis here finds more resonance with some recent titles like *Jesus Takes a Side* (Rashid, 2022) or *How to Have an Enemy* (Florer-Bixler, 2021).

In this light we come full circle to see how Thích Nh□t Hahn's refusal to "take sides" at the beginning of this essay should not be abused to underwrite tepid, moderate acquiescence:

> I know it will be possible for some people to use these words ["do not take sides"] to prolong social injustice, but that is an abuse of what I am saying. We have to find the *real causes* for social injustice, and when we do, we will not condemn a certain type of people. We will ask, Why has the situation of these people remained like that? (1995, 79f)

Thus, when Hanh appeals to understanding "both sides," this is not an appeal to neutralize a conflict or pretend to be above the fray; it urges engagement. He invites us past the mirages of the conflictual surface toward understanding another's suffering:

> To reconcile the conflicting parties, we must have the ability to understand the suffering of both sides. If we take sides, it is impossible for us to do the work of reconciliation. And humans want to take sides. That is why the situation gets worse and worse. Are there people who are still available to both sides? They need not do much. They need to do only one thing: go to one side and tell all about the suffering endured by the other side, and go to the other side and tell all about the suffering endured by this side. That is our chance of peace. That alone can change the situation. (H□nh, 2000, p. 157)

In this call to compassion, his refraining from taking sides does not stymie exchange but courageously intensifies it.

In 2021, *Lumen Christi* hosted a panel on Girard's mimetic theory, discussing some of the challenges regarding contemporary cancel-culture dynamics (Lumen Christi, 2021). Some panelists rightly critiqued how Twitter-mania and cancel culture uses victims as weapons to attack our neighbors

in a blood thirsty Puritanism without grace. And the Girardian notion of conversion was broached by the panel—repentance that we could be victimizers without knowing it, and that we must grapple with our own complicity in societal evils. And in place of cancel culture's false modes of belonging, panelists discussed how we must *build communities based on forgiveness to replace ostracizing culture*. We must get beyond us/them. We must put our stones down and pick up our pots and pans, to create community centered around forgiveness and to dialogue, even with people with whom we strongly differ.

While my above reflections affirm sentiments within that vision, I have shown how this vision must be supplemented with a certain agonistic spirit, a graceful divisiveness. Placing two such contrastive words in tandem is, again, at home in the Scriptural tradition, most notably in Christ's snake-dove *modus operandi*. His social method evidenced a graceful norm and a disciplinary exception: he was undoubtedly saturated with an inclusive concern; yet he also spoke of the *limits* of attempting to win others over, of eventually shaking the dust off one's feet (Matthew 10). He not only blessed the poor but also indicted the rich with "woe." He blessed peacemakers and yet said he came to bring division. And along with prophetic indictments, like Matthew 23, so facially divisive, he also spoke of a community of increasingly pastoral and even excommunicative discipline (Matthew 18). (Notably, this "exclusion" involves "treating them like gentiles and tax collectors"—a status that, for Jesus, evidently warranted intensified gracious outreach.) He dove-ishly spoke of carrying a cross, but he also shrewdly walked away from his Nazareth stoning. Paul, too, not only patiently suffered arrests, but he also invoked his citizenship in the idolatrous power, Rome. Christ was not only silent before his abusers but criticized their delusional abuse of power; he not only reached out a hand of generous inclusion, but he also cast out money changers and let the rich man reject his invitation. And even the possession-sharing community of Acts seemed to have in it some weird, communist angel of guilt who evidently slayed Ananias and Sapphira.

In all of this, we must come to terms with the awkward, uneasy coexistence of snake and dove. Or, per Augustine, we live in a messy mixture of the Earthly and Heavenly cities. Per William Cavanaugh's riff on Augustine, Christ's movement is like a play that shares the stage with a diametrically distinct play, one featuring worldly powers containing violence (Cavanaugh, 2011). This is a stage in which the political has evidently not disappeared. Even the most unconditional God, in whom there is no shadow but only light, nonetheless paradoxically manifests in our world with certain boundaries.

Even if She endlessly pours forth all light, we inescapably cast shadows on this stage.

In other words, the language of inclusivity, welcome, and forgiveness must remain as ever-present, essential, and forceful as that of the dove image. That must be combined, impossibly, and without diminishment, with a fearless, shrewd, serpentine agonism. Mouffe says our maturation here is not in the disappearance of hegemony and enemies, but the reduction of antagonism into agonism. Supplementing unconditional grace and inclusivity with a realist agonism resonates with the Augustinian tradition of political ambivalence that endures engagement with the world and public life (see Mathewes 2007). And that saint promised no easy solutions—not even pacifism—in the raging fires of politics (*City of God*, 15:4; 19:5-6). To uphold a snake-dove life of graceful conflict risks the mischaracterization of irenicism, as one could read Thích Nh□t H□nh, or the backlash of "divisiveness" that many felt toward Jesus, St. Stephen, or Dr. King. But while the command to be a snake-dove may indeed feel uncomfortable, even impossible, in our Earthly city, I contend that it is also the only way to the Heavenly city.

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# The wounds of war and the scars of culture: Simone Weil and René Girard on the symmetry of violence

**Abstract:** The philosophical discourses of violence developed in the 20th century can be grasped in two fundamental paradigms: the paradigm of force (Simone Weil) and the paradigm of domination (Horkheimer and Adorno). This article aims at situating René Girard's theory of the culture within the paradigm of violence as an immediate force, stemming from Simone Weil's phenomenological description of force in *The Iliad*. Simone Weil can be read as a model for modern reflection on violence in different ways. One of them can be identifying her interpretation of *The Iliad* as a starting point for the critique or even unmasking of blind reifying violence through the philosophy of culture: an example of this kind of translation can be found in Girard and his analyses of the figure of the scapegoat and rituals of violence, (sanctioned within myth), transferring violence into a sacral sphere. The pivotal point of the comparison is the concept of *kydos*, "the triumphant fascination of superior violence," developed by Girard in *Violence and the Sacred*. The Greek term, which connects violence, understood in the mode of immediate force, with the magical and sacral dimension, serves as a key concept for comparison of the two thinkers' conceptualizations of force. It allows interpretation of the conceptual tenets of Girardian theory, such as unanimity, symmetry, *mimesis*, and myth in the light of the key concepts of Weil, such as reification, symmetry, unawareness, and the blind mechanism of force. It also allows us to point out the discrepancies between the two conceptualizations (above all, the tensions between the rationality and irrationality of violence) and to grasp Girard's theory as a philosophical

commentary on Weil's insights. This is going to fill a space on the map of modern discourses of violence.

**Keywords:** Simone Weil, René Girard, force, domination, *kydos*.

## Introduction: two paradigms

The following article is based on the premise that modern (20th century) discourses of violence can be read within two fundamental paradigms: the paradigm of force and the paradigm of domination. While the Frankfurt School (Max Horkheimer and Theodor Adorno) can be easily identified as having set up the pattern of the philosophical critique of domination, hidden in instrumental reason, Simone Weil delivered a profound phenomenological description of violence understood as an immediate force.

Both patterns of understanding violence, although in most aspects opposite, surprisingly show some formal affinities: (1) both have their background in the 20th-century's World Wars and both are attempts to grasp our human condition within the context of current historical development; (2) nevertheless, precisely for the sake of understanding the present, they reach very deeply into the past, into the archaic spiritual history of the West. Both deliver great modern interpretations of Homer. Simone Weil, with her analysis of *The Iliad* (Weil, 1965) on the one hand, and Theodor Adorno and Max Horkheimer, with their reading of *The Odyssey* on the other (Horkheimer & Adorno, 2002), seem to have found archaic sources for our modern self-understanding.

Moreover, different modern accounts of violence and force seem to more or less unconsciously refer to these two fundamental patterns. But this reference is far from being straightforward or unproblematic. History and developed civilization modified, sublimated, and mediated these patterns so that they are not simply copied in the events of our most recent history and our 20th century discourses of violence and force. One can read these discourses as reminiscent of their sources, even if this reminiscence is blurred1.

[1] This article is a part of a wider project to read both accounts of violence as reflections through which we understand our present condition, or as paradigms of our contemporary complex understandings of violence. These interpretations can be read as interpretations of symbols in the Ricouerian sense: the bringing out of a secondary sense hidden in the primary sense. Thus, through Weil and Adorno, Achilles and Odysseus become symbolic representations of contemporary modes of violence.

After the trauma of the Holocaust, various critiques of instrumental rationality connected with violence and domination were an echo of Adorno's accusations against reason and the Enlightenment: it reverberates in Heidegger's critique of calculative thinking (Heidegger, 1966, 1998, 2008) in Bauman's connection between the Shoah and bureaucracy (Bauman, 2008, pp. 83–116), less strongly in Hannah Arendt's critique of modern society (Arendt, 1998). In a less direct way it also reverberates in Foucault's multifarious analyses of the interdependence between power and knowledge (Foucault, 1980, 1995).

Simone Weil did not have followers in this sense. Nevertheless, I assume that she can also be read as a paradigm for modern reflection on violence in more than one way. One of them would be to read conceptual frameworks of modern political theories that somehow repeat and support, although on a different level, the rules of war violence as described in her essay *The Iliad, or the Poem of Force*. Perhaps the most straightforward exemplifications of the affirmation of force against "reflection, justice, and prudence," incorporated in the modern history of thought, can be found in the German political and juridical discourse of the Weimar Republic, inspired by George Sorel and his *Reflections on Violence* (Sorel, 1999) – early Walter Benjamin and Carl Schmitt would be paradigmatic examples here.

Weil's phenomenological analysis of force can be paradigmatic for modern discourses in a different mode: it can be read as a starting point for the critique or even unmasking of blind reifying violence through the philosophy of culture. An example of this kind of translation is René Girard and his analyses of the scapegoat figure and rituals of violence transferring violence into a sacral sphere.

This article aims at situating Girard's theory of culture within the paradigm of violence as an immediate force, i.e., within Simone Weil's understanding of violence.

**Simone Weil's paradigm: symmetry**

The immediate historical context of the emergence of Simone Weil's essay *The Iliad, or the Poem of Force* is telling: it was written during the summer and fall of 1940, immediately after France capitulated under the yoke of modern German forces (June 22, 1940). Nevertheless, Weil's insights are not a straightforward result of the most recent events of the Battle of France. The first source of the essay stems from her school lectures of 1937/8. It is reminiscent more of the hopelessness of the First World War than Hitler's military and political power, whose full consequences were at that moment unclear.

But even if we could not know this, it would be evident that Weil's reading of *The Iliad* is very far from purely historical or literary interest, but that it is rather a phenomenology of the nature of immediate physical violence, i.e., force: "For those dreamers who considered that force, thanks to progress, would soon be a thing of the past, the *Iliad* could appear as a historical document; for others, whose powers of recognition are more acute and who perceive force, today as yesterday, at the very center of human history, the *Iliad* is the purest and the loveliest of mirrors" (Weil, 1965, p. 5). This phenomenological description is not an immediate eidetic analysis but is an outcome of mediated interpretation of symbols, myths, and literary sources.

Paul Ricoeur showed how philosophical reflection has nothing to do with immediate consciousness or intuition. Instead of being given, reflection emerges from the task of interpretation of symbols. If symbols refer us to at least a double meaning, then myths can be considered similar symbolic systems requiring interpretation. But there is more to it: symbolic structures require not only interpretation (as an explanation of this duality of meanings present in language), but they also call us for thinking and philosophic reflection whose task it is to recover their meaning for our own existence: "I cannot grasp the act of existing except in signs scattered in the world" (Ricoeur, 1970, p. 46). It is precisely what Simone Weil (or, differently, the Frankfurt School) does: her account of Homer can be read as a mediator or reminder of this sign of our existence and strives at "recovering something which has first been lost" (Ricoeur, 1970, p. 45).

Now, the question has to be posed: what kind of reflection can we see in this 'mirror'? How does force modify our condition?

The first and main characteristic of violence, according to Weil, is *reification*. Subjection to force or physical violence turns a human being into a thing. There are at least three modes of reification present in Weil's essay: Reification is possible literally as killing, i.e., turning a living body into a corpse. But reification happens also in the 'not-yet,' in the brief moment of awaiting certain death. The figure of Priam's son Lycaon begging Achilles for life is a paradigm of a person who "becomes a corpse before anybody or anything touches him" (Weil, 1965, p. 7). This also concerns Priam himself, begging for Hector's body, which for Achilles, was an inert object. Yet another mode of reification, a sort of prolonged not-yet, is present in slavery, an outcome of brute force. The paradigmatic figure here is Briseis, a slave concubine of Achilles, compelled to love him, although she has all the reasons to hate him. She mourns his friend Patroclus instead of her loved ones: slaughtered

parents, brothers, and husband. Employing this replacement of feelings, the enslaved person "loses his own inner life" (Weil, 1965, p. 11).

The second fundamental characteristic of violence is *symmetry*. The greatness of *The Iliad*, according to Simone Weil, contrary to other great books of Western and Jewish civilization, is its neutrality: "One is barely aware that the poet is a Greek" (Weil, 1965, p. 26). The favors given to one side would mask another feature of force, pitilessly shown in the epos. The reification, obviously inflicting the victims, concerns and also intoxicates those who are *by chance* in power. In *The Iliad*, nobody is spared from suffering, pain, fear, and misery: "In this poem, there is not a single man who does not at one time or another have to bow his neck to force" (Weil, 1965, p. 11). This symmetry is visible on several levels. On the level of events, each crowing hero at a certain moment becomes a victim of force, even Achilles. But symmetry has another dimension: each character using force simultaneously undergoes its reciprocal power, which reifies him even before the change of roles. By reifying others, a hero is also reifying himself: he believes he is the one who uses force, and while it is the force that overwhelms him: his deeds and reactions become predictable. Moreover, symmetry also appears on the level of narration: it is bitter but simultaneously a cool and distanced description of death and suffering, neutral to the conflicted parties. It is a description stripped of any "comforting fiction," as Weil puts it.

The third predominating feature of violence is *blindness* and an illusion of *natural necessity*. The symmetrical character of force eventually creates the illusion that it is given by destiny, that it possesses us rather than we possess it. The Trojan War warriors behave, with no exception, as if they were caught in a blind mechanism. They reject any reasonable voice that mitigates the use of violence and further fighting (like the voice of Thersites). They prevent the war from finishing as if they were programmed to proceed toward the final destruction. The Greeks do not want the riches of Paris and Helen. They want to see Troy in ruins. The Trojans cannot feel satisfaction seeing the fleeing Achaeans: Hector knows that "the day will come when Holy Troy will perish" (Homer, 2015) and still does everything to make certain it really happens, setting fire to the ships which prevent the Greeks from escaping. "What they want is, in fact, everything" (Weil, 1965, p. 15). Both parties make sure the war does not finish too early, as if they were programmed to drive toward the final destruction. All this comes up to a special understanding of force by those who exercise, or suffer it: force is conceived as an attribute of individuals only at the beginning, until it reveals its symmetrical and mechanical character. Later it is understood as a natural or divine, but not

as a human power. Man is only a marionette in the hand of destiny, nature, or gods. "Thus violence obliterates anybody who feels its touch, it comes to seem just as external to its employer as to its victim. And from this springs the idea of a destiny before which executioner and victim stand equally innocent" (Weil, 1965, p. 17).

All this excludes moderation in the use of force. The symmetrical, blind, and seemingly natural character of reification forfeits any reflection or mediation that would mitigate violence. This makes boys slaughtering each other in the mud of Flanders in 1917, similar to mythic Achaean and Trojan warriors. After the first childish embrace of war as a game, there comes a day of fear. They feel condemned by Zeus, or the hand of necessity, or in a more modern manner, history. Any reflection or moderation"would expose their mind to suffering so naked, so violent that it could not be borne" (Weil, 1965, p. 20). Their blindness secures them and haunts them at the same time: "the conquering soldier is like a scourge of nature. Possessed by war, he, like the slave, becomes a thing" (Weil, 1965, p. 22).

Simone Weil gave an account of the nature of immediate physical violence, or force, as she most frequently put it. The force of war and the spiritual situation of a soldier could be interpreted as one of the possible patterns of understanding violence in the West.

**Girard: symmetry as mimesis**

Before connecting Girard with Weil's phenomenology of violence, we need to briefly reconstruct his main idea. I will not present it thoroughly but concentrate mainly on the symmetrical character of violence, as it allows us to find a parallel between his theory of culture and Weil's account.

Contrary to popular views, violence is not founded on the difference (Girard, 1989, p. 49). It is not a different skin color, cultural distinctions, ethnic or religious tensions that are the primary soil for the proliferation of violence. It is precisely the opposite: it is the similarity of human beings that facilitates hostility. Violence appears wherever people become more and more alike, i.e., in mutual rivalry for the same object. The desire behind the competition makes people similar to the point of sameness. The common denominator of desire makes other differences irrelevant.

The first act of violence emerges from the situation where a human community, for some reason, can no longer live according to hitherto operating rules and has to establish itself anew. Such a crisis can have objective causes (war, calamity, epidemics), but it becomes a crisis only on a societal level: "Men feel powerless when confronted with the eclipse of culture; they

are disconcerted by the immensity of the disaster but never look into the natural causes; the concept that they might affect those causes by learning more about them remains embryonic. Since cultural eclipse is above all a social crisis, there is a strong tendency to explain it by social and, especially, moral causes" (Girard, 1986, p. 14). It abolishes settled rules and hierarchies and destroys culture through human social reactions. Such a situation makes people equal in one desire (e.g., victory) and makes previously functioning rules and distinctions irrelevant. On this account, Girard often defines it as a "mimetic crisis," where *mimesis* is not an aesthetic term but an anthropological one, referring to the symmetry of desire. It is very close to the "contagious indifference" - the state of soldiers' minds depicted by Simone Weil (Weil, 1965, p. 18). A "mimetic crisis" is also a "sacrificial crisis": a situation in which hitherto practiced religious rituals lose their social disciplinary function in legitimizing established hierarchies and distinctions. Therefore, such a crisis can easily lead to a carnival of violence, a ubiquitous fight between people, and rivalry, which is not mitigated by norms and prohibitions anymore. What is important now is that the crux of a sacrificial crisis is always a mimetic tension that emerges in extraordinary circumstances. A community overwhelmed by a calamity forgets previous distinctions, which foremostly means forgetting the prescribed and differentiating rules of desire: who and in what social position is allowed to desire what. All of a sudden, everyone wants the same.

This critical situation is very similar to that depicted in the *Iliad*: the Acheans forget about Helen, they want everything; the Trojans forget their desire to save Troy, and they also want everything. The object of desire is not relevant. What is important is the rivalry. While Simone Weil's description is focused exactly on this carnival of violence, Girard's account concerns the cultural and religious means of avoiding the final destruction. In his view, there is only one remedy for such a critical situation: the afflicted community has to transfer the ubiquitous and mutual violence upon one individual, who becomes the victim of a collective murder. Such a rivalrous community is, by definition, persecutory (Girard, 1986, p. 16). The *mimesis* of conflict and rivalry, which, at the same time, antagonized and unified the community members, now becomes the *mimesis* of unanimity in the choice of a victim. Such a collective and spontaneous murder becomes a new beginning and forms a new culture by a renewal of the basis of cultural order, the system of social distinctions in desires. The act of collective murder is a shock, a *katharsis*, a purification for the community, which cuts off the dangerous process of unification.

What is important now is the ambivalence of the victim: once burdened with the community's guilt, after being sacrificed, he/she is recognized as a savior, a person who averted the crisis (Girard, 1986, p. 42). The culture begins to worship him as a god who saved the community, or as the god-founder of a new community. In other words, the scapegoat is transferred from the profane into the sacred: "The return of peace and order is ascribed to the same cause as the earlier troubles to the victim himself. That is what makes the victim sacred and transforms the persecution into a point of religious and cultural departure" (Girard, 1986, p. 55). The first spontaneous act of violence is the foundation of culture, and it must be saved in the cultural memory. It will be repeated as a ritual that commemorates the first act, and, at the same time, it will be mystified in myths; the role of such narrations blurs the randomness of the act of lynching and stress the sacral aspect of this event. In this way, the accidentality and humanness of the primal sacrificial selection are hidden from the collective consciousness: "The sacrificial crisis is never described in myths and ritual as it really is. There, human violence is envisioned as issuing from some force exterior to man" (Girard, 1989, p. 82). It is akin to force misunderstood as a natural necessity, as depicted by Simone Weil.

Thus, the myth is a story mystifying collective human violence and depicting it as something natural or divine for which humans have no responsibility. The mechanism seems to be parallel to what happens with the Weilian warriors after the first embrace of force: once it eludes personal control and proves to afflict those who believe had possessed it, it is de-humanized and ascribed to superhuman powers, like destiny, history or nature.

The rituals and corresponding myths are reminders of the first victim in changed, mollified forms that either blur the responsibility of the collective murder or even hides the very event. Nevertheless, the sacrificial religious rituals are the traces of the collective spontaneous murder, scars from the wound in the community. But, thanks to myth and its mystifying function, nobody remembers that this wound was self-afflicted.

### *Kydos*: the fascination of violence

Now, let's turn our attention to the Greek word *kydos*, explained by Girard in *Violence and the Sacred*. *Kydos* connects violence, understood in the mode of immediate force, with the magical and sacral dimension; by the same token, it focuses on the intellectual affinity between Simone Weil and René Girard.

In English, there exists a late derivative of this Greek word, the informal noun *kudos*, which, according to the Merriam-Webster dictionary, means so much as prestige, praise, fame, or renown as a result of achievement. However, the English *kudos*, although stemming from *kydos*, has lost a substantial part of its original connotation. In Homer, and Greek tragedies, *kydos* is glory as the result of military advantage, but, at the same time, it contains magical-sacral components, which make it directly untranslatable. Its connotation reveals the "relationship between violence, desire, and divinity" (Girard, 1989, p. 151). *Kydos* is a stake in the single combat between Achean and Trojan warriors, but it is not a mere human advantage: "It is the fascination of superior violence. Violence strikes men as at once seductive and terrifying; never a simple means to an end, but as an epiphany" (Girard, 1989, p. 152).

The status of *kydos* is ambivalent: between divine and human, subjective and objective. *Kydos* is a triumphant majesty, characteristic of gods, as "for the Greeks, the issue of violence carried to its extreme was divinity itself" (Girard, 1989, p. 152). *Kydos* is a form of talisman. When it appears, it creates unanimity on both sides of the confrontation. Those who possess *kydos* feel enormous and growing power; those who do not feel defeated and paralyzed. As a feature of human relations, it is always changeable and fleeting, although, for both sides of the conflict, it seems to be barely reversible at the decisive moment. It signifies the combat between Ajax and Hector, where *kydos* is transferred from Hector to Ajax and back to Hector. The one who is actually with *kydos*, feels invincible, and the other party is overwhelmed with fear (Homer, 2015). Even Patroklos is filled with *kydos* and spreads fear in the Trojan army encircling the Greek ships (Homer, 2015) – a momentary advantage that seems to be irreversible. *Kydos* excludes any moderation and leads to catastrophe.

Although elusive and abstract (a fleeting sign of a temporary victory), *kydos* is the highest object of mimetic rivalry, much more important than the seemingly real point of war (like Helen or treasures).

*Kydos*, according to Girard, shows affinity with another Greek concept: that of *thymos*. Like *kydos*, *thymos* is an object of rivalry: "the adversaries are trying to wrest from each other's grasp their very souls, their vital force, their being. Each finds this being reflected in the other's violence, because their mimetic desires have converged on one and the same object" (Girard 1989, 154). Like *kydos*, *thymos* is also ambivalent and alternative (has an alternating character): it means soul, spirit, or anger. However, unlike psyche

(which refers to soul or mind as an inalienable human attribute), one can actually possess it or not.

*Kydos* and its connate *thymos*, as described by Girard, focalize the main features of Simone Weil's force: reification, symmetry, and blindness (that is, the false interpretation of force as a natural necessity).

Thus, the very essence of reification can be grasped in terms of *thymos*: it fills Achilles, who "harshly" replies to Likaon, begging for his life. Likaon is the one stripped of *thymos* before his soul leaves his body: "And the other's knees and heart failed him. Dropping his spear, knelt down, holding out his arms" (Homer, 2015). Achilles, in Girard's words, "grasps his soul, his vital force, their being" (Girard, 1989, p. 154), and Likaon, in Weil's words, "becomes a corpse before anybody or anything touches him" (Weil, 1965, p. 7). The same happens later to his father Priam: "He stopped, clasped the knees of Achilles, kissed his hand, Those terrible man-killing hands that had slaughtered so many of his sons" (Homer, 2015).

Further, those who actually possess *kydos* (and *thymos*), feel godlike and do not understand its symmetrical and alternative character; they do not understand the symmetry of mimetism, whose law it is to afflict both sides equally, irrespective of any momentary passing advantage. Once force reveals its symmetrical, alternative character, *kydos* loses its characteristic as a human gain, but it does not disappear. It is not demystified as a human illusion; it becomes even more "objective" as if given by a god: and it is a myth that supports its interpretation as a divine or natural necessity. After every hero tastes a moment of defeat, "victory is less a matter of valor than of blind destiny" (Weil, 1965, p. 13). The perfect example was the moment when Zeus put the destiny of the Trojans and Acheans on the scales and "seized the scales in the middle; it was the fatal day of Greece that sank" (Homer, 2015). *Kydos* is not a gain anymore. It is even beyond the Olympians and is simply given interchangeably by destiny (*Moira*). This (false) recognition leads to the escalation of conflict, which becomes a divine affair, where humans are downgraded to helpless marionettes. The military clash is reshaped into a war for bleeding.

**Discrepancies: the rationality and irrationality of violence**

Probably the most original aspect of Girard's theory of violence is that contrary to common sense and philosophical tradition, violence is not irrational (Girard, 1989, p. 2). It is not an expression of a dark, demonic or biological instinct. It is not, like in Hobbes, a primitive state of nature where everyone is at war with everyone else. This state can be abolished by

the political act of ceding one's inborn right to aggression and defense of the sovereign. In Girard, on the contrary, violence is a defense mechanism developed in culture. And as such, it is characterized by specific logic and severe consequences. Looking for a victim as a remedy for evil emerging from natural causes might seem utterly irrational to objective judgment. Still, it is rational if we look at it from the perspective of the logic of culture. The scapegoat mechanism prevents an unlimited escalation of violence by unloading the spiral of symmetry (*mimesis*). Its rationality can be seen in the mechanism and the ritual of selecting and sacrificing victims (whose detailed description I am putting aside). There is a certain lack of social bonds between the community and the potential scapegoat: victims need to be set apart from the community, either on the bottom of the social ladder or as someone distinguished. Such isolation minimizes the risk of revenge and an outbreak of uncontrolled violence.

In Simone Weil, by contrast, violence is irrational, insofar as it is a result of a lack of reflection, and: "Where there is no room for reflection, there is none either for justice and prudence. Hence we see men in arms behaving harshly and madly" (Weil, 1965, p. 13). Unlike the critics of reason, Simone Weil blames the lack of rational recognition of the limits of force (that is, "that interval of hesitation, wherein lies all our consideration for our brothers in humanity" (Weil, 1965, p. 14)) for the blindness and contingency of pain suffered and inflicted. Seen more globally, the randomness and arbitrariness of force that has exceeded its measure take the form of impersonal and automatic geometrical retribution. As such, it becomes a literary theme (Aeschylus's tragedy) and a point of departure for philosophy. Greek philosophy, with its conceptions of "limit, measure, equilibrium which ought to determine the conduct of life" (Weil, 1965, p. 15), is a remedy (alas, according to Weil, forgotten) for the abuse of force.

The rationality of violence in Girard cannot be simply juxtaposed with the irrationality of force in Weil. Weil's irrationality of force is, contrarily, personal and human: it is always a soldier, a warrior, a human being who forgets the limits and measure of reason, letting violence acquire semi-natural, or semi-sacral, superhuman dimensions. Girard's rationality of violent mechanisms and rituals is utterly impersonal and, in a way, non-human: it is culture, i.e., a superhuman structure which develops self-defense mechanisms. Nevertheless, although Weil, unlike Girard, believes in the power of thought and philosophy, both referred to the higher rationality of Christianity – Girard in the demascating myth function of the Gospels, Weil in its

revelatory source of understanding of human suffering. And both believed that Christian tradition forgot, or blurred, its message.

**History and modernity**

Above, I have described the cyclic rhythm of the beginning and renewal of culture in Girard. This corresponded to the difference between the spontaneous mechanism of the surrogate victim and the scapegoat ritual. This dual structure has, in Girard's thought, a double function. On the one hand, it is a historical hypothesis describing the logic hidden in archaic cultures and "primitive" religious systems. On the other hand, it depicts a model, a transhistorical and transcultural anthropological description of the laws of human culture in general. One can say that the historical, genetic aspect of the scapegoat ritual constitutes a sort of cultural residue: the scapegoat mechanism is the ultimate, yet primitive, rescue for a culture in distress. Thus, one can see the history of culture as a returning echo of collective violence, independently from the religious turn Girard saw in Christianity. In this approach, the core can be historically modified and reshaped into stable institutions, but it never disappears. It can always be recollected and repeated in this or that form.

Nevertheless, in the descriptions of historical times and modernity, there is another possibility within Girard's thought. In his last book (Girard & Chantre, 2010), Girard returns to the unsolved mimetic conflict, namely, to the Weilian force. Here, culture is no more seen as a cyclic repetition of sacrificial crisis and its remedy in sacrifice. Christianity changed our civilization irreversibly. It revealed violence hidden in myths, and by doing so, it disarmed the mechanism of transference of the collective guilt onto individuals. By the same token, it dismantled the sacrificial ritual by means of depotentialisation. But even Christianity and its powerful message was unable to weaken the mechanism of the escalation of tension in mimetic rivalry. It, so to say, stopped halfway: it deprived us of the cultural tools to prevent the undue escalation of violence, but it did not prevent violence itself.

This second scenario of historical development, evidently present in Girard's last book, shows affinities with Simone Weil's account of force even more directly. Here, modernity is not described as a series of scapegoat rituals for the sake of cultural renewals (oblivious to the Christian revelation). The opposite is true: religion demystified the scapegoat mechanisms and rituals and depotentialized them as remedies protecting communities from mimetic violence. We acquired the cultural knowledge of Christianity, but we could

not follow the ethical appeal to withhold the desire for revenge and hold the spiral of symmetrical violence.

In *Battling to the End,* Girard transfers the principle of mimesis from individuals within a community to global war relations. He interprets Clausewitz's treatise *On war* as an account of mimetic international conflict. Clausewitz, having grasped the essence of war as a "duel on a larger scale" (Clausewitz, 2006, p. 13), and stating that "war is an act of force and *there is no logical limit to the application of that force*" (Clausewitz, 2006, p. 15), has inscribed war in the model of mimetic rivalry (known from the pre-Christian times). In late modernity, this model becomes a global and spreading conflict, where force has no limits, theoretically. Practically, the historical circumstances of conflict do not end with an Apocalypse because conflict waxes and wanes. Its dynamics are a sort of pulsation of rivalrous tension. After reaching a certain point and applying acute remedies, the spiral of mimesis loosens up, and conflict goes back to the limitations it exceeded earlier. *Katharsis*, known from "primitive" cultures, never comes, and conflict is never truly resolved.

Mutual imitation is increasingly vehement: the mimetic symmetry comes out from behind the scenes and becomes a global principle of the world. In other words, the unappeased global conflict is a modern version of the ancient sacrificial crisis. Simultaneously, according to Girard, in the first decades of the 21st century, the institutions slowing down the escalation of conflicts started to become less and less efficient. The only thing that stays hidden from the actors of such conflicts is their progressing similarity. For instance, contrary to Huntington, Girard interprets the conflict between China and the US not as a clash of civilizations (Huntington, 1996, pp. 182–226), two different powers, different cultures, values, and so on, but as a dispute "between two forms of capitalism that are becoming more and more similar" (Girard & Chantre, 2010, p. 42). The reaction of George W. Bush to September 11 is not a clash of Jihad and the McWorld (as Benjamin Barber's famous book title proclaims (Barber, 1996)), but a new form of global *mimesis*. What the actors see, each from his point of view, as combat between good and evil, from the global perspective, looks more and more similar: terrorists versus Abu Ghraib and Guantanamo Bay. In the context of the north-eastern Polish border, one could also say that Poland in 2021 became more and more like the anti-Christian regimes it has always opposed (or believed to have opposed).

Simone Weil and René Girard noticed, each in their way, the social and symmetrical character of immediate force. Towards the end of his life, Girard translated the tensions between individuals into global relations. Weil, for obvious biographical reasons, couldn't develop her phenomenology of force in new historical circumstances. Nevertheless, she realized how vitalthe insight is that "human destinies are not separated, but are intertwined and become a whole" (Leder, 2018, p. 76). This insight facilitates the experience of the symmetrical balance of power and the right measure or limitation in using force. Weil was convinced that the concepts of measure, balance, and limit, "which ought to determine the conduct of life, are, in the West, restricted to a servile function in the vocabulary of technics" (Weil, 1965, p. 15). Although she wrote these words on the verge of WWII, it is clear that they have not lost their relevance in the third decade of the 21st century. The new Millenium announced itself with a return of force in a new-old form: the festive mood of the fall of the iron curtain faded, suppressed contempt could be uttered again, hate re-found its place in the public sphere, and naked military violence returned to Europe, *kydos* proliferated again. In other words, to stick to the metaphoric of this essay: human culture opened up its scars and returned to the stage of mutually inflicting wounds.

In this way, Simone Weil's and René Girard's accounts of force have become topical in the first decades of the 21st century. As Andrzej Leder noticed: After the post-war decades of suppressed aggression (remember the slogan: "Never again war!"), where the role of philosophy was to demystify and unmask the hidden violence of bureaucratic systems in the mode of the Frankfurt School, now philosophy faces the necessity to intellectually embrace force again (Leder, 2018, p. 36). It is the role of philosophy to recover the concepts of measure, limit, and balance from their restricted meaning in technology, or to reflect on the nature of direct, war-like violence. Geo-politically it seems an all too weak weapon against self-perpetuating mechanisms, but the only one we can be truly responsible for.

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# Masks and mirrors of subject identity. Between the petrification of language and the mimeticization of the gaze

> The mimetic character of violence is so intense that once violence is installed in a community, it cannot burn itself out. To escape from the circle it is first necessary to remove from the scene all those forms of violence that tend to become self-propagating and to spawn new, imitative forms.
>
> (Rene Girard, *Violence and the Sacred*, p. 95)

**Abstract:** The article addresses the issue of the constitution of the subject and the formation of identity in a world that is rapidly changing along with threats it cannot control. The discussion will span between the epistemic interpretive perspectives of Rene Girard and Jacques Lacan, involving aspects of the understanding of the subject, the meaning of language, the perception of the image, and the action of the Real. In the cognitive approach, the goal is to show the space of violence, crisis, trauma and finally language as a representative of culture. In the interpretive perspective, two (*signifiant*) mechanisms of human behavior are presented: mimicry and petrification, the action of which is revealed in the subject, or for the subject. The critical perspective will refer to the contemporary condition of the subject and its position in relation to nature, culture and social conditions. As for pedagogical discourse, the question is formulated: how do we understand the reality in which the subject exists, and what is the dimension of violence

that organizes culture or emerges from this culture? The text uses concepts borrowed from Jacques Lacan's psychoanalysis.

**Keywords:** subject, identity, violence, mimicry, language, gaze, lacanian psychoanalysis

The search for new spaces of interpretation in discourses and social practices is rooted in the endless encounters of another impossibility, which we could call the return of the Real that persistently and intrusively triggers further crises. Thus, there is a crisis of subjectivity, identity, personality, masculinity, femininity and, consequently, a crisis of the family, fertility, parenting, and behavior, not to mention a crisis of education. And if there is a crisis, it must be without a doubt due to some kind of oppression, violence, suffering and ultimately trauma. We constantly have to deal with the different faces of violence and what we could call **wound culture** originating in social trauma (Seltzer 2015). Thus, if the subject is in permanent crisis leading to post-traumatic rejection or denial of identity, then, as Seltzer argues, the abnormal normality of trauma becomes a model of subjectivity and social relations inherent in **wound culture** (Seltzer 2015, p. 353). This interpretation views trauma as the product of mimetic identification, which can only be possible if it represents an inability or a petrification of the ability to identify with others. As a result, trauma becomes a determinant of the subject's place in **wound culture** by marking his or her private existence and the failure of the social (Seltzer 2015, p. 352).

Meanwhile, Lacanian psychoanalysts approach the problem of crisis with pragmatism and recognize that it is a *signifiant* that has always been present in social spaces, discourses, or in the office while resonating since Freud, who called it trauma. The Lacanian understanding of trauma takes on a different dimension, as it becomes a moment of rupture that the subject must face despite not knowing how to explain what has violently invaded his or her life (Vanderveken 2022, p. 96). Of course, this is a clinical approach, in which working with the symptom that follows the trauma offers a chance to deal with what is at first impossible for the subject. Be that as it may, we are constantly called upon to grapple with the answer to the question of how the position and condition of the subject, whose meaning is represented by a *signifiant*[1] defined by some crisis, is changing in the modern world. The

[1] Signifiant is a term Lacan borrowed from de Saussure. Lacan referred to this basic element as signifier (signifiant) so that the words "linguistic sign" "acoustic image"

problem begins when there is a petrification of the *signifiant* with which the subject cannot cope. Lacan calls this a subject that is petrified by the *signifiant* and is incapable of asking any questions. The problem reveals itself when such a petrified subject lives as well as acts, but refuses to think about who he or she is (Soler 1995, p. 48).

Viewed from this perspective, the studies of critical educators showing the growing problem of "petrification of the child's emerging identity in school" (Szczepska-Pustkowska 2014) appear threatening. Unfortunately, more and more often, this is a child denied the ability to speak, left all alone with images stripped of meaning, and ultimately ensnared by the ritualization of appearances that no one notices anymore. This is a child who, in defense against the actions of the Real, remains petrified through a spectrum of various symptoms, unable to cope with a reality that can only be safely accessed through language representing the Symbolic order. For this to happen, however, there needs to occur what Lacan called the parents' *lalangue* communicated as the place that the child occupies in their desire and in their *jouissance*: defining how they welcomed the child into their lives (Węc 2016). This is a very important act, because *lalangue* is a deposit, a substance, a petrification, in which the group's way of dealing with its unconscious experience is marked. This unconscious experience stands for the effect of speech and discourse on the substance of the body as well as for what element of discourse, in any given social relationship, has ordered and historically transmitted the *jouissance* that is deposited in language (Soler 2014).

In my discussion, I will use Lacanian topological triangulation to determine the logic of causality of the discourse I am attempting. This involves the use of interpretation determined by language, which indicates that a *signifiant* of crisis can be triggered by the mechanisms of mimeticization and petrification that have become cultural phenomena. In terms of the subject's understanding, there is also the context of a logical turn leading from Freud's topography of the subject, based on the two topoi of the human mental apparatus, with the first topoi introducing the space of the functioning of the unconscious, (pre)conscious and conscious subject, and the second topoi delineating the structure of the subject defined by the three mental realms of the *Id*, *ego* and *superego*, to Lacan situating the subject topologically in its fluidity and indeterminacy in relation to the three mental orders: the Imaginary, the Symbolic and the Real.

and "concept" are replaced by words that evoke each other while simultaneously opposing each other (Węc 2012).

## The scapegoat or the violence of mimetic identifications

I begin my discussion with an interpretation of Rene Girard's anthropological **concept of violence**, but only to the extent which is determined by the signifiers defined in the introduction of the article. Girard's thought sparked my interest many years ago, especially with regard to the interpretation of mimeticism, which appropriates the subject by sacrificing it on the altar of violence hijacking its existence, and marking it with inevitable suffering. This startling vision of the organization of the subject's universe and the construction of culture emerging from the abyss of mimesis exposes the mythic anchoring in the primitive sacrum. Girard has formulated a universal persecutory pattern showing violence as a specific principle of regulating social relations in a serious social and cultural crisis. The persecutory pattern is based on four stereotypes: the stereotype of general differentiation, the stereotype of differentiating crimes, the stereotype of sacrificial stigmas and the stereotype of violence (Girard, 1991, p. 37), which, according to Girard, means the authenticity of acts of rape and crisis. Consequently, the occurrence of sacrificial signs – anything that suggests the affinity of these criminal signs with crisis – is enough to identify and annihilate the victim as the one held responsible for the crisis that occurred.

Girard adopts a highly pessimistic vision of reality when showing that culture has its origin in violence, which shifts the Freudian formula of culture as the source of suffering to a completely different place of understanding the world in which humans have come to live. Like Freud and Lacan, Girard applied triangulations establishing a logic of causality for human relations constituted by the object of desire, the mediator (rival) of desire, and the subject of desire. In interpreting the scapegoating mechanism, he distinguished three stages: the mimetic crisis, violence against the victim and the sacralization of the victim. Undoubtedly, this theory was influenced by this philosopher's conception of language. So, we are all under **the power of language**, which is the most reliable indicator of "being from" somewhere, and thus exposes what the subject would like to hide. We can also speak of the aversion and impotence of language in erasing the differences that the subject wants to hide. According to Girard, language always says too much and too little, even if it satisfies every matter has its opposite or rage and uproar that mean nothing (Girard 2019, p. 94). In this sense, too, the very desire to integrate (e.g., with another culture) is an attempt to achieve the perfection of its imitation. However, this is not possible, as there will always be someone who will expose the subject by exploiting the impossible

aspects of cultural mimicry, such as the language that lies in the depths of the subconscious of the human psyche (Girard 1987, p. 162). Ultimately, he concludes that Logos Phobous (Greek for language of terror) is ultimately the language of mimetic **desire** and violence, which needs no words to circulate among people (Girard 2019, p. 201).

A pessimistic vision of the world is also found in the concept of mimetic desire, which is thought to be the basis of subjective existence. Girard's claim that mimetic desire is identifiable already in a child, who has no problem with it, is worth noting. Things are different in an adult, who is more likely to be ashamed to admit that he or she mimics another. Of course, this is due to the fear of revealing a lack in his or her being. This leads the subject to mislead others by giving false information about him/herself, while expecting others to imitate him/herself thus hiding the fact that he/she is an imitator. In this sense, the subject, upon encountering another subject who appears complete in comparison with him/herself, wishes to compensate for his/her shortcomings and to make sense of his/her existence. In the chapter entitled "Metamorphoses of Desire," Girad writes that desire according to the Other is always the desire to be the Other2 (Girard 2001 p. 89). This means that in order to desire a similar fusion with the substance of the Other, one must feel an insurmountable revulsion for one's own substance (Girard 2001 p. 61). Consequently, all conflict, rivalry and competition have their origin in mimetic desire transforming into mimetic competition. Mimesis becomes the meaning of human life in every aspect of life from the minutest details of everyday life through the grand rituals of culture religion, ideology, or politics. Mimesis is both the source of development and the source of the understanding of good and evil and, by implication, the source of every crisis.

The Giradian crisis thrusts people into a constant struggle that deprives them of what differentiates humans from one another by essentially robbing them of their "individuality" and causing language to be threatened (Girard 2019, p. 77). During a crisis, everyone always has to utter the last word of violence, thus forcing his/her opponent to remain silent; everyone wants to strike a decisive blow: the blow that will not be followed by further blows and that will thus serve as a model for a ritual (Girard 2019, p. 171) This ubiquitous crisis governs all aspects of knowledge, its polemical nature, and the rhythm of its development. Girard finds that our anthropological vocation stems from the distinct nature of Western society. This vocation intensifies as the crisis accelerates to become an increasingly serious tragic crisis.

[2] Let us recall that Lacan says that the desire of the subject is the desire of the Other.

The only possible way of containing these crises is through **rites** of passage, the purpose of which is to shape, like the original crisis, any potential crisis caused by some loss of difference. The goal is to turn the terrifying uncertainty that always accompanies the emergence of contagious violence into certainty. If rites of passage are always successful, if they achieve their goal every time, they tend to slowly transform into a mere more or less "symbolic" rehearsal as one becomes certain of their outcome. The sacrificial nucleus, the central element of the ritual, then also disappears, so it is no longer very clear what the "symbol" refers to (Girard 2019, p. 389). A key premise in Girard's theory is also that ritualization allows for the control of violence rooted in mimetic competition and unequal distribution of desirable items. Under this view, people are incapable of either taking responsibility or of self-reflection that would allow them to discern their own participation in the conflict. Ultimately, everyone is pitted against everyone and violence spins out of any control. In the end, the destructive stages of either individual or social conflict are set in motion, which leads to a search for a "scapegoat" to blame in order to defuse the conflict. The figure that Girard used is a personification of the crisis of people who are convinced of this victim's guilt. Killing the **scapegoat** ends the crisis by channeling the collective violence, directing it toward one arbitrarily chosen member while the community experiences reconciliation.

Summarizing the discussion of Girard's conception of culture and the manner in which it is interpreted, the question emerges of whether, and to what extent we are therefore participants in a collective trauma. (LaCapra 2015 p. 61): a trauma that can be associated with what Girard analyzes as a sacrificial crisis, accompanied by either danger or mimetic violence. In his view, we have been immersed in mimeticism. Some are fortunate to have good role models and the knowledge of how to withdraw and distance themselves. Others are not so lucky and have bad role models (Girard 2018, p. 177). Of course, in the face of this, prohibitions must be formulated, the transgression of which triggers further crises. Analyzing Girard's concept, one gets the impression that the Real is part of the subject's reality as something permanent rather than happening. It is as if the Real were at work at all times. Girard exposed what most of us find intolerable. Although Girard inferred his concept by applying hermeneutic tools to the interpretation of cultural texts, he reduces the meaning of language to nothing more than a differentiating, alienating and even exclusionary factor if it in any way distinguishes itself from some collective identification. It seems that the reason for this approach to language is also to reduce it to the level of mimesis: only in the horizon of

what Lacan would call the Imaginary order. In the end, it can also be argued that the subject itself with its willingness to violate prohibitions is a reason for Girard to consider it a scapegoat identified with the identities of violence, divinity, power, or the victim; in other words, with mimesis.

**Identity masquerades a case of anomorphic error of perspective**

Lacan's mimicry is closely linked to the dialectic of the constitution of subjectivity and the processes of identification in identity formation. Thus, the subject occupies a central place in Lacan's psychoanalytic conception. When referring to the self-constituting subject, one must consider the identification with the Other, originally through the Oedipus complex, which, thanks to the normalizing function of sublimation, helps us determine the changes in the identity of the subject. Freud showed in his works that the need for "topographical" coordination of mental dynamics is related to secondary identification through the introjection of the image of the same-sex parent. So, the sexual development of the subject automatically becomes integrated into the consideration of the formation of his or her identity. In this sense, identity – in the stereotypical or trivialized sense – is only a mask that, for Lacan, is the effect of mimicry, which is a kind of anamorphic "error of perspective." This error is what enables one to resemble someone or something that is externally imposed on a person and leaves the subject embedded in an image. Mimicry shows something insofar as it is different from what could be called (being) itself, which is at the back. The effect of mimicry is camouflage, in a strictly technical sense. It is not a matter of blending in with the background, but of becoming mottled against a mottled background, exactly the way that camouflage works in human warfare. Lacan also describes a phenomenon called intimidation, which entails the survalue that the subject is always trying to achieve with his/her appearance. However, he reminds us not to rush to introduce intersubjectivity into this game. For we must remember that whenever we are dealing with imitation, we should beware of thinking too quickly about the Other who is supposedly being imitated. Unlike Girard, Lacan believes that mimicry is merely the reproduction of an image, not the reproduction of another subject. (Lacan 1981)

What is at the heart of Lacan's thery is that beyond the Symbolic order of language, there exists and operates the Imaginary function of the gaze, which is worth considering in the educational relationship to be as important as speaking. After all, it is no secret that the gaze reflects who the subject is to the Other. If either speaking or looking fails to occur, building

a relationship with the Other may be impossible. Thus, the organization of the educational process itself cannot be more important than educational sensitivity and concern, in which the teacher must take care to embody the idea whereby the Other will come to exist for the subject through the constitution of the subject's desire, rather than through the construction of his or her mimetic identity prosthesis. The essence of the Lacanian concept of the child's subject formation lies in the assumption that the child sees him/herself in relation to the Other. It is the gaze of the Other that gives the child validation and allows it to apprehend its body as a whole, even though this apprehension does not occur in the child itself, but precisely in the gaze of the Other. Only then does the subject acknowledge, insofar as he or she receives validation from the Other, that what he or she sees in the mirror is him or her. From this moment, the subject becomes trapped in the gaze and speech of the Other, for since the gaze and speech appear, the subject tries to attune him/herself to the Other and respond to his/her desire. It is also necessary to understand that when the child passes through the mirror phase, he/she is able to say "I" and establish the subject in relation to the symbolic ideal of the Self, with all the baggage of the parents' ideals and judgments, in which it will be trapped from that moment on.

Lacan believes that the Symbolic order (linguistic: I am what I am called) should become crucial in the child's development, thus superseding the Imaginary order (image: I am what others see me as). Certainly, the mirror phase, during which the child's initial identification is made, determines his/her future identifications. Reaching the ideal Self is tantamount to accepting the social values represented by the Other and confirming that the subject is already embedded in language. In effect, the image that is reproduced by the subject is only a response to the need of the Other. We see clearly here what the difference between the Symbolic and Imaginary orders is, and how important this is for the constitution of subjectivity and the formation of the subject's identity. **This difference is marked by entry into language or entrapment in the gaze of the Other**, which is a sort of petrification that locks the subject in a trap, liberation from which can bring at most the production of a symptom (Węc 2015). If the subject fails to cope with the situation, he or she must face the trauma that petrifies what the Real brings to the situation.

Lacanian preoccupation with the subject, his/her identifications and identity gives us hope that what we commonly call an identity crisis does not in fact occur in the dimension in which it is posited. Philippe Lacoue-Labarthe also reminds us of this, and stresses that dialectical thought, whose

source is the reconciliation of difference constitutive of identity, will always be the result of mimesis whose representations are visible either through imitation of reality, or through the supplementation of what nature itself is unable to produce (Lacoue-Labarthe 2014, p. 42). Nevertheless, there will always be a gap in the system of representation itself. Potentially, we can assume that there is no possibility that the premise of "the same" will not be subject to the principle of mimicry. And although the operation of the "forgetting effect" is presupposed, we will always reveal the difference in identity through repetition.

Lacan refers to the function of seeing, which can be considered an error of perspective. He reveals the gaze as such in the anamorphic transformation, in its pulsating, flashing and extended function, as seen in this painting, which is merely a trap for the gaze, since anamorphosis shows that the goal of painting is not to realistically reproduce objects in space. The discussion on anamorphosis highlights the importance of the gaze, which plays an increasingly prominent role in the modern world. After all, we cannot close our eyes and stay silent in a world where reality is being created by media coverage based on a mass-produced images devoid of a symbolic meaning. The phenomenon of anamorphosis is part of the interpretive sequence I have been undertaking: where tongue-ear-eye cease to be instruments of the mind, and become representations of desire through speaking-listening-seeing. In this case, the assumption that seeing and looking (in the same way as speech and speaking or hearing and listening) reveal a different perspective of cognition, one warranting the invocation of the Lacanian dialectic of the gaze, in which the principle of anamorphosis opens up a hitherto invisible horizon behind which another meaning is hidden: a horizon accessible only to those who know where to turn their gaze (Węc 2015, p. 68).

There remains the question of violence, which has a special significance for Lacan as a clinician. Of course, in psychoanalytic interpretations, we find that violence is rooted either in what is repressed or in what is associated with Lacanian *jouissance*. In either case, the representations of violence are grounded in the Imaginary order, when no passage through the Symbolic order has taken place. Lacan pointed to the presence of aggression as a residue in the Imaginary order after the mirror phase, where a matrix is constituted on the basis of the mirror image, on the basis of which all subsequent relations of the subject to someone similar to him or her are formed, from the order of the competing alternative: he or she or I. This means, however, that aggression is the result of the inability to accept another subject due to his or her otherness. The second very important aspect is the representations of

violence or even the obscenity of social discourse ruthlessly taking away the subject's voice in recognition that he or she has nothing to say. Here language becomes a representation of the trauma of the Other fighting a constant war against the Law.

**Instead of conclusion: the subject in the mirror of the Other**

The reflection that comes to mind as a conclusion leads me to recognize that it becomes necessary to recover the symbolic space both for social life and for each subject, so that language, speech, discourse, as well as silence are not the same as violence. Of equal importance is the recovery of the Imaginary order, whose representations are determined by these identifications, which can acquire a mimetic or petrifying dimension. The type of identification, as we can see in Lacan's work, however, is the perspective that offers a chance to develop the non-mimetic desire of the subject. The point is also to rebuild interpersonal relations in order to re-create a space for being together in such a way that the potential and symbolic **wound culture** does not lead to a petrified pain of the subject that pushes him or her into a space appropriated by the Real. By giving up the fight for our own freedom, as well as the freedom of the Other at our own request, we become hostage to the ritualization of appearances. We allow violence to become a petrified signifier subordinated to an object imposed by another with power. It is hard to believe that the Foucaltian aporias of power and knowledge so fantastically identified in this ritualized game of the Imaginary (Foucault 2005) continue to occupy social space.

My perspective of understanding Girard's and Lacan's concepts continues to make me realize that after all, this knowledge is not arcane science for us. Two great intellectuals who are talking about the same thing and in the same language share their knowledge. They do so in order to stir something in us to move desire as Lacan says. We are constantly faced with the challenge of coping with the idea that there must finally come a moment when the subject will be given the opportunity to move from a state of enslavement to a state of freedom, so as not to relive again and again the situation that triggers permanent trauma. It is also a matter of ensuring that trauma does not become the result of the interpenetration of what is social and what is antisocial so that it does not lead to the disappearance of the boundaries between what is public and what is individual. There can be no consent, in any dimension of the subject's life, at any period of his or her life, to the creation of such forms of social being that inflict wounds and open up old ones. For in doing so, we discover a social existence and an audience that

gathers and meets in the spectacle of an unfortunate event and in identification with a world that is conceived as hostile, this is a pathological public sphere (Seltzer 2015, p. 353). If nothing is done then the abnormal normality of trauma becomes a model of subjectivity and social relations inherent in **wound culture** (Seltzer 2015, p. 353).

As researchers, academics, and teachers, we have the opportunity to take part in the organization of what is commonly called science and which establishes a certain attitude towards a certain social group once proudly called scientists meant to represent knowledge and, of course, to ensure the progress of that knowledge. Thus, we have the object of study, "science," along with the question of what conditions must be met for the subject undertaking research to become a reflective researcher, and not a collector of slots: slots that give the semblance of achieving success as determined by a fiendish other, whose sniggering echoes in the ears of those who become entangled in this game. Of course, this game of appearances does not only concern researchers, but mainly appropriates the object of study. Lacan would not hesitate to regard this embedding of research as a perverse game of appearances that petrifies the object by depriving it of meaning. After all, we are under no illusion that anyone is concerned with a search that situates the object of research in the perspective of a Heideggerian thing. All that is at stake is the ritualization of appearances taking on a dimension defined by Girard as violence represented by a form of mimetic behavior that, once set in motion, remains petrified and deprives the subject of any causal power.

This tacit colonization of discourse and research practices activates deposits of trauma, thus petrifying the suffering of the subject exposed to the perversion of power producing law beyond its symbolic location. Researchers using intellectual tools that allow reflexive discourses of power and knowledge to continue to insist on emancipation point to the ritualization of appearances, which in reality is a petrification not only of the gaze, but also of language. It is time to exclaim that the ritual dances around the space designated by slots are a type of colonialism that has imperceptibly taken away our freedom, which we had little of before anyway. Also important in this game of appearances is a question that should be posed following Girard: who is the scapegoat here? Just as important is the question of where the lines of the sacred and the profane run for all those who are forced by the oppressive practices of power to struggle for survival?

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# *Via pulchritudinis*: the narrative of violence and vulnerability in painting in view of Hans-Georg Gadamer's hermeneutic aesthetics

**Abstract:** In the article, I explore the many faces of violence and vulnerability evoked in religious and secular painting. Drawing upon Hans-Georg Gadamer's phenomenology of art as play, I aim to show that the creative activity of both the artist and the viewer exceeds the mere actualization of the past event or the instantiation of poetic fantasy. Bringing into conversation Bosch's, Caravaggio's, Millais's, and Waterhouse's masterpieces, this essay interrogates how their embodiments of the uncanny proximity of violence and vulnerability as two conflicting sides of our human experience complicate the expected symmetry and clear-cut distinction between belligerency and gentleness, powerfulness and the powerlessness, benevolence and malevolence. Inviting us to appreciate the authenticity of their subtle meanings in the continuous veiling and unveiling (*Verbegung/Entbergung*) of truth, the selected artworks prompt, simultaneously, a possibility of our self-recognition. In the process of our patient tarrying in front of them, we are called on to attend to and acknowledge the more complex realities that speak to our lived experience and defy its apparent homogeneity.

**Keywords:** art, violence, vulnerability, Hans-Georg Gadamer, hermeneutic aesthetics.

**Introduction: Gadamer's gloss on the *eventing* of art and the historical/fantastic event in art**

Developing his inimitable phenomenology of art as play in *Truth and Method*, his *opus magnum*, as well as in the collections of essays, *The Relevance of the Beautiful*, and *Aesthetics and Hermeneutics*, Gadamer proposes a novel approach to aesthetics.[1] He examines what happens *to* us and *in* us when we contemplate art and argues that, as viewers, we enter an intimate conversation in which an artwork speaks to us, puts a claim on us, and provokes a change in us. His phenomenological-ontological conceptualization of art forefronts the performative aspect of art, which embraces the dialogic-transformational character of an aesthetic encounter. Contemplating an artwork, the viewer is addressed by it and is called on to respond. According to Gadamer, an aesthetic experience is an event (*Ereignis*): "Art has its 'being' in the *Vollzug*—the vital, living event of its appearing or its performance" (Gadamer, 2007, p. 215). His notion of the *eventing* of art can be explained thus: "For Gadamer, the kind of truth claim made on us by art cannot be understood in the abstract as, say, the quality of a proposition or statement. Rather, he believes, this claim to truth appears as the culmination of an event, one that thus unfolds in the sensuously embodied fullness of place and time" (George, 2011, p. 110). An aesthetic experience is an event in which we are captivated by the truth that emerges in the continuous veiling and unveiling of meaning (*Verbegung/Entbergung*) (cf. Gadamer 1987, 259), rather than master that which happens. This truth not only shatters what is familiar to the viewer but, much more importantly, effectuates his/her seminal transformation.

Using the metaphor of a game to describe what occurs when we contemplate an artwork, Gadamer argues for the uncontrollability of what happens, maintaining that it is the backward-and-forward movement itself that is decisive and speaks to the essence of play and not the conscious actions of the players. He puts the players' attitude below the "higher determination"—what is outside the players themselves—as the deciding factor in play (Gadamer, 1977, p. 53), radicalizing in this way our thinking about the passive/active role of the spectator and advocating for the "middle voice":

[1] The first part of Gadamer's *Truth and Method*, entitled: "The Question of Truth as it Emerges in the Experience of Art" is quintessential for an understanding of his approach to aesthetics (Gadamer, 2000, 1–169). Significantly, Gadamer begins his greatest work of philosophical hermeneutics with recourse to art and explication of the experience of art, placing, thus, aesthetics within hermeneutics.

> The alternatives of either active or passive do not do justice to the subtle balance inherent in hermeneutics. Despite the hesitations in his account, Gadamer definitely moves beyond the active/passive mode of thinking. Play *replaces* the subject. "To replace" here means to place again, to displace and not to substitute or to supersede. The middle voice as internal *diathesis* points to the volume of the hermeneutic event: the verb speaks and encompasses the subject. Play's replacing the subject highlights "under" in understanding. It does not submerge the *understanding* subject because it does not erase "standing" in understanding. (Eberhard 2004, p. 70).

Our stepping beyond the rigid barrier between passivity and activity, as Gadamer contends, leads us to trust deeper the fullness of the engagement that we experience in an aesthetic encounter[2].

In Gadamer's phenomenological-ontological model, our contemplation of art is *an experience of Being*. This observation stands in contrast to Kant's reduction of the experience of art to a purely subjective response (cf. Gadamer, 1986, pp. 32–33). Recognizing the impossibility of our mastering what happens to us when we contemplate art, Gadamer defies the traditional account of an aesthetic encounter as grounded in subjectivity and asserts its secondary role (cf. Grondin, 2002a, p. 39; Davey, 2016, p. 6). Maintaining that in an aesthetic encounter, what is brought to experience is "the totality of experienceable world," Gadamer avers the ontological dimension of art. By reasoning the conversational character of an aesthetic experience as immersed in our general experience of finitude, he proposes a novel approach to aesthetics, whose core is the interrogation of the *event-like* nature of art.

The underlying motifs of Gadamer's aesthetics: the phenomenology of art as play and the *eventing* of art draw our attention to "the being of an artwork." His stance in this respect can be explained thus: "the game analogy suggests that the act of spectatorship contributes to enhancing the being of the artwork by bringing what is at play within it to fuller realization" (Davey, 2016, p. 6). The enhancement of the art's being indicates yet another important facet of Gadamer's hermeneutic aesthetics—"an increase in being" (*Zuwachs an Sein*) (Gadamer, 2000, pp. 135–136), which is the crux of his claim of the ontological dimension of the experience of art. The notion of "an

[2] I offer a detailed explanation of Gadamer's disavowal of the passivity/activity distinction and of his premise of our being ruled over rather than ruling an aesthetic encounter in *On Beauty and Being: Hans-Georg Gadamer's and Virginia Woolf's Hermeneutics of the Beautiful* (2021).

increase in being" is two-fold; it embraces the excess that concerns a work of art itself: "…the language of art means an excess of meaning that is present in the work itself. The inexhaustibility that distinguishes the language art speaks from all translation into concepts rests on this excess of meaning" (Gadamer, 1986, p. 130), but also the viewer's 'increase in being'—the self's enlargement. The excess means the realization of an artwork's full potential in the possible, manifold interpretations. Simultaneously, while the meaning of an artwork is being unveiled and is self-manifesting, the viewer uncovers the unchartered territories of his/her *self* (Gadamer, 1986, p. 129). The unfolding of truth in an aesthetic experience precipitates the viewer's self-understanding (cf. Hołda, 2021).

The process of self-questioning that an aesthetic encounter provokes is tied to how we are addressed by an artwork as well as our presumptive knowledge about it. To be moved by a work of art is to be moved from the inside out, with one's entire being. The proximity of understanding its meaning creates the feeling of uncanniness[3]. Understanding is an epiphany that always happens at the boundary between the known and the unknown, the familiar and the unfamiliar, the accessible and the inaccessible, and is recognized as curiously relating to the human self. Gadamer accentuates the overpowering way art addresses us and speaks to us. The invasive "seeing" of us that takes place causes transformation to be inevitable; art demands our *metanoia* (Gadamer, 1986, p. 34)[4]. For Gadamer, the dialogical and the transformational aspects of an aesthetic experience are intertwined.

I shall use this brief sketching of Gadamer's phenomenology of art as play as a point of departure for a discussion of how the embodiment of violence and vulnerability in painting can impact our understanding of the phenomena in question, and, more specifically, how it precipitates our response to the points of indeterminacy and the regions of the vacillating border line between power and powerlessness. All the pictures discussed in the next sections of this essay address violence and vulnerability from the perspective of the uncanny closeness of those two opposing sides of our human condition. Hieronymus Bosch's *Christ Mocked*, Caravaggio's *Judith Beheading Holofernes*, and Millais's *The Black Brunswicker* reconstruct some

[3] A detailed account of Gadamer's explication of the uncanny in an aesthetic encounter is offered in *On Beauty and Being* (Hołda, 2021, pp. 130, 179); The notion of the uncanny in a broader context of Gadamer's inimitable insights into the nature of language is potently explained, for instance, by Jean Grondin in *The Philosophy of Gadamer* (Grondin, 2002b, pp. 123–142).

[4] See also, e.g., Hołda (2021, p. 130).

historical event. Waterhouse's *La Belle Dame sans Merci* rereads and reimagines the fantastic event of a romantic encounter between a knight and an elf-woman from John Keats's poem of the same title. However, neither the reconstruction of history nor the revisitation of the imaginary event is just a mimetic representation of the real or imagined past. Those pictures are instances of the creative interrogation of both the events of violence in a historical or fantastic milieu and of human disposition towards violence. They produce nuanced interpretations that chime with the various perceptions of human woundedness that can both cause outrage and set off vulnerability.

After Gadamer, we can affirm that the creative activities of the artist and viewer far exceed the actualization of the past event (cf. Gadamer, 1986, pp. 129–130), and we may add that they outstrip the concretization of the fantastic world (myth, fable) as it is reimagined in another work. In the interplay between the painter's and the spectator's imagination, an aesthetic experience, understood as a game, is the true locus of the creation of polyvalent meanings. These multifarious senses that are inferred can not only differ from a viewer to a viewer, but can possibly inspire a pivotal change in our understanding, which, according to Gadamer, is also self-understanding (*Selbstverständnis*):

> … an encounter with the authentic, as a familiarity that includes surprise, the experience of art is the *experience* in a real sense and must master ever new the task that experience involves: the task of integrating it into the whole of one's own orientation to the world and one's self-understanding. The language of art is constituted precisely by the fact that it speaks to the self-understanding of every person, and it does this as something ever present and by means of its own contemporaneousness. (Gadamer, 1986, p. 129)

Exploring the messages imbued in the selected artists' narrative artworks, we can ask a question whether their appeal is the same as it was at the time when they were conceived? Probably it is not, but this answer directs us to acknowledge the potential of hermeneutics in opening and re-opening us to listen to the marginalized interpretative voices and of including the new and the startlingly contradictory interpretations to the official ones.

Our reception of art, influenced by a historical moment, does not wholly predetermine the interpretative versatility of our responses. Even if the time of the artworks' creation seems to impose a certain, also, delimiting interpretation, it does not hamper our capability to infer messages that emerge from our intimate contact with them, and which transcend the

historical moment of their creation. Going further, Gadamer outstrips the argument of the significance of the limitation ensuing from the so-called author's intention and opens a wider, trans-subjective perspective, asserting, at the same time, aesthetics' legitimate and telling space within hermeneutics:

> … in understanding a work of art, we cannot be satisfied with the cherished hermeneutical rule that the *mens auctoris* [author's intention] limits the task of understanding posed by a text. Rather just the expansion of the hermeneutical perspective to include the language of art makes it obvious how little the subjectivity of the act of meaning suffices to be the object of understanding. But this fact has a general significance, and to that extent aesthetics is an important element of general hermeneutic. (Gadamer, 1986, p. 130).

It is commonly acknowledged that our reception of art is never restricted to the classic explications that we can read or hear, since we create our own personal, individuated answer that is rooted in our lived experience. In addition, our reception often exceeds our experiences, inviting a new experience. Gadamer says that an experienced man is not one that has experienced a lot, but rather one that is open to new experiences. His hermeneutic sensibility makes room and advocates for "… readiness for experience that distinguishes the experienced man from the man captivated by dogma" (Gadamer, 2003, p. 362)[5].

What readings and re-readings of the events of violence and vulnerability are stimulated by Bosch's, Caravaggio's, Millais's, and Waterhouse's paintings? Can they fundamentally alter or broaden our seeing and, thus, understanding of the violent and the vulnerable as held together in a perplexing entanglement? Can interpreting these masterworks alongside Gadamer's phenomenology of art disclose some vital understanding of the profound and irreducible complexity of violence and vulnerability at the existential and phenomenological level? The answers to those queries are often filled with contradictory and aching truths about our human condition. The philosophical stance of non-violence seems to surface in those masterpieces not as the choice of a better way of life but as the inexorably deep meaning

[5] Gadamer's remark regarding general experience is further elaborated when he draws our attention to the correlation between the "vivid presentness and contemporaneousness" and the paradoxical newness and surprise that an aesthetic experience entails: "For experience in its deeper sense as experience is never merely a confirmation of expectations but a surprise of them" (Gadamer, 1986, p. 200); See also Gadamer (1986, p. 123).

of human existence. While awakening us to that which is inherent in our existence and helping us transcend our estrangement from the laws of the universe, Bosch, Caravaggio, Millais, and Waterhouse alert us to the exigency of an abandonment of a naïve belief in easy solutions and clear-cut answers to the prescient questions that pertain to our *being-in-the-world*. The symbolic richness of Bosch's, Caravaggio's, Millais's, and Waterhouse's narrative artworks invites us to appreciate the authenticity of their subtle meanings in the incessant process of unravelling the intricate ideas that they problematize. Contemplating the selected artworks, we acknowledge the revelation of deeper complexities in the seemingly unambiguous distinction between power and powerlessness, loss and gain, violence and vulnerability.

**Hieronymus Bosch's *Christ mocked*: the imperative of non-violence**

Hieronymus Bosch, the Dutch painter living 1474–1516 is famous for his vivid, albeit bizarre images of the garden of Eden and the equally intense and grotesque embodiments of hell that are off-limits. His surreal evocations of the religious themes of human sinfulness and fallenness[6] draw attention mostly through their spectacular, macabre symbolism, while faithfully rendering the Bible's metaphorical language (see e.g., Robinson, 2022). As a result, Bosch's convoluted, hermeneutically opaque images, which call to the mind the Bible's figurative vocabulary, pose continuous queries for generations of art historians and critics. His painting *Christ Mocked* (1510) is an excruciating depiction of the Biblical scene in which Jesus is mocked and crowned with thorns. Cogently rendering human disposition towards violence and insidiousness, this artwork interrogates the salvific message of Christ's death (cf. Capron 2021), drawing the viewer instantly into the depths of the theology of the redeemer's passion. The outstanding appeal of the painting arises from the sharp contrast between Jesus's morbid and frail figure and the bawdy circle of his tormentors that epitomizes obnoxious malignity. A large portion of the picture's extraordinarily emotive power can also be attributed to the artist's brilliant concentration on the oppressors' eyes and facial expressions that pull us into their world of evil, distortion, frenzy, or even madness. The inward gaze of Jesus's persecutors focuses on his gaunt

[6] The astounding and enigmatic character of Bosch's paintings has been the subject of a centuries-old debate. Walter Bosing summarizes the extant research by pinpointing a two-fold approach: "Some writers have seen him as a sort of fifteenth century Surrealist who dredged up his disturbing forms from the subconscious mind; his name is frequently linked with that of Salvador Dali. For others Bosch's art reflects esoteric practices of the Middle Ages, such as alchemy, astrology, or witchcraft" (Bosing, 2000, p. 7).

form that capably expresses his innocence, unspeakable suffering, but also mystical perseverance and an understanding of mission.

The grimaces of all four men looking intently at Christ convey a range of emotions that stimulate us to interrogate the nuanced meanings of violence and vulnerability as entangled in the peculiar *danse macabre*. The oppressors' gazes nimbly reflect their mockery, brutality, and stupidity, as well as the confusion that governs the moment of the unsettlingly humiliating encounter between the human and the divine—God's yielding to man's violent, hideous, and insane action. Interestingly, Bosch uses fully the space of the canvas for his characters, placing them on three planes: Christ in the center, two men slightly further, and two others at the very bottom of the picture, in the foreground (cf. Capron, 2021). This stratified positioning accentuates the dynamic, but, at the same time, enclosed, or even claustrophobic circle of cruelty laid bare by holiness, or sanctity as violated by abominable barbarity.

Drawing our attention to the minute particulars of the tormentors' attire, their eyes, and hands, Bosch's picture creates a daunting image of domination, wickedness, and sinfulness. Following the part-and-whole paradigm of hermeneutic interrogation, while patiently examining Christ's and his executioners' hands in the picture, we discover an engulfing blend of innocence and malignance. Jesus's hands are clasped together in a sign of submission that is drenched in ethereal calm. The artist's stunning precision in portraying the diversity of the oppressors' gestures amply embodies the complexity of their nefarious and callous deeds[7]. The hand of the man on the left, covered with an iron glove and shown in the moment of thorning, represents the unrestrained, spiteful act of torture (cf. Capron 2021), and accords with the hand of the man on the right, resting on Christ's shoulder, while the tormentor commits a perturbing act of treachery.

Bosch's ingenious representing of deceitfulness in the posture and facial expression of this character enables us to elicit a thorough exegesis of the more than one face of violence. The artist draws our attention to fiendishness that can misleadingly hide behind the veneer of susceptibility. The surreptitious kind of violence, like the mythical Trojan horse, erodes

[7] The extant scholarship on Bosch's art highlights his meticulous rendition of human behaviors. For instance, arguing for the similarities between Leonardo da Vinci and Bosch, Ingrid Rowland indicates the latter's superb concentration on the grotesque in depicting human faces as well as behaviors: "Both artists were fascinated by grotesque human faces, but Bosch also detailed grotesque human behavior with a bawdy abandon all his own. No matter how closely we look at his minutely particular works, there is always something more to see" (Rowland, 2016).

the Other from within and destroys. It metaphorically invades the Other's integrity and safety, deceiving while appearing to be docile and innocent. Inducing trust and signaling friendliness while meaning hostility, violence camouflages the real danger. In the thought-provoking combination of the hand of the man on the right side and his head leaning towards Jesus, as if to listen attentively and subserviently, the depiction of his confrontational dis-*position* calls to the mind Judas' betrayal of Jesus. The effect of foreboding-ness is heightened by the image of a spiked collar—a dog's wear—on the neck of this character, which clearly suggests that Jesus is hounded by a horde of raucous oppressors, reminding us of an attack of fierce dogs: "For dogs have surrounded Me; The congregation of the wicked has enclosed Me" (Psalm 22:16)[8]. This image effectively illustrates human perversity and treacherousness.

The intimate encounter that occurs in the close physical contact between Christ's hands and the hand of the old man in red and blue, at the lower left corner, aptly communicates the severe clash between Jesus's virtuousness and piety and the dirty sedition of a human being. The profundity of Christ's inner agony in this scene of violent abuse is achieved through the depiction of his holy indifference to suffering as his robe is being torn off by the hands of the man at the bottom right corner. One is amazed by the man's callous stare that matches the filthiness of his deed. Deriving its indisputable force from the commanding juxtaposition of torture and mock homage with Christ's divinity and goodness, Bosch's rereading of God's passion makes us see how violence and vulnerability come together in a terrifying embrace.

This most moving study of humbleness and humiliation, on the one hand, and horror and depravity, on the other, is conducted with a telling use of colors and shapes (cf. Lewis-Anthony, 2008, p. 2). Christ's modest and slender body clad in a pale, unpretentious robe is contrasted with the opulence of the oppressors' gestures and the gaudiness of their wear: the domineering green, red, and black colors on the canvas. By capturing the complex nature of the contradictory features in the persecuted (physical meekness and spiritual power) and the persecutors (anxiety and wickedness), Bosch's delineation of Christ's passion remains open to the ampleness of hermeneutic investigation. Not granting us an authoritative or univocal interpretation, the painting provokes an ardent need for a deeper understanding of human

[8] All quotations from the Bible are from the King James Bible Online. https://www.kingjamesbibleonline.org.

motivation, irrational seeking of dominance, and the execution of violence as confronted with the unspeakable vulnerability of the Incarnated God and his wounded humaneness.

Remarkably, the isolation of the episode from any contextual details draws our attention to what is happening to Christ, without diverting our thoughts to the background possibly also laden with meaning (cf. Capron, 2021; see also, e.g., Lewis-Anthony, 2008, p. 3). In this way, our reception of the painting's message is focused primarily on Jesus's poignant entrapment and is not distracted by the marginal or the secondary. The anonymity and scantiness of the backdrop directs our eyes to the figure of Christ, who emanates with an otherworldly power mixed with palpable weakness and prompts us to fully contemplate his passion. With the crown of thorns sort of hanging in the air and casting a halo over Jesus's head (Capron, 2021), the act of his crowning becomes more ambiguous and stimulates our apprehension of a range of meanings that dwell in the in-between of acquiescence and defiance[9]. We are aware that the crowning is an act of monstrous brutality, and, at the same time, it is a telling, if peculiar, confirmation of Jesus's kingship. Bosch goes beyond the schematic treatment of the Biblical episode, encouraging us to appreciate the significance and the beauty of a non-dualistic response to his pictorial narrative.

As hermeneutic investigation reveals, there is no single or magisterial interpretation of any work of art. *Christ Mocked* stimulates us to uncover the ever-deeper complexities that arise in the recognition of its meaning, which on a general level can be narrowed down to the universal story of the violent entrapment of a human being. Dramatized in innumerable works of art and literature, this foundational narrative is a rhizome story that originates multifarious and non-hierarchical interpretations of violence. Significantly, one of the most conspicuous features of Bosch's painting is the image of Christ looking at us in a way that is difficult to escape[10]. One may say that the performative aspect of this picture expresses the quintessence of Gadamer's phenomenology of art that takes cognizance of the intimate conversation

[9] The moment of thorning, which contains an inherently contradictory message, does not cease to draw attention of art historians. Justin Lewis-Anthony puts its immanent ambiguity thus: "The circle of thorns hovers behind Christ's head like a kind of vicious halo" (Lewis-Anthony, 2008, p. 2). This exceptionally stirring element of the picture communicates Bosch's hermeneutic sensibility and his exquisite proclivity for elusiveness.

[10] Jesus's firm yet gentle look is present in Bosch's other pictures, for instance, in his most famous *Garden of Earthly Delights* (c. 1500). Cf. e.g., Hieronymus Bosch: At the Border of Disorder (2016).

between an artwork and the viewer. Inescapably and stirringly, our gaze encounters Jesus's gaze, which deepens the sense of the epiphanic moment of our realization that God's passion is the act of a moving defenselessness in the face of violence.

Interestingly, Christ's frailty and paleness, as well as his one-of-a-kind subtlety and unimposing comportment call to the mind the representations of him as the unicorn in the Middle Ages (cf. e.g.: Beal, 2019, pp. 154–188; see also Fernow, 2022). In medieval but also in Renaissance art, the beautiful and miraculous creature of the unicorn is often captured as hunted, encircled, and subdued. Those portrayals are saturated with profound religious symbolism. In the hunt image (*The Unicorn Crossing the Stream*, see Zucker & Harris, 2015), this extraordinary animal, which possesses healing capacity, is depicted as wounded, and its wound is commonly associated with Christ's wound on the side. We can discern the connection between Christ's wound and his power of health-giving: "But he was wounded for our transgressions, he was bruised for our iniquities: the chastisement of our peace was upon him; and with his stripes we are healed" (Isaiah 53:5) and unicorn's capability of healing. The image of the unicorn as enclosed, either by the circle of hunters or the low fence, calls to the mind Christ's subjugation.

In Bosch's painting as well as in the medieval and Renaissance pictures of the unicorn, the state of submission has basically a double meaning that can possibly expand to yet other, subliminal senses. The unicorn can easily leap over the low fence that encircles it. Jesus in his divine power can free himself from the most repugnant state of being ensnared. The imagery of the unthinkable surrender is expressive of love so deep that it gently pushes the lover to a complete acquiescence. The painting powerfully renders God's vulnerability—Christ's will, unified with the Father's, is filled with love for humans and yields to being tormented. Jesus's passionate love (*passio*) is the source of cure for the wounded humanity. In consequence, violence and unspeakable pain are, paradoxically, the fountain spring of deliverance and remedy.

*Christ Mocked* draws our attention through the richness of its author's hermeneutic sensibility, while we attempt to understand the "unreasonable" logic of capturing and being captured. Strangely enough, captivation through violence can include the uncanny sensation of being the captive of love for the one who is taken captive. The polarity but also the entanglement of love and hatred provides the liminal space where the opposing feelings seem to be conflated. Their coexistence reveals how the inconceivable becomes plausible. The apparently unlikely admixture reminds us of the Biblical image of the

calm cohabitation of a wolf and a lamb, which heralds the time of peace[11], echoed in William Blake's romantic imagination and his *Songs of Innocence and Songs of Experience*[12]. Bosch's painting serves as the genuine locus of both the universal narrative of suffering that is unfolding in our contemplation of the picture thanks to his masterful perception of the hermeneutic liminal space, and of the viewer's self-discovery as the suffering subject in the face of violence. The artist's ingenious grasp of the indissoluble connection between capability and vulnerability potently anticipates Paul Ricoeur's hermeneutics of the human subject and the profundity of the truth about our capabilities (*l'homme capable*) and corresponding vulnerabilities (*l'homme sufferant*)[13]. Bosch's compelling embodiment of violence as juxtaposed with vulnerability inspires us to recognize the multivalent nature of the human predicament: the hunger for power and its failure, the will to physically and mentally overpower, and the tawdriness of the mere thought of subduing the Other.

## Caravaggio's *Judith beheading holofernes*: violence and the mighty way of the weak[14]

It is hardly possible to think of a better match in the history of art between the artist's violent and scandalous life and his paintings depicting the depths of human viciousness and cruelty than the life and works of Michelangelo Merisi da Caravaggio (1571–1610). This self-indulgent, immodest, and murderous artist who lived a violent and sinful life, is a world-known genius who created pictures of unique religious profundity and brilliance (cf.: Cook, 2016; Nixon, 2010). His masterstroke painting, *Judith Beheading Holofernes* (c. 1598–1599), an exceptionally telling rendition of the Biblical scene of the decapitation of Holofernes, the Assyrian general, by an Israeli woman, named Judith, does not cease to draw the attention of art critics and

[11] This is one of the most vivid, Biblical images of an undisturbed peace: "The wolf also shall dwell with the lamb, The leopard shall lie down with the young goat, The calf and the young lion and the fatling together; And a little child shall lead them" (Isiah 11:6).

[12] Cf. e.g., William Blake's Songs of Innocence and Experience. Tate. https://www.tate.org.uk/art/artists/william-blake-39/blakes-songs-innocence-experience [accessed 26 Nov 2022].

[13] In his inimitable hermeneutics of a human being as *l'homme capable* and *l'homme sufferant*, Paul Ricoeur gives an account of our fundamental capabilities and vulnerabilities. See, e.g.: Ricoeur (2007, pp. 72–90); Hołda (2020, pp. 7–24); Wierciński (2019a, p. 149; 2019b, pp. 5–15).

[14] St. Paul's words: "My grace is sufficient for you, for power is perfected in weakness" (2 Corinthians 12:9) sensitize us of the paradoxical logic of strength in weakness.

common viewers alike. This phenomenal artwork evokes both the essence and the beyond of the oppositional binaries of terror and timidity, power and powerlessness. More intricate than it seems to be at face value, the picture takes us to the climax of the beheading narrative, with the seduction motif left only to our imagination[15]. Caravaggio's dexterous pictorial embodiment of Judith's belligerent act that has become the gateway to the freedom of the Jewish nation partakes of the discussion of the multifaceted reality of violence, its tangled motivations, and unforeseeable outcomes[16].

It is not merely the naturalistic image of the dying Holofernes with his bleeding wound in the neck that astounds the spectator (cf. Langdon, 2012, p. 167)[17]. Caravaggio calls on us to hermeneutically interpret the most puzzling and meaning-laden moment of Judith thinking about her brave but monstrous act soon after she has committed it. This irresistible spectacle of ghastly violence and awesome courage is, at the same time, a deft evocation of the dynamic of feminine fear, empowerment, and revulsion. Caravaggio captures dread as it intermingles with bravura. He delves deeply into the psychology of the executor and reveals its complexity, while creating a potent image of the oppressor's tragic failure. In the formidable "dance" of crime and justice, the roles of victim (Judith as the representative of the suppressed nation) and victimizer (Holofernes, the persecutor) are reversed to the effect of a dazzling, albeit horrifying, victory.

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[15] In the biblical story of Judith and Holofernes one finds the clandestine suggestion of Judith's seducing the Assyrian general: "So all went forth and none was left in the bedchamber, neither little nor great" (Judith 13:4).

[16] The theme of decapitating Holofernes was dramatized in numerous works of art. An involving and succinct study of some of them alongside Caravaggio's painting can be found in The Many Faces of Judith (2019). The works discussed in this study are: *Lucas Cranach the Elder's, Judith with the Head of Holofernes (1530),* Artemisia Gentileschi's *Judith Slaying Holofernes* (1612)**,** *Judith* by Giorgione (1504), Cristofano Allori's *Judith with the Head of Holofernes* (1610), Elisabetta Sirani's *Judith with the Head of Holofernes* (1638–1665), or Trophime Bigot's *Judith Decapitating Holofernes* (c. 1640). Artemisia Gentileschi's *Judith Slaying Holofernes* offers an engaging *and evocative woman artist's representation of a female victory over male tyranny* (cf. Ostbye, 2022).

[17] Caravaggio's choosing to show the actual act of killing has also been pinpointed by other scholars. Robert Appelbaum emphasizes that "Before Caravaggio artists limited themselves to showing Judith with the head, not actually in the process of cutting it off. She poses in those paintings as if triumph over Holofernes has either been cautionary or orgasmic" (Appelbaum, 2017, p. 55). An engaging interpretation of the two versions of the picture from the medico-legal perspective is offered by Gianmarco Troiano, Isabella Mercurio, Nicola Nante, and Mauro Bacci (2017).

Interestingly, Caravaggio modeled Judith upon his love and muse, the Roman courtesan, Fillide Melandroni (cf. Langdon, 2012, p. 167)[18]. He famously chose sinners to portray saints, which might be viewed as a provocative attempt to express the disavowal of a rigid and hypocritical morality, as well as the more inclusive, non-dualistic approach to human condition and his own predicament. The heroine's young age, bodily fragility, and the whiteness of her dress emphasize the clash between her apparent innocuousness and the boisterous savagery of her action. Our immediate reaction to Caravaggio's downright realism—the sheer brashness of what we see—takes us to the deeper levels of meaning imbued in this exceptional manifestation of rage and strength. Undeniably, the knowledge of the biblical context helps us understand the rationale behind Judith's sweeping act of violence[19]. The outcome of her shrewdness and courage amounts not to a personal triumph but to the victory of the Jewish nation, guarded by God's providential care. Caravaggio's capturing of the discrepancy between the heroine's innocent comportment and her cunning action aptly foregrounds the complex nature of the history of the Jews in the Old Testament. The crux of God's intervention lies beyond the foreseeable logic—the weak and the marginalized prove to be the most effective, if unlikely, tools of and witnesses to his divine power.

An excellent example of Caravaggio's use of chiaroscuro, *Judith Beheading Holofernes* speaks through its vibrant interplay of light and darkness[20]. The lighted figure of Judith and the darkness behind her potently convey the painting's sophisticated meaning—the internal contradictoriness

[18] See also: Caravaggio: Judith and Holofernes analysis (2020, 9 September). https://ndrw.me/caravaggio-judith-and-holofernes-analysis [accessed 1 Dec 2022].

[19] "Then Judith, standing by his bed, said in her heart, O Lord God of all power, look at this present upon the works of mine hands for the exaltation of Jerusalem. For now is the time to help thine inheritance, and to execute thine enterprizes to the destruction of the enemies which are risen against us. Then she came to the pillar of the bed, which was at Holofernes' head, and took down his fauchion from thence. And approached to his bed, and took hold of the hair of his head, and said, Strengthen me, O Lord God of Israel, this day. And she smote twice upon his neck with all her might, and she took away his head from him" (Judith 13:4–8).

[20] For an apt discussion of Caravaggio's poetic use of light and dark and its embeddedness in the Christian tradition see, e.g., Bosing (2000, pp. 187–190). *Judith Beheading Holofernes* marks an important stage in Bosch's career, since then on the artist will develop his inimitable way of showing the light and dark contrast. Judith Beheading Holofernes, Gallerie Nazionali Barberini Corsini. https://www.barberinicorsini.org/en/opera/judith-beheading-holofernes/ [accessed 30 Nov 2022].

of violence as coexisting with virtue. In its suggestive folding and unfolding of meaning, Caravaggio's picture treats us to a feast of colors. The white and yellow colors of Judith's dress are contrasted with the dark red color of the drapery that closes the entrance to a tent. The curtain looks like a big cloud of blood emerging from the dark, half veiling and unveiling the place of murder. In this way, the abysmal darkness of the night is interpolated with the intensity of red, suggestive of passion and tragedy. The depth of the red color can be understood as signifying Judith's fervent defense of her nation as it calls to the mind the image of a blood shed. But also, it may be interpreted as an implicit evocation of the exquisite blend of pleasure and disgust—the yielding to seduction on Holofernes's part and Judith's revulsion as the aftermath of her murderous act. Metaphorically speaking, this touching admixture of two opposing feelings represents Eros and Thanatos, forever entangled and warring.

Displaying Judith's feelings of fright and detachment, Caravaggio's pictorial rereading of the biblical story offers cogent insights into the human capacity for violence. One of the greatest strengths of this artwork is a sense of liminality—vice and virtue are held together to make us discover the complex reality of violence. The process of uncovering the artwork's meaning is also the viewer's pathway of self-discovery. The uncanny feeling of cruelty's proximity to tenderheartedness prompts us to acknowledge that our humanness is stranded between holiness and vileness, and it is the subtle, hermeneutic in-between sanctity and sinfulness that determines our *being-in-the-world*. To our horror, we may also recognize our face in the face of Judith's servant, whose readiness to dispose of Holofernes' head can be seen as an apt epitome of our eagerness to rid of what seems to be disturbing and uncomfortable. Amongst the multifarious perspectives, from which Caravaggio's depiction of violence can be discussed, the prevailing one seems to be the phenomenology of terror. Focusing on the effect of a militant action, Caravaggio conveys the primordial truth about our human need for both justice and goodness. In the indispensability of executing justice, goodness calls on us to preserve the humane in us. Undoubtedly, his masterpiece can also be interpreted as an ominous reminder that gaining trust can be illusory, painful, or even fatal, and that violence can follow the blissful state of succumbing to desire.

**Millais' *the Black Brunswicker*: war and peace in an intimate embrace**

The embodiment of the tangled realities of subjugation and violence discussed in reference to Bosch's and Caravaggio's religious paintings, when juxtaposed with the secular painting of a similar theme, leads us to uncover still other vistas of the problematic at hand. The centrality of the topic of pugnacity in John Everett Millais's famous painting *The Black Brunswicker* (1860) stimulates us to investigate the resonance of this visual representation of human proclivity to belligerency and an attempt to counteract it. Millais was a Victorian English painter, one of the founders of the Pre-Raphaelite Brotherhood in nineteenth century England. *The Black Brunswicker* is an excellent example of narrative art, telling the story of tenderness, love, and attachment, but also of violence and restraint. The picture features a young woman who is pushing the door closed in a brave attempt to stop her sweetheart, the officer, from leaving for the battle, while he is trying to open it. Famous for its embodiment of human feelings of longing and frustration (cf. e.g., Kern, 1996, 10), this potent instance of Pre-Raphaelite art is created using bright colors and exquisite detail, which heightens the emotive power of the intimate encounter that is portrayed.

The stark distinction between the dominant black on the left side of the canvas and the white on its right instantly draws our attention to a clear divide between violent and appeasing intentions. However, the red ribbon on the lady's sleeve, evocative of her affection, matched by one that appears on the collar of the dog standing at the soldier's feet, effectively deconstructs the seeming univocality of the painting's message: condemnation of the violent and the avowal of the peaceful. It introduces an element of doubt; the ribbon is a symbol of homage to the officer but also an expression of the lady's deep infatuation that is the cause of her counteraction, aimed at preventing fight. The apparent univocity is further disparaged by the rather puzzling connection between the woman and the dog. The lady's desire to keep the lover for herself can be viewed as an attempt to subjugate him, which, however, may, at the same time, indicate the lady's submissive nature, since her feelings are shown as tinged with an animalistic attachment.

The narrative's sentimentality—the rather shallow message of romantic love—takes us to a deeper and more diverse range of meanings, above all, to its ethical appeal of non-violence. The picture's passionate expressiveness, which derives precisely from the clash between the soldier's black uniform and the lady's pearly white ball gown, invites us to unravel the more complex message of this emotionally charged painting, which encompasses the question of outer commitment and personal engagement. Although its content is

appropriate to the historical moment—it is thought to have been inspired by the Duchess of Richmond's ball in 1815 and the officers leaving for the Battle of Quatre Bras to fight Napoleon's army (see e.g., The Black Brunswicker, 2018)—it still speaks to us today because it not only captures romance and moral integrity but thematizes the relationship between human agency and violence understood as a multi-faceted phenomenon. The picture embodies the apparently obvious, though not overtly shown, masculine combativeness and feminine, clandestine sovereignty. The *raison d'être* of conceiving this picture can be reduced to the representation of physicality of the imminent separation. However, Millais created an immensely morally charged picture that poses questions about war demanding sacrifice, the conflict between duty and love, as well as the dissonance between self and relationship (cf. Pearson 2010, pp. 137–139). The officer's departure resonates with both a contemporary for Millais and today's viewer as it depicts a woman's passionate longing and her attempt to rescue the partner who is under threat. This visual representation of the impending danger and woman as a rescuer is thematically interconnected with Millais' two other historical pictures: *The Proscribed Royalist 1651* (1852–53) and *The Order of Release 1746* (1852–53)[21]. The material concreteness of the figures' costumes (the colors conveying a sense of difference) highlights the poignancy of the approaching peril[22].

The high evocative power of Millais's picture, which rests on the contrast between the soldier's dark uniform and the lady's impeccable whiteness, potently represents the astuteness of the irreconcilable conflict between war and peace. However, its blurring of the line between violence and non-violence seems to be Millais's even more intriguing accomplishment. Despite its overt messages: the bright red ribbon symbolizing reverence for the soldier; the blackness of his uniform and skull hat representing destruction and evil, and the white of the lady's dress signifying purity, virtue, and perhaps naivety, the painting transcends its focus on realistic details. The state of military

[21] Michael Cohen pinpoints rescue as a male fantasy as an intriguing motif that features in Millais's paintings. The portrayals of such a fantasy can suggest Victorian men's discomfort with the patriarchal system of values (Cohen, 1995, p. 92)

[22] Musing on the picture's dramatic contrast of colors, Elizabeth Prettejohn notices the intimate relationship between physical objects and human feelings that they express: "Details reveal the vulnerability through artefacts rather than nature, but these commodities incarnate human needs. The girl's ball-gown is heavily creased from its long sojourn folded unused. The wallpaper bubbles up betraying damp, and, most poignantly, a puzzling object lies draped in deep purple cloth, betraying beneath its form an empty cradle (2012, p. 145).

alert, juxtaposed with the subtlety of a peaceful existence, in this experience-meets-innocence narrative artwork, questions the formulaic, feminine innocuousness, passivity, and peacefulness. The tenderness of the conflict between the two characters, which is powerfully suggestive of the implicit desolation, forlornness, and trauma, disrupts the seeming unambiguousness of the aptly portrayed integrity and dutifulness.

Recognizing the rationale behind the officer's choice of loyalty, we also feel empathy for the woman's profound infatuation and fear. This situation of no true deliverance beclouds the univocity of our response and encourages us to intuit into the more nuanced facets of the distinction between violence and peacefulness. If we step back from the historical moment, we can notice the rather common scenario of a gentle argument between lovers. Countless acts of feminine activity that are aimed toward peace-making can be recognized in the image of the woman preventing the man from fighting. As an antiviolence manifesto, the picture sets an example of a woman's behavior (cf. e.g., Kern, 1996, p. 186). The conciliatory ethics of Millais's painting is clear, but its subliminal meanings: the woman's capability of subjugating because of her secret power and the male fantasy of rescue[23] debunk the facile understanding of its message. The inherent duality of representing the female character—she features all at once as a delicate and submissive creature and a potent agent—as well as the male's rather languid movement and indecisive gaze complicate the picture's reception and preclude the spectator's attempt to pigeonhole the painting's content and belittle its richness, and, at the same time, to fall prey to a facile distinction between violence and vulnerability.

**Waterhouse's *La Belle Dame sans Merci*: the power of the powerless**

The last picture in this study, John William Waterhouse's *La Belle Dames sans Merci* (1883) calls upon the viewer to appreciate its apt evocation of the formidable subtlety of beauty and love and their astounding, cruel undercurrents. In a similar vein to Millais's, this painting dramatizes feminine power and arouses ambivalent feelings concerning love and devotion that seem to be its origin. This superb example of Pre-Raphaelite art belongs to the series of paintings that are visual representations of John Keats's famous poem of the same title (1819) (Keats, 1988)[24]. With irresistible expressivity,

[23] For more on the male fantasy of rescue, see e.g., Kern (1996, pp. 181–206).

[24] For the study of creative responses to Keats's poem see, e.g., Boyiopoulos, K. & Sandy, M. (2016, pp. 83–87); Scott, G.F. (1999, pp. 503–535).

Waterhouse captures the sharp distinction between blissfulness and wretchedness, and, concomitantly, shatters the paradigmatic attribution of power to a male character and powerlessness to a female character. In his nimble rereading of Keats's poem, Waterhouse draws the viewer's attention to the knight's failure in recognizing his lover as a powerful creature that brings about his destruction.

Despite his armor and militant appearance, the knight succumbs completely to the lady's devastating allurement. The stark contrast between his protective outfit and the flimsiness and airiness of the woman's wear emphasizes the stereotypical divide between masculine belligerence and feminine gentleness and innocence. However, as it seems to be clear, Waterhouse escapes such an easily drawn conclusion and complicates the picture's message by potently embodying feminine deceitful sweetness alongside predictable submissiveness. With an expression of delicacy and blissful compliance on her face, the elf-like being is depicted as having physical weakness. Her bare feet seem to imply that a long trip in the darkness of the woods is impossible. But, at the same time, she is shown as a crushing *femme fatale* capable of defeating the knight. She uses her long, strong hair, a feminine quality, to bind her lover to her[25]. Waterhouse explores the cliché idea of a woman's secret power and foreseeable susceptibility and, by debunking the obviousness of the formulaic gender difference between maleness and femaleness, invites the viewer to interrogate the flimsy barrier between violence and vulnerability.

The interplay of violence and vulnerability in Waterhouse's painting seems to be exceptionally intense. The garish image of the knight leaning towards the lady of his heart is evocative of his loving care and unassuming attitude, whereas her attentive and docile turning to the beloved is expressive of both timidity and bold possessiveness. Exploring the beauty of the chivalric romance and the sinister possibility of a spiritual plight that it might entail, the painting disavows the classic understanding of violence and vulnerability. To be vulnerable appears to connote being violent on different grounds – innately violent, when in need of fulfilling one's deep and desperate desire. Interestingly, Keats's narrative poem referenced in other works of literature, as well as musical compositions, is abundantly present in the history of art in

[25] Waterhouse imagery offers a distant and subverted reference to the biblical story of Delilah attempting to overpower Samson (Judges 16:10–13).

its spectacularly versatile re-imaginings[26], all of which seem to provocatively exploit the unorthodox side of the power play between genders.

Waterhouse's powerful rendition of the intricacies of violence and vulnerability, power and defenselessness, cruelty and mercilessness, calls on the viewers to remain open to a more inclusive, hermeneutic understanding of the phenomena at hand. Disclosing both the profundity of a romantic liaison and its underbelly—seductiveness and despairing exhaustion—Waterhouse's imaginative world resonates with the possible and anticipated ways of interpreting Keats's poem. The ekphrastic force of this picture—the visual revisitation of the verbal art—accentuates the importance of the ancient old theme of the discrepancy between fantasy and reality, allowing the viewer to partake anew of its existential and phenomenological aspects. Waterhouse, after Keats, evokes the hidden, feminine desire to overpower man, as well as reveals masculine, covert longing for (be)longing and being overwhelmed. As Dani Cavallaro accentuates: "The knight himself is clearly unable to resist her advances, and not even his body armor, a classic symbol of masculine inviolability, is of any avail in this uneven confrontation between human and supernatural powers" (2017, p. 103). In the impressive "dance" of emasculation and emancipation, violence and vulnerability take turns to leave the viewers as enlarged in their ability to see and know, beguilingly open to a new understanding and not really confined to the old one.

**In lieu of conclusion**

According to Gadamer's hermeneutic-phenomenological explanation of an aesthetic experience, when we look at an artwork, we come face to face with ourselves. We are constantly being asked to investigate the complex and varied messages while also traveling the path of self-discovery. On this perpetual quest, we are in the position of learning more about ourselves as human beings in what the picture captures and discloses. Following Gadamer's aesthetics, we can gather that the claim art puts on us is about the confrontation of the unfamiliar, in which we discover something new, and are compelled to acknowledge the possibility of a different way of thinking and acting. In an aesthetic encounter, we mentally *turn around*, and the *metanoia* that we undergo delineates the ethical trajectory of a passage from the secure to the unsettlingly unknown and discomfiting. In this creative process

[26] Keats's discerning representation of chivalric love was echoed in the visual arts by numerous artists: Frank Dicksee, Frank Cadogan Cowper, Arthur Hughes, Walter Crane, and Henry Maynell Rheam, to mention the most famous ones (cf. e.g., Scott, 1999).

of self-discovery, we begin to comprehend who we really are—this is an opening up to truth (*aletheia*) (Gadamer, 1986, p. 34). Bosch's, Caravaggio's, Millais's, and Waterhouse's portrayals of violence are inasmuch re-readings of the historic/fantastic events as they are the readers of us the viewers. The interpretative process is two-fold: as spectators we interpret and are being interpreted (*Selbstbegegnung*).

The aesthetic encounter is a rewarding exegetical task through which we discover that the destruction of the familiar worldview gives rise to the construction of a new angle of vision. When the horizons of the viewer and the picture fuse, the viewer is touched by the reality of the painting. Remaining open to it, he/she participates in the game, which is the back-and-forth apprehension of the picture's message. Sensitizing us to the *eventing* of art, to what happens *to* and *in* us in the backward-and-forward movement of unveiling the picture's multifarious meanings, Gadamer's phenomenological approach radicalizes our thinking about the reception of art, inviting us to dwell in the dynamic of the aesthetic encounter. Interpreting the selected artworks against the backdrop of Gadamer's aesthetics, we are more aware of the deeper subtleties in the seemingly clear-cut division between power and powerlessness, loss and gain, violence and vulnerability, since we are wary that the process of interpretation is a never-ending venture that opens us to yet new understandings each time we undertake the task of interpretation.

If we are lingering and yielding in front of Bosch's, Caravaggio's, Millais's, and Waterhouse's arresting images of violence and vulnerability, we see that they neither schematize nor flatten the more complex realities that are lurking behind the stern contrasts that are operative in them. Moreover, while we are trying to seize their meaning, we are seized by it and led to effectuate a change in our course of thinking, cognizing, and acting. The vivid images of power and powerlessness; fragility and malignity, black and white; emancipation and dependence; femininity and masculinity; flamboyance and reserve, alert us to the necessity of those clear distinctions, as well as to our remaining open to the less obvious and intriguing cross-pollinations of those opposing qualities. Whereas Millais's picture draws our attention mainly to its apparently overt treatment of the conflicting faculties, Bosch's, Caravaggio's, and Waterhouse's masterpieces are compellingly balanced between the blunt oppositions of good and evil, savagery and holiness, cruelty and passive resistance, destruction and protection. All four artists attempt to grasp those meanings that transcend the monochromatic certitude of the binary opposition of forcefulness and peacefulness, leaving the viewer engrossed by eliciting the "middle voice."

Bosch's and Caravaggio's spiritually intense images reveal that violence is a space of bewilderment for those who commit it, as if testifying to and giving a troubled answer to the deep psychological truth of the religious commandment "Thou shalt not kill" (Mathew 5:21). Partaking abundantly of the teachings of moral theology, their paintings disclose that transgressing the uncrossable boundary, the human is stunned by her self-induced, moral deformation or dubiety. Bosch's intended exaggeration, which in most of his paintings takes the form of grotesqueness, and Caravaggio's outstanding subtlety bring to the surface the issue of the incomprehensibility of one's depravity or befuddlement, which is the human pathway of experiencing woundedness caused by sin. Judith's victoriousness intermingles with confusion and Christ's persecutors' barbarity is conquered by their gaze of amazement. Undeniably, Bosch and Caravaggio go beyond the human impulse to compartmentalize tangled realities to make them more comprehensible and easily controllable. Those artists hear and ingeniously respond to the existential tension of our lived experience rather than succumb to the temptation of quenching or simplifying it.

The ambiguous messages of Bosch's, Caravaggio's, and Waterhouse's paintings, seem to be counterbalanced by the seemingly unequivocal meaning of Millais's picture. However, by providing us with some hints, Millais leads us to delve deeper into the texture of what we see as captured on the canvas. On the one hand, we are confronted with an indisputable condemnation of the forthcoming bloodshed, on the other hand, though, the stereotypical understanding of masculine militancy and feminine submissiveness is further problematized as the female character in the picture is shown as gaining on her power to prevent her lover's participation in the pending calamity. Thematizing the power play between genders, Waterhouse's picture seems to constitute an intriguing continuation of a similar topic. It discloses to the viewer the complex reality of power and powerlessness, violence and vulnerability, defying the relevance of the surface distinctions between those dualistic oppositions, and interrogating into their asymmetry as more genuinely expressing our lived experience.

In their evocations of the intricate and surprising connections between violence and vulnerability in both religious and secular paintings, the selected artists defy the obviousness of the dichotomy that is believed to be pervasive in our *being-in-the-world*. Those masterpieces reveal how sharp distinctions lose their weight once we intuit more into the subtleties and heterogeneousness of our human condition. Our aesthetic journey, which is also our self-discovering journey, brings us nearer to the veiled

truth about our realities and ourselves. In the continuous effort to unravel the meaning of the discussed paintings, we can view their messages as daunting and perplexing. Bosch's, Caravaggio's, Millais's, and Waterhouse's visual representations question the safe and univocal understanding of the violent and the vulnerable. The truth unfolding in front of our eyes touches our insecurities and prompts an imaginative reconsideration of the assured and even fossilized ways of comprehending the phenomena at hand, creating, thus, a prodigious opportunity to self-educate.

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# Visibility and invisibility of violence in education

**Abstract:** The article describes the connections between theoretical assumptions concerning teaching freedom and the role of authority in education. It also presents Rene Girard's idea of sacrificial crisis and uses it as an interpretative technique to understand conceptual, bureaucratic, and neoliberal forms of hiding violence. Finally, the author formulates remarks concerning the importance of making violence visible and distinguishing between its manifold forms and cases.

**Keywords:** authority, education, freedom, Girard, sacrificial crisis, violence.

## Introduction

Education is a part of the culture. The relationship between culture and education is reciprocal. At the same time, education is causally linked to cultural factors in the society in which it is realised. Education has also influenced the future conditions of development of the society in which it is performed. Even if cultures tend to naturalise themselves in order to understand relationships between them, it is needed to uncover the cultural character of social institutions, among them education, to show that even the most apparent categories and practices were one day culturally created (Girard, 1979, pp. 227, 228). Educational practices and ideals cultivated in schools and universities hugely impact culture and society. The paper argues that some tensions visible in the attitude towards freedom and authority are essential for understanding contemporary education.

Ethics and norms are a part of the culture and are also influenced by educational practices. One of the crucial aspects of ethical reflection concerns definitions, evaluations, and reactions to and against violence. According to Rene Girard, violence is an unavoidable condition of human life. We shall ask ourselves how to distinguish between good and bad violence, the one culturally tamed and the one unleashed and spiralling out of control (Girard, 1979, pp. 37, 38). The hope for a world without violence influences educational systems and plays a role in understanding authority and power in education. This hope also makes invisible some aspects of violence that are harder to fit into the conception of a nonviolent world. This invisibility is many faced: it applies to the role of authority in education, the sacrificial crisis, as well as to the role of the state and the market. The last two topics are mainly scrutinised from the perspective of their role in education and in connection with the issue of violence. Final remarks concern the issue of the visibility of violence in educational contexts, as well as the role language and concepts play in making different aspects of violence more visible.

**Teaching freedom**

The value of freedom and its social role influences not only the organisation of society and the relationship between its members, it also plays a role in education. In this context it is worth asking what are the prerequisites for teaching freedom, when it shall be done, to what extent freedom and its understanding relies on social contexts restricting its absolute character (Kotarbiński, 1986, pp. 330, 331). This shall be accompanied by the consciousness of perils connected with expanding the sphere of freedom, which raises the stakes of our choices. In Rene Girard's words:

> More and more freedom is given to individuals and communities. Therefore there is more and more that is good and at the same time more and more that is bad in culture and social life. Indeed, our situation is increasingly apocalyptic as freedom increases. The Gospels have brought about this freedom, (...). The Gospels cannot guarantee that people will act the right way; they are not some kind of recipe for the good society. What the Gospels do is to offer more freedom and to set the example, above all through witness to the message, death, and resurrection of Christ, about how to use this freedom wisely (Girard, 2000, p. 274).

The magnitude of our decisions increases in proportion to the level of freedom we enjoy, demanding greater responsibility. Also with the increase of power the vulnerability of human species existence on Earth increases (Jonas 1984). Ethical importance and meaning of our choices influences our self-understanding. It also connects questions of freedom and autonomy, with those concerning violence, since the possibilities of harming others are vast.

The burden of responsibility is accompanied by a desire for autonomy, which has been analysed by Girard. He stated that the final reconciliation between the autonomous self and the other is impossible. This does not mean that the need for such a reconciliation does not arise. In Girard's words:

> Solipsistic idealism and positivism wish to recognize only the solitary individual and the collectivity; these two abstractions are no doubt flattering to the Self which wishes to view everything from on high, but one is just as hollow as the other (Girard, 1965, p. 111).

The impossibility of finding ideal agreement between conflicting desires of solitary individuals and the ideal norms guaranteeing a peaceful organisation of the whole society is important for answering questions concerning the methods of teaching autonomy and freedom. If the final reconciliation of individuals and societies in which they live remains impossible, the tension between the two transposes itself on desires of individuals and the social methods of solving conflictual desires of its members.

According to Girard, the role of violence in providing autonomy is changing between the society of masters and slaves and the society of internal mediation. The first relied upon the brute force and courage in order to solve the tensions between individuals, whereas in the upper regions of the internal mediation society "(t)he elementary rights of individuals are respected but if one is not strong enough to live in freedom one succumbs to the evil spell of vain rivalry" (Girard, 1965, p. 112). In the first violence was visible and obvious. The change towards the second does not mean that violence vanished, but rather that it is harder to grasp, its mechanisms are more complicated, which makes it less visible. It is also important to note that the not so upper regions of the second society are still experiencing violence in its direct and physical forms.

Interpreting the tensions between individuals, society and its members, and desires and norms, in the context of teaching freedom, we can recognize a tension between freedom as a result of inner desire and freedom as one of the societal norms imposed on us by others. This tension translates into a tension between the reliance on external authority to help us be free

and the external bonds that entangle us and diminish our ability to be free. In Michel Foucault's words describing this tension in Immanuel Kant's text:

> First, Kant establishes that individuals are unable to get out of their condition of tutelage by themselves. Why are they unable to get out of their condition of tutelage? It is precisely for the same reasons given for them being in the condition of tutelage and for their responsibility for their own condition of tutelage. It is because they are cowards, because they are lazy, because of their fear. Once again, even if they were released from their bonds, from what holds them back, and from that authority, they would not take the decision to walk on their own two feet and would fall, not because of obstacles impeding them, but because they are afraid. We are in the condition of tutelage because we are cowards and lazy, and we cannot get out of this condition precisely because we are cowards and lazy (Foucault, 2010, p. 33).

In other words we need someone from outside who would help us to teach ourselves autonomy and who would let us be free. At the same time any external authority might be suspicious since it will again mean a form of guidance over our decisions. Questions concerning teaching freedom lead us to the questions regarding authority of teachers and educators to which I now pass.

**Authority in education**

The very same questions about authority, freedom, and autonomy are often directly stated in the context of education. Many contemporary educational theories are afraid of authority figures and concentrate on making the teacher a partner in the education process so that the power over pupils and students will not lead to oppression and imposition of teacher's values. For example, Tomasz Szkudlarek, while describing critical pedagogy, states: "education suppresses freedom, but liberation requires education" (Szkudlarek, 2004, p. 366).

> One of the proposed solutions for the political and ideological engagement of teachers is to remain neutral towards social and cultural conflicts to avoid the possibility of ideological bias, the teacher, according to this view, shall remain distanced towards the main issues of the contemporary world (cf. Filippakou, 2022, pp. 4-8). Henry Giroux proposes another conception of the role of the teacher in the classroom, namely the role of someone who helps students to understand the connection between power and knowledge, the obligations which

> arise from social responsibility, as well as to foster their engagement in social affairs (Giroux, 2014, pp. 59-63).

In order to further understand the problem of the role of authority in education, it would be useful to refer to Girard's distinction between beneficial and harmful violence. He stressed that the two types of violence are very similar, and yet it is crucial to distinguish between them (Girard, 1979, pp. 37, 38). This distinction between different types of violence might be helpful in recognizing the perils of a neutral standpoint, which concerns us here in the context of its application in education. The adherent of a neutral standpoint refrains from taking sides, and in consequence, abstains from discriminating between types of violence.

> The impartial party is not eager to resolve the issue, does not want to know if there is a resolution; nor does he maintain that resolution is impossible. His impartiality-at-any-price is not unfrequently simply an unsubstantiated assertion of superiority. One of the adversaries is right, the other wrong, and the onlooker is obliged to take sides; either that, or the rights and wrongs are so evenly distributed between the two factions that taking sides is impossible. The self-proclaimed advocate of impartiality does not want to commit himself to either course of action. If pushed toward one camp, he seeks refuge in the other (Girard, 1979, p. 46).

Relating this reflection to the role of authority in education, we can grasp that by abstaining from evaluation, the teachers present themselves as an authority being above the explicit conflicts of contemporary society. By not imposing any values and declaring neutrality, teachers refrain from condemning evil and risk being on the side of the rule of nobody (see below). This may also lead to another factor in making violence socially invisible - the teacher who avoids taking sides and abstains from expressing any value-laden judgments will most probably lack the motivation and means to expose violence and its negative consequences.

**Sacrificial crisis**

According to Girard, a lack of distinction between types of violence leads to a cultural process with far-reaching consequences. The process, which he calls "sacrificial crisis," endangers the very cultural foundations of societies because it affects the possibility of conceptualising. In his words:

> The sacrificial distinction, the distinction between the pure and the impure, cannot be obliterated without obliterating all other differences as well. One and the same process of violent reciprocity engulfs the whole. The sacrificial crisis can be defined, therefore, as a crisis of distinctions—that is, a crisis affecting the cultural order. This cultural order is nothing more than a regulated system of distinctions in which the differences among individuals are used to establish their "identity" and their mutual relationships (Girard, 1979, p. 49).

Similar issues to the sacrificial crisis have been observed by other authors as well. For example, Lewis Mumford (1952, p. 144) wrote about "systemic confusion of names" as one of the vivid examples of ethical disheartenment. The obliteration of differences influences educational systems as well. In order to establish ethical values and categories also to introduce knowledge and differentiate it from ignorance, there is a need for distinctions.

For some young people facing conflicts between self-sufficiency and limitations of the outside world, between the need for autonomy and the anxiety about responsibility, and different visions of the world and self, the solution to those tensions is to commit suicide (Witulska, 2015, p. 426). The educational system shall help them to overcome those inner tensions. It is worth noting that this will not happen by pretending that education is not relying on narratives or by assuming that the future of society is impossible to predict. In such a context young people will miss reflection on values and goals that relate to the future (Gauchet, 1997, p. 180). These assumptions often lead to denying the role of meaning and sense-making in educational activities. In the words of Neil Postman:

> The point is that, call them what you will, we are unceasing in creating histories and futures for ourselves through the medium of narrative. Without a narrative, life has no meaning. Without meaning, learning has no purpose. Without a purpose, schools are houses of detention, not attention (Postman, 1995, p. 7).

We need to overcome the sacrificial crisis in education in order to provide meaningful narrations about education and its role in our societies. Those narratives shall not close pupils' eyes to the presence of violence, as well as search for providing them with the ability to evaluate different situations ethically.

**Rule by Nobody: The Power of Bureaucracy and Markets**

Lack of distinctions and the impossibility of establishing the identity of people wielding power leads to a new type of rule - "rule by Nobody," which Hannah Arendt (1970, p. 38) defines: "bureaucracy or the rule of an intricate system of bureaus in which no men, neither one nor the best, neither the few nor the many, can be held responsible." A bureaucratic decision-making system leads to a situation of diffusion of responsibility, often annihilation of it (Bogunia-Borowska, 2021, pp. 51-53). This form of government of nobody prompts a paradoxical situation. On the one hand, it makes violence less visible since it lacks active actors to impose it on others. On the other hand, it makes violence more attractive as a solution to social conflicts. Without the possibility of communicating grievances, since all the harm and mischief is without an author, it leads to frustration and regret. In the search for a solution, there seems to be only one answer - a violent one (Arendt, 1970, p. 81-87).

The rule of nobody in its bureaucratic context finds its corresponding version in the rule of nobody/the rule of the vicious state in the context of the market. Thus, another way of making violence invisible is referring to enlightened self-interest or market coordination. Again no actor would be responsible for violence and its results. In other cases, the whole responsibility for the evil actions is deflected towards the state, as if employers, consumers, corporations, and markets were always good and non-violent. Thus, the Weberian definition of the state as an entity holding the total monopoly over violent actions is applied without reflection on the much more complex social life practice. Money, market, and self-interest are treated as if their influence was neutral and without connection to power and violence (Arendt, 1970, pp. 77, 78; Foucault, 2013, pp. 140-142; Kucz, 2019, pp. 146-150).

The invisibility of the violent aspects of markets underestimates the dangers of corporate control over educational systems, which propels the charm of neoliberal reforms in education. From that follows the utilitarian understanding of education, as if achieving goals (mainly market-oriented ones), the best usage of resources, and the proper ratio of money spent to money gained, were the crucial factors in the social role of educational systems and their influence (Rosół, 2019, pp. 16-19).

**Visibility and invisibility of violence in education**

Taking into consideration the above reflection concerning the relationship between freedom, authority, violence and education, we might conclude that different questions concerning authority in education, and the issues arising from the sacrificial crisis all are a part of the process of making other faces of violence less visible. Philosophical reflection might be helpful to recover and create conceptual distinctions, making it possible to see the world in more shades and dimensions. Quoting Marta Bucholc:

> The basic mechanism for dealing with violence in civilization is to suppress its presence in selected spheres of social life. Violence is pushed backstage - and the backstage of the global world is immense. What used to accumulate in the dark corners of our cities and beyond the tightly closed doors of Goffmanian asylums is now removed to other continents and burdens the lives of people who, for their equally anonymous oppressors, have neither names nor faces. Violence, which we have cast out from here, may easily found out there. (Bucholc, 2015, p. 27)

Suppressed violence is not resolved violence. Invisibility does not mean nonexistence. The Russian war against Ukraine reminds us that violence is still there on the European continent. It also shows that the connection between violence and education is much more complex than the reflection on educational systems that are already in place would suggest. Entering Ukrainian territories, Russian forces were engaged in destroying libraries and killing teachers. Russian rockets destroyed universities and schools. Those actions were deliberate against the Ukrainian culture and educational system (Said-Moorhouse, Ochman, 2022). An essential part of the war includes the questions concerning the legitimacy of state power, the language of institutions, and the values that will be promoted in the public sphere.

Education is one of the most critical tools for answering those questions. Even if we agree that the situation of war provides an extreme context, it still might help us understand that questions concerning teachers and the educational process are fundamental and include issues that might turn violent in unfavourable circumstances. The example mentioned earlier of war also illustrates vividly that the possibility of education, and the space and circumstances that allow for its existence, shall not be taken for granted. The statement that "neoliberalism" is "the most dangerous ideology of our time" (Giroux, 2014, p. 65), in the context of education, ignores these prerequisites. It narrows the perspective to particular states and their policies, whereas

wars and conflicts may destroy the very possibility of the existence of educational systems. The negative influence of physical violence on education is not limited to international conflicts and wars. Research also shows how the prevalence of physical violence in a society has a negative impact on the possibility of education and access to it (Haugen, Boutros, 2014, pp. 100-108).

By ignoring the need for a proper context, which is necessary for educational systems to function properly, we close our eyes to the existence of direct violence. This leads to an overestimation of the dangers connected with different types of symbolic violence, cutting funds and other changes in the way education is treated in a society, at the same time to underestimation of the dangers connected with direct violence, dysfunctional states, international wars, that all make it impossible for the educational system to function properly (cf. Giroux, 2014, pp. 86-93).

This does not mean that those other dangers shall be ignored or that they are not worth our attention. Certainly educational institutions in the United States and the United Kingdom face significant challenges, including issues of funding and corporate control. Nonetheless, if we claim a global scope of our reflection, we shall remember that in many parts of the world, the main problems are even more profound and more existential issues. Even in the context of the US, there exist some more existential questions concerning education and its role in politics and culture. For example, as we can read in "The Economist," there are plans to change the way children that are not legally allowed to stay in Texas will be treated - their access to free education might be denied ("Meanness to migrants," 2022, pp. 39, 40). In the same issue of "The Economist," there is another article concerning the role of physical violence in education: the fate of Indian children who were forced to attend boarding schools. The article states: "There was rampant physical, sexual and emotional abuse as well as malnourishment, disease, and overcrowding. Many children were sent out to farms and businesses for months of manual labor. The schools often pocketed their wages" ("Stolen children," 2022, p. 38). These are vivid examples of more violent issues that concern education, which we shall not forget while protesting lack of funds, bureaucratic burdens, etc. The development of more nuanced language and concepts are essential to make violence, in its many forms and shades, more visible and less easy to forget.

**On the Commitment to Evaluate Violence**

The inflation of language and the war-like metaphors are unhelpful in understanding the scope of challenges and the difference between particular situations and in different parts of the world. Claiming that violence is violence and there is no difference between symbolic violence and physical violence makes it harder to understand how to change the world into a less violent place (cf., for example, Bourdieu, Passeron, 1990, pp. XX, XXI, 9, 10). Describing violence in the symbolic categories is an act in social life that focuses our attention on the violent character of educational systems, but at the same time lacks ideas about the way out of its violent character (Kłoskowska, 1990, pp. 39, 40). Applying its own interpretative tools might be seen as an act of symbolic violence, undermining the legitimacy of educational systems without providing a less violent alternative. As Arendt (1970, p. 80) wrote: "The practice of violence, like all action, changes the world, but the most probable change is to a more violent world." Without differentiation between physical violence and symbolic or maybe even better between physical, mental, and symbolic violence (cf. Sojak, Zybertowicz, 2008, pp. 17, 18) and without differentiation between good and bad violence, the very understanding of stakes and actions needed to solve international and social conflicts and diminish the role of violence in the world is going to be endangered.

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# Prometheus of a scapegoat? Humans in the discourse of the anthropocene and the concept of mimesis and persecution pattern by René Girard: attempts at pedagogical reflection

**Abstract:** The discourse of the Anthropocene expresses an interesting tension in the way human causation and guilt are framed. On the one hand, the Anthropos is a unique species, making historical, geographical and geological conquest single-handedly (to the exclusion of non-human subjects). A triumphant and increasingly dominant coloniser of a planet that ultimately falls very low, indeed. In the light of the impending climate catastrophe, the "age of man" no longer sounds so noble today. On the contrary, it becomes a testimony of discredit and decline, a sign of egoism and planetary destruction by one species. Among the many approaches and attempts to address and nuance the discourse and amidst the search for the most appropriate labels (e.g. *Capitalocene, chtchulucene, ecozoic*, etc.), it is the *Anthropocene* or *post-Anthropocene* that seem to remain the ones most frequently referred to in colloquial or journalistic discourse. A need arises to clearly identify the one to blame for the impending climatic apocalypse. Under conditions of crisis, during what Girard call undifferentiation, the Anthropos selects itself as the scapegoat, becoming both the unfortunate, guilt-ridden OTHER and the ruthless, violence-hungry MOB. Could René Girard's concept of mimesis and scapegoating help to understand the pattern of this dialectical, subversive strategy? If so, then perhaps it is to be expected that the stage of sacralisation of the victim, which crowns the logic of scapegoating, instead of overcoming it, will only perpetuate the apotheosis of human agency, dangerous from the point of view of the actual state of the planet. This time, these will be

essentially anthropocentric and technologically advanced "escapes forward", such as exploitation of the moon or other planets, invasive prevention of further ice and greenhouse ages, deflecting asteroids so that they do not collide with Earth, and other, hardly predictable spectacular gestures of the triumphant Anthropos. The above questions are the subject matter of this article and a pretext for pedagogical reflection.

**Keywords:** René Girard, scapegoating, mimesis, anthropos, anthropocene, climate crisis, anti-natalism, non-atropocentric pedagogy.

*To the as-yet-unborn, to all innocent wisps of undifferentiated nothingness:*
*Watch out for life.*
Kurt Vonnegut, *Deadeye Dick* (1999, p. 11).

**Introduction**

The term Anthropocene was coined by Paul Crutzen and Eugene Stoermer in 2000 (Moore, 2016, p. 3). It grew out of the assumption that human activity had profoundly transformed the biosphere and geological time. It was founded on the collapse of the simple dualism of Nature and Society; today we are more aware of the complexity of the processes and entanglements of human and non-human entities in the overall web of life on Earth. From the perspective of the state of the planet, the era called the Anthropocene is the time of urgency for multiple species, the human being included. It is a time of mass deaths and the great extinction, the onslaught of catastrophes and diversions. These are real rather than metaphorical deaths, which are not constructed, but embodied and by all means material. "How can we think in times of urgencies *without* the self-indulgent and self-fulfilling myths of apocalypse, when every fiber of our being is interlaced, even complicit, in the webs of processes that must somehow be engaged and repatterned?" – asks Dona Haraway – "[…] the pattern is in our hands. The answer to the trust of the held-out hand: think we must" (Haraway, 2016, p. 39).

Unfortunately, thinking alone is proving far from sufficient today. Postmodernism has accustomed us to constant deliberation, distance and critical reflection, to an affirmation of language and text, to focusing on interpretation and the symbol, on a destabilising constructivism of the subject (individual and collective), on the liquefaction and constant historicization

of phenomena and concepts. Are these habitual practices of thinking today capable of reversing the course of planet-wide events? Can they prevent climate catastrophes or the sixth extinction? It seems fairly doubtful. Karen Barad, a thinker of new materialism representing a post-anthropocentric perspective, points out that postmodern humanism, focused on linguistic reality and mainly concerned with the distanced (re)production of mirror images, i.e. the creation of representations of reality which were displaced by means of reflection but in no way changed the state of affairs, in fact neutralised own causality. "The belief that grammatical categories reflect the underlying structure of the world is a continuing seductive habit of mind worth questioning" (Barad, 2003, p. 802). According to Ewa Domańska, in turn, this was significantly influenced by the so-called Foucault effect. Foucault's understanding of the causal power of the subject caught up in the all-encompassing, inescapable relations of knowledge and power, a subject that is flexible and weak, led to it being deprived of its causal powers and to the neutralisation of its activity (Domańska, 2012, p. 145-160). Domańska followed Elly Shohat and observed: "depriving the individual (community) of its 'essence' makes it a weak subject, often succumbing to neo-colonial manipulation and incapable of survival" (Domańska, 2012, p. 154), void of causal, let alone revolutionary energy. However, today, in a situation and time when emancipating communities and groups are increasingly achieving the status of autonomy and, at the same time, when the state of the planet is a challenge through its inexorable reality, such a figuration of the individual no longer seems to perform its role.

The new humanities is therefore accompanied by voices calling for the return of the "strong individual" and for it to be positioned outside the mechanisms of power. These voices call for the humanities to be proactive and have a real impact on reality, rather than being merely contemplative or critical. According to Domańska, the performative turn, a return to an interest in empiricism and materiality, can be identified as a form of weariness of the weak subject and an attempt to rebound from the "Foucault effect" (Domańska, 2007, p. 48-61). The new humanities practised at a time of climate crises will be in multiple ways seeking agency, redirect cognitive energy from the symbolic to the corporeal, bind and intertwine theory and practice (Marzec, 2021, p. 48 ff), stress the inherent interlacing of the examining hybrid-subject (human-non-human subject), the examination tool and the examined reality; this interlacing prevents any critical distance and yet it is seen as having the potential for new agency. The world of the new humanities is one of immanence, a reality of participation, of learning from

within, of participatory cognition interested not so much in distance, but in proximity (Haraway, 2016, p. 160). Ryszard Nycz sums up the multitude of relevant approaches as follows:

> Digital humanities operates in the 'culture of participation'. Engaged humanities is a form of intervention, at times rather invasive stirring of ossified approaches, preconceived judgements and behaviours of a given community or society. Cognitive humanities is marked by the participatory position of the subject as a 'subject in an environment'. Post-humanities is characterised by an ecosystem of 'culturenature' as a universe of the activity of the subject. Artistic humanities is characterised by an inclusion of art as a tool and medium of creative cognition. The unique nature of cognition under the new humanities is most radically formulated by Kirsten Hastrup, who observed: 'We cannot in any way access reality unless we become part of it' (Nycz, 2017, p. 37).

How is this fusion with reality to be achieved and what does this actually mean for the theory from "before" the turn, which could be called the "new humanities" one? What is called for in the face of the current challenges posed to humanities by the rigid material reality of the (post) Anthropocene, the absolute necessity of historicising the old, postmodern (poststructuralist and postcolonial) theories, verifying and transcending them. Ewa Domańska gives as an example the so-called "French Theory", which includes Michel Foucault, Jacques Derrida, Roland Barthes, Claude Levy-Strauss, Jean-Francois Lyotard, Gilles Deleuze, Jacques Lacan, Paul Ricoeur, Jean Baudrillard, and René Girard. Domańska critically examines the totalizing visions of the world promoted by them and their ways of explaining it through the prism of such all-encompassing and organizing catch-all categories as power, knowledge (Foucault), violence (Girard), the unconscious (Lacan), etc. (Domańska, 2012, p. 156). In the further part of this article, the trace indicated by Domańska will provide the impetus in the examination of the possible usefulness or adequacy of theories of the indicated type for the problems of the Anthropocene and in the attempts to identify within its framework and define the statuses of the totalizations indicated by Domańska. René Girard's concept of the scapegoat, one of the classic proposals of French Theory, will be considered here. The studies presented will be accompanied by the questions: Can the scapegoat theory be applied to reflection concerning the Anthropocene? If so, in what way

can it be done? And finally: What are the implications of these applications for this reflection?

**René Girard's theory of mimesis and the scapegoat vs. the discourse of the Anthropocene**

It is worth looking at the problem of actual causality, somewhat perversely, from the perspective of a concept developed by a researcher who has never conducted any fieldwork and who only drew on books for his competences, including those in cultural anthropology (Cf. Kociuba, 2014, p. 250-251). This reading of texts was the basis on which he reconstructed the logic of his own theory, which has had its loyal disciples and consistent critics for decades.[1] To recall: René Girard's theory is based on the assumption that common and inescapable violence is inherent in the nature of interpersonal relations. In circumstances of severe crises, it manifests itself in a particularly dramatic way: the escalation of crisis sentiment results in the identification of a scapegoat by the community concerned, followed by collective violence directed at it.[2] Such social practices are allegedly based on so-called "scapegoating", founded on mimesis and the underlying stereotypes: the stereotype of general undifferentiation characteristic of the crisis situation, the stereotype of sacrificial stigmata and the stereotype of violence (Girard, 1989, p. 24). When, under certain social circumstances, these stereotypes begin to surface, the crisis caused by mimesis and the build-up of bad reciprocity rapidly intensifies, the collective hatred escalates and finds its outlet in the form of violence against a selected scapegoat. What is mimesis and how exactly does it work?

The belief in this evolutionary principle of mimesis, inherent in humans, lies at the heart of Girard's concept. This principle is both a potential source of social suffering and a condition of social order achieved by the discharge of negative social energy on scapegoats. The key motivation for human action becomes, in this view, desire as a function of man's imitative tendencies. Girard emphasises that "there is nothing, or next to nothing, in human behavior that is not learned, and all learning is based on imitation. If human beings suddenly ceased imitating, all forms of culture would vanish"

[1] This question is addressed by e.g.: Urbańska, 1997, p. 21-45; Kociuba, *1998, p. 137-157; Kociuba, 2004, p. 203-222; Kociuba, 2006,* p. 71-97; Kociuba, 2007, p. 141-150; Kociuba, 2008, p. 17-32.

[2] Fragments of reconstructing the concept of mimesis by René Girard come from my article: Humeniuk, 2020, p. 233-244.

(Girard, 1987b, p. 7). Amidst the many patterns of social functioning, man learns not only how to BE, but also how to HAVE. The mimesis of "appropriation" is the power of desire and competition. As Girard explains this dynamic,

> Without men's tendency to imitate each other's desires, envy would not be so extraordinarily powerful in human society. Envy is merely the reciprocal borrowing of desires, under conditions of sufficient equality to ensure the development of mimetic rivalries (Girard, 1987a, p. 51).

In a situation of social equilibrium, this auction-like mechanism occurs fairly harmoniously thanks to the established cooperation mechanisms. It only acquires particular significance in a situation of crisis. Girard, a scholar of myths and archaic religious traditions, associates such an equilibrium with a community's establishment of relations with the Transcendent through a sacrificial process, where the sacrificial system is treated as a safeguard of order and social equilibrium. However, at the moment of crisis, when the local ecosystem is shaken by a natural or social calamity, when "When a society breaks down, time sequences shorten. Not only is there an acceleration of the tempo of positive exchanges [...], but also the hostile or 'negative' exchanges tend to increase" (Girard, 1989, p. 13) a dangerous undifferentiation occurs which threatens the very foundations of peaceful social existence. This is when what Girard calls conflict-provoking mimesis comes into play. The process takes places as follows:

> […] these differences gradually wear away. Everywhere we now encounter the same desire, the same antagonism, the same strategies – the same illusion of rigid differentiation within a pattern of ever-expanding uniformity. As the crisis grows more acute, the community members are transformed into 'twins', matching images of violence. I would be tempted to say that they are each *doubles* of the other (Girard, 1979, p. 78-79).

In a crisis situation, the earlier division into groups of influence and privilege and into social, professional and economic structures ceases to apply. In the face of natural disasters, war, epidemics, economic crisis, the community loses its distinctive features. Everyone is equally threatened with loss or annihilation, everyone becomes equal in the face of the impending catastrophe.

The planetary crisis fits well into the formula of precisely such a catastrophe. The aforementioned calamities, such as mass extinction, climate change, acidification of the oceans, melting glaciers, cancer clusters, frequent and severe droughts, are all symptoms of a concept called the Anthropocene, which has long entered the boundaries of academic discourse. The tipping points have been crossed, we are passing through a time of transformation of planetary life bringing with it "the potential to transform Earth rapidly and irreversibly into a state unknown in human experience" (Barnosky et. al., 2012, p. 52). The reality of change has become part of a cultural phenomenon affecting the collective imagination, made present in the public space through scientists, journalists, activists, artists, and ordinary participants in social life. "The apathy of the Anthropocene" – a term coined by Ewa Bińczyk (2018), aptly reflects today's pervasive sentiments of fear, hopelessness and imminent apocalypse. This is an era when we "need to learn to die" (Scaranton, 2015). As long as the Anthropocene as a big topic was dealt with by experts, one could sleep relatively comfortably. At present, the awareness of the magnitude of irreversible destruction and the inevitable end of the world as we know it is acute and widespread. The Anthropocene is becoming a sign of the psychotic split between human domination of the world and the lack of control over degradation processes. It puts humans in a position in which they seem to have completely seriously lost their agency; their activities have set in motion a machine of disintegration that humans can no longer stop or undo (Andrzejewska, 2018, p. 124). There is also the easily internalized package of figurations and dystopian and apocalyptic images, adding fuel to the flames, provided by pop culture and various conspiracy theories. As a result, the crisis is becoming a kind of general trauma that generates a mechanism of Girard's undifferentiation: the human species as such is at risk of annihilation.[3]

Under such conditions, as Girard argues in his theory, a search for the culprits of the crisis ensues. A conviction arises that an individual or even a small group of "others" can prove deadly to the entire community. This conviction becomes widespread and predominant. This is the origin of the phenomenon of the mob, important for the French thinker's concept. As Girard puts it,

[3] Common knowledge has it that the perception of the Anthropocene rather rarely takes into account the actual disappearance of species other than one's own, which is why visions of a human-free world resonate most strongly and appeal to the imagination.

> The crowd tends toward persecution since the natural causes of what troubles it and transforms it into a *turba* cannot interest it. The crowd by definition seeks action but cannot affect natural causes. It therefore looks for an accessible cause that will appease its appetite for violence. Those who make up the crowd are always potential persecutors, or they dream of purging the community of the impure elements that corrupt it, the traitors who undermine it (Girard, 1989, p. 16).

The mob tends to assume the roles of institutions or pressures them and urges their decisions to act, towards collective violence (Urbańska-Szymoszyn, 2013, p. 65). The pattern of mob operation lends Girard's conception a strongly pessimistic feature; people are unable to face crude and senseless violence without risking being subjected to it. They used to underestimate it. Now, in a situation of crisis, it seems to them to be the only available and effective way to crack down on those they believe are responsible for the crisis. As the mob emerges, social structures collapse and the principle of the recognition of differences, which hitherto defined the social order, is lifted. Instead, the mechanism of undifferentiation is set in motion, setting people against one another and at the same time unifying their behaviour.

> When fighting against one another, everyone behaves in a similar, aggressive manner and uses similar means against their rivals. Evil continues to grow and the uniformity of behaviour gives the impression of confusion, total undifferentiation. The mob, once mobilised, holds the supreme power. It forces all institutions to merge with it. [...] In times of crisis, the mob is like a crucible in which everything melts, including powers and authorities (Urbańska-Szymoszyn, 2013, p. 65).

Automatic accusations against the common enemy, the scapegoat, along with persecution imagery and activity make up the condemning stereotype of "crimes of undifferentiation" and the stereotype of specific sacrificial stigmata: in order to hold the victims responsible for the crisis-time "undifferentiation" they are accused of "undifferentiated" violence. What is the choice of the victim based on? What determines the identification of the scapegoat? The scapegoat is predominantly an outsider, one deemed a stranger or a foreigner. He or she may have done something wrong, or else his or her behaviour may have been considered harmful or his or her gesture may have been misinterpreted (Girard, 1989, p. 32). It is not the separate *nomos* that is seen in the other, but the anomaly; not the different norm, but the abnormality. The defect becomes an aberration and a foreigner becomes a stateless person (Girard, 1989, p. 21-22). Girard indicates in this context

the persecution aberrations and the tendency to show the "abnormalities" as physically and/or morally reprehensible features.

Just as when Girard's community was unable to understand the origins and mechanism of the crisis affecting it, now, as Jason W. Moore points out, the concept of the Anthropocene raises questions it cannot answer.

> The Anthropocene sounds the alarm [...]. But it cannot explain how these alarming changes came about. Questions of capitalism, power and class, anthropocentrism, dualist framings of 'nature' and 'society', and the role of states and empires – all are frequently bracketed by the dominant Anthropocene perspective (Moore, 2016, p. 5).

In the face of helplessness and severely limited causality, as in Girard's work, a culprit is needed. And, paradoxically, the culprit here becomes the HUMAN BEING himself. Some approaches see the culprit as the humanity at large, while others, e.g. the Capitalocene, focus on a certain specified part of the human population.

In the former case, the origins of man's non-nuanced general agency are to be found in the time when the genus Homo erectus mastered the art of making stone tools and controlling fire, thus fundamentally and irreversibly altering the balance of its relationship with the non-human world. The sources of anthropocentric culpability in this regard are also often found in the so-called anthropocentric biblical creation myth. As early as 1967, the myth was recognised as the root cause of the planet's irreversible problems by Lynn T. White, professor of medieval history at Princeton and Stanford. It was then that his famous article on the religious roots of the ecological crisis was published in *Science*. The anthropocentrism of the biblical myth of the creation of the world was identified by the author as the source of a disastrous man-nature dualism, which allegedly gave rise to Christianity's infamous role in establishing the anthropocentric paradigm of biblical hermeneutics. White also argued that the unrestrained development of technology contributing to the devastation of the planet was a direct result of a Judeo-Christian theology-inspired belief in eternal progress. As White pointed out

> Especially in its Western form, Christianity is the most anthropocentric religion the world has seen. As early as the 2nd century both Tertullian and Saint Irenaeus of Lyons were insisting that when God shaped Adam he was foreshadowing the image of the incarnate Christ, the Second Adam. Man shares, in great measure, God's transcendence of nature. Christianity, in absolute contrast to ancient paganism and Asia's religions (except, perhaps, Zoroastrianism), not only established

> a dualism of man and nature but also insisted that it is God's will that man exploit nature for his proper ends (White, 1967, p. 1205).

White's text was the starting point for contemporary narratives claiming that Christianity in general and biblical stories about the creation of the world in particular are to blame for the global ecological crisis. It is religion, as a result of human culture, that is the root cause of the culpability of the human race as such. White's text was the starting point for modern narratives claiming that Christianity in general, and the biblical stories of the creation of the world in particular, are to blame for the global environmental crisis. It is religion, as a result of human culture, that is the main cause of the human race's guilt as such. White's theses have been widely debated, inspiring some scholars (Toynbee,1974; Nicholson, 1970; McHarg 2006; Worster, 1994), while others have strongly criticized them in polemics (Hitzhusen, 2007; Attfield, 2010; Callicott, 1989; Nash, 1996). White's work became the inspiration for a new-age biblical project initiated by Norman C.Habel under the name , „The Earth Bible", where selected biblical texts commodified the earth, constituted reconstructions of its „voice" (Habel,2012).

The latter perspective can be discerned, for example, in the differential culpability of the human species in the propositions of the Capitalocene, in which the capitalist system of appropriation of land, its resources and labour (which began long before the industrial revolution, since the first signs of epoch-making change in the shaping of the landscape occurred at the time of Columbus and the conquest of the Americas in the 15th century) that becomes the harbinger of climate catastrophe. British-American anthropologist Jason Hickel in his book *Less is More. How Degrowth Will Save the World*, diligently enumerates the sins of capitalism. He identifies several key historical phenomena: Western dualism as the dominant worldview, fencing and accumulation as the resulting practices of appropriation of land, nature and human bodies (e.g. slavery, feudal structures, the destruction of economies geared to self-sufficiency), historically modulated profit-oriented ideologies, including those motivated by religion, such as, for example, 17th-century Calvinism, in whose theology profit was supposed to signify moral success and "proof of salvation" and, consequently, dispossession and colonisation. Hickel writes of "devouring the world" and "growthism", which, given the asymmetry of global responsibility for the climate crisis, the asymmetry of responsibility of the "rich North" and the "poor South", should not be attributed to "man" in general, but to populations representing countries such as the United States, the countries of the European Union, Canada, Japan, Australia, China, and Russia, i.e. those whose real contribution to the

devastation of the planet is incomparably higher than that of the countries of the "poor South".

In both ways of delivering a (post-)anthropocentric narrative, i.e. when it blames the entire human species and when it concerns only a certain part of humanity, the part which for centuries has been the beneficiary of Earth's resources and, in its greed-driven agency, unjustifiably and perniciously assumed their inexhaustibility, one can see a parallel with the themes of undifferentiation and scapegoating. The scapegoat becomes simply the Anthropos, the human being. Or rather, a certain more or less ahistorical, abstract humanity, whose "human activity" was supposed to have contributed to the current catastrophic state of the planet. In Girard's work, the culmination of the persecutory pattern on which the concept of the scapegoat is built is collective violence.

> Thanks to the mechanism of persecution, collective anguish and frustration found vicarious appeasement in the victims who easily found themselves united in opposition to them by virtue of being poorly integrated minorities. [...] Scapegoat indicates both the innocence of the victims, the collective polarization in opposition to them, and the collective end result of that polarization. The persecutors are caught up in the 'logic' of the representation of persecution from a persecutor's standpoint, and they cannot break away. [...] The polarization exerts such a constraint on those polarized that the victims cannot prove their innocence (Girard, 1989, p. 39-40).

Collective violence directed at the scapegoat defuses the group anxieties associated with the crisis situation. Anthropocene narratives do not quite correspond to the ambivalent guilt of the scapegoat in Girard's; in the former the human species is simply guilty as charged. Nonetheless, the collective 'hatred' of a significant part of the planetary conscious community towards the human species seems genuine and is expressed in the frequently reported, deeply disappointed and bitter voices about how we do not really deserve to be saved at all (Bińczyk, 2018, p. 51). "Is the 'collapse' of a civilisation that condemns almost half of its population to malnutrition really something to be feared?" (Bińczyk, 2018, p. 51). In view of the obvious responsibility for the impending apocalypse, there can be no mercy for the Homo sapiens. A form of Girard's mob violence can be seen in the discourse of the Anthropocene as the induction of guilt through constant emphasis on the ethical non-neutrality of all consumer choices ('why, faced with the climate apocalypse, do you eat meat/travel by airplane/buy goods from chain stores/uncontrollably

buy and exchange technological gadgets?', etc.). Contemporary consumer choices, as Andrzej Marzec notes, resemble moving through a minefield. "It's easy to get lost when we scrutinise the long lists with the composition of the goods we buy, follow their history, production conditions, find out if they have anything to do with plastic or other inimical substances" (Marzec, 2021, p. 28). Eco-shaming, a strategy to achieve pro-climate social change by shaming individuals and making them feel guilty is becoming a handy tool for manipulation and a common practice of everyday life (Cf. Mallet, 2012, p. 223-231; Mkono, Hughes, 2020, p. 1223-1244). Narratives that sustain a state of individual guilt can be recognised as formulas in which collective anxiety, fear and frustration find an outlet. The mob performs Girard's ritual to contain the crisis in the hope of a cleansing catharsis. It is, of course, difficult to deny the fundamental validity of at least part of this type of diagnosis. The human species has contributed enormously to the current planetary crisis, and no force can revoke or bewitch it. To make matters worse, there is still too little decisive willingness to act for pro-ecological change, too often succumbing to resignation, indifference, impasse, inaction, and despair. However, as many researchers point out, by means of this kind of simplistic and totalizing diagnosis, instead of solving problems, one only exacerbates and perpetuates them. This way of thinking and narrative perpetuates a vision of the hyper-agency of the anthropos. Instead of deconstructing it, instead of proposing effective strategies to dethrone this "crown of the world", it rather reinforces the image of humans as supra-historical colonisers of the all-encompassing biosphere. As Eileen Crist observes,

> The Anthropocene discourse delivers a Promethean self-portrait: a genius if unruly species, distinguishing itself from the background of merely-living life, rising so as to earn itself a separate name (anthropos meaning 'man', and always implying 'not-animal'), and whose unstoppable and in many ways glorious history (created in good measure through PAT) has yielded an 'I' on a par with Nature's own tremendous forces (Crist, 2016, p. 16-17).

History of humanity in the narrative of the Anthropocene is a history of "guaranteeing human domination". "History has itself unfolded by silencing nonhuman others, who do not (as has been repeatedly established in the Western canon) speak, possess meanings, experience perspectives, or have a vested interest in their own destinies" (Crist, 2016, p. 18). A similar message seems to resound in the words of Daniel Ross when he writes about the Anthropocene as a narcissistic trauma that, ultimately, heralds nothing

less than a nihilistic collapse (Ross, 2021, p. 48-170). This attitude towards the Anthropos, which grows out of a kind of surreptitious affirmation, refers gloomily to the final, crowning stage of Girard's logic, the stage of the sacralisation of the victim, or more precisely, the process of its production of the sacred.

This is the stage that mythologises the entire persecution pattern: through an act of collective violence, the relationship between the persecutors and their victim is reversed, and it is this reversal that becomes the source of the sacred. It makes the passive victim the object of faith in the omnipotence of the institution of the scapegoat as a propitiating, crisis-avoiding institution; its helps regain a sense of collective unity and achieve a state of redemptive peace. The scapegoat is thus an ambivalent figure, a paradoxical and unfortunate institution. At the same time, it is a guarantor of the reconstruction of social order after the disaster. This is how the philosopher himself describes this surprising "about-face" of the mimesis principle:

> Mimeticism is the original source of all man's troubles, desires, and rivalries, his tragic and grotesque misunderstandings, the source of all disorder and therefore equally of all order through the mediation of scapegoats. These victims are the spontaneous agents of reconciliation, since, in the final paroxysm of mimeticism, they unite in opposition to themselves those who were organized in opposition to each other by the effects of a previous weaker mimeticism (Girard, 1989, p. 165).

The mythologisation of the scapegoat is, continuing Girard's parallel narrative of the Anthropocene, the mythologisation of the anthropos. The Promethean self-portrait of human beings drawn by the discourse of the Anthropocene is expressive of the same species-supremacy (Crist, 2016, p. 15), where humans are the only form of "intelligent life" in the universe predestined to control and actively manage Earth's natural systems. By affirming the central position of humans in the past, if only as culprits and destroyers, the discourse of the Anthropocene falls even deeper into its own trap. This can be seen, among other things, in language. Language often departs from

> environmentalism's dark idiom of destruction, depredation, rape, loss, devastation, deterioration and so forth of the natural world into the tame vocabulary that humans are changing, shaping, transforming or altering the biosphere, and, in the process, creating novel ecosystems and anthropogenic biomes (Crist, 2016, p. 18).

The discourse of the Anthropocene holds a conviction that there are no doubt technologically-advanced antidotes to the climate crisis, available to the innovative anthropos, and that human agency is capable, via cutting edge geoengineering, control solar radiation, store hazardous eco-waste in outer space, alter the trajectories of dangerous asteroids and even create new living conditions for humanity beyond planet Earth. As critics of such Anthropocene-modulated narratives, currents and theories point out,

> Nothing about it [the discourse of the Anthropocene – M. H.] – much less the name – offers an alternative to the civilizational revamping of Earth as a base of human operations and functional stage for history's uninterrupted performance. The discourse subjects us to the time-honored narrative of human ascent into a distinguished species; a naturalized, subtly glamorized rendition of the 'I' as on a par with stupendous forces of Nature; a homogenized protagonist named 'the human enterprise' undefended for either its singularity (are all humans involved in one enterprise?) or its insularity (are nonhumans excluded from the enterprise?); a reification of demographic and economic trends as inescapable, leaving the historically constructed identity of Homo sapiens as planetary ruler undisturbed and giving permission to humanity's expansionist proclivities to continue. […] (Crist, 2016, p. 24).

**Conclusion**

Critical of French Theory, Ewa Domańska argues that its representatives

> exposed the foundations of modern thinking and the processes of knowledge production but did not offer the foundations (or any hope for them) that could become the basis of a new paradigm; they showed how the system works, but not how to break free from it. French Theory was necessary and useful as an intervention, critique and contestation of the dominant thinking and research angles of the 1980s. As such, it also became a kind of social critique. The tendencies that emerged from French Theory are interventionist, critical, insurrectionist, combative [...], but not edifying. French Theory preached a critical approach to texts as well as suspicion and resistance to established conventions. However, the road from criticising and undermining traditional humanities to creating critical humanities is a long and bumpy one. [...] French Theory demonstrates how to expose

> and challenge foundations, but not how to build new approaches that would result from this critique (Domańska, 2012, p. 157).

René Girard's concept, defined by the French philosopher as a culture-forming psychosocial mechanism that generates violence and, through it, establishes the primordial sacred and culture, is a recurrent example of Girard's anthropological theory taken up in almost all of his works. The basis for his concept, as already indicated, was an extensive study of ethnological and anthropological literature. The author was often criticised for this repetitive schematism and for the fact that, apart from a narrow system of anthropological concepts and a fixed vision of culture, he never introduced any new elements into his theory. This stable, static and somewhat primitive repetitiveness (Kociuba, 2014, p. 248) earned Girard both sworn enemies and faithful disciples for years. In light of the objections that Domańska raises towards French Theory, this repetition of Girard's pattern, its aspiration to universalise the theory is rather poorly suited to the dynamics of a naturocultural world heading towards a climatic apocalypse. Donna Haraway, a biologist and philosopher dealing with feminist new materialism, stresses the sympoietic nature of this dynamics. Following M. Beth Demster, she refers in this way to the unique features of complex collectively-generating systems, semi-open, which lack self-defined spatial or temporal boundaries. These are systems that are subject to evolution and have a potential for surprising and unpredictable changes. Within them, information and control are diffuse, are distributed between the various components and are generally hard to predict (Haraway, 2016, p. 37 ff). In the face of this nonlinear and unpredictable dynamic of transformation and reconfigurations of the world during the Anthropocene, the system of thought which Girard proposes seems unduly one-dimensional.

However, as the article tries to demonstrate, the essential blueprint of the mimesis theory can be projected onto the issues related to the Anthropocene: starting from the planetary crisis as an undifferentiating mechanism, a consequence of centuries-long if not millennia-long exploitation of Earth's resources, an exploitation consisting in the mimetically destructive activity of humanity (the Anthropocene and the Capitalocene as formulas of multiplied mimetic actions resulting in the mass exploitation of the planet's resources), through the category of the mob choosing a scapegoat and unleashing its accumulated violence on it (in the narrative of the Anthropocene, the scapegoat is the Anthropos himself, differing from Girard's doctrine only by the fact that it is not innocent, its guilt being real and indisputable), right through to the sacralisation of the victim, seeing in them the dawn of a new order

and harmony (here we can point to those currents within the Anthropocene theory which deem state-of-the-art technologies and geo-engineering, i.e. unceasingly human causation, to be an antidote to the planetary crisis).

The logic of Girard's theory can thus be applied to empirical reality, if the data on the state of the planet and projects to combat climate catastrophe expressed in the referenced narratives are accepted as such. However, such a simple application can at best legitimise the old, well-known maxim, which holds that history is written by the victors. Within this agenda, as Crist bitterly states,

> Adverse impacts must be contained insofar as they threaten material damage to, or the survival of, the human enterprise [...]. The vocabulary that we are 'changing the world'—so matter-of-factly portraying itself as impartial and thereby erasing its own normative tracks even as it speaks—secures its ontological ground by silencing the displaced, killed, and enslaved whose homelands have been assimilated and whose lives have, indeed, been changed forever; erased, even. And here also lies the Anthropocene's existential and political alliance with history and its will to secure human dominion […] (Crist, 2016, p. 18).

What kind of pedagogy can be inferred from such simple applications? Certainly not the kind of pedagogy that will induce people to "move on the perch of beings in order to make room for non-humans", as Andrzej W. Nowak once illustratively put it in a discussion around the issue of the Anthropocene. The perpetuation of the species supremacy of the Anthropos can only favour itself. A pedagogy and education conceived solely as a "human issue", designed solely for "humanity" will, irrespective of the degree to which it is "ecologised", be like a downward slide along old routes. Just like in the face of a very real climate disaster one can no longer practice humanities the old ways without consequences, one cannot without consequences defend anthropocentric pedagogy. In the first book in Poland dedicated to non-anthropocentric pedagogy, this is addressed by Maksymilian Chutorański:

> a radical 'separation' of humans from non-humans cannot be the main foundation of ontological choices, which concern what makes up education, or methodological choices, within which an appropriate method, which presupposes the privileging of people and their agency, reflexivity, affectivity, makes it possible to properly reach the object of study. There is a need for onto-methodologies which will allow us to appreciate how pedagogical action is an effort of humans and

> non-humans, and that education itself is the changing of the existence of many entities in many ways (only some of which are 'educational change') (Chutorański, 2020, p. 145).

There are many indications that today, in a special way, it is precisely in the field of pedagogy that we need to revisit old concepts and dogmatic categories that have so far served to increase distance from reality rather than to confront the reality of the world (e.g. the category of *the critical*) (Cf. Marzec, 2021, p. 25-48 ff). There is a need for pedagogical strategies for creating interspecies alliances and communities, for educational awareness shifts regarding the symbiotic proximity of humans and non-humans, also drawing on so-called theories and philosophies of proximity (e.g. Timothy Morton, Jane Benet, Donna Haraway), and, perhaps, for confronting what might from a pedagogical point of view seem the most difficult questions, i.e. those which anti-natalist thought has long been grappling with.

Many signs in heaven and earth indicate that there is not much time left for us all to think. It furthermore looks like there is little time for action.

> Like nature, like nature, like nature
> Nature, Nature, Nature […]
> Like me ultimately
> *And even more like whatever is not me. […]*
> Henri Michaux, "Wspomnienia" (1988, p. 340-341).

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# Being as sacred: on Heidegger's ontological wanderings

**Abstract:** René Girard's Mimetic Theory has put forward a very compelling toolbox whose hermeneutical valour we are willing to test by reading Heidegger's ontological wandering in the semantic constellation of Being. Finding a lead in Heidegger's reading of Œdipus' peripeties as presented in Sophocles' *Œdipus Rex*, we will try to translate the fundamental notions of Heidegger's critique of metaphysics into Girard's jargon to see if any clarity is gained. It is time to go *after* Heidegger, both as in following him in his own wandering but also as in chasing him, out of his *Holzwege*, and eventually go further. Hopefully, some of the *obscurities* of Heidegger's text will find in this perspective a new light, without losing any of its *fascination*.

**Keywords:** being, *aletheia*, sacred, victim, *ens causa sui*, non-instinctual attention, metaphysics.

## Introductory remarks

Heidegger famously said, in a well-known interview given to Rudolf Augstein and Georg Wolff for *Der Spiegel* magazine on September 23, 1966, that «only a God can save us». In a short and surprising sentence, he thus synthesized more than three decades of theological and ontological wandering. In this paper we will try and test a Girardian account of Heidegger's intuitions. The attitude we are intending to adopt is less respectful than Heideggerian studies might admit but fully in line with Girard's polemist style. The leading interpretative hypotheses are: a. to consider Heidegger's ontological and theological research as an adventurous yet uncompleted expedition in hitherto-unknown regions, that only thank to his exceptional

foresight he was able to shed light on and thus open for later inquiries; and b., to consider Girard's guide as the best suited and most promising to further on such exploratory enterprise, after but if necessary against Heidegger's own self-understanding. We find in Gianni Vattimo's approach to a similar initiative, the courage to endure such ambitious endeavour (Vattimo, 2010, p. 78). We will try and show what we might gain *to* both Heidegger and Girard from the implications of a close reading inspired by such hypothesis – namely that the semantic constellations by which Heidegger refers to *Being* should be reinterpreted, clarified and even completed, with the terminology by which Girard investigates the *Sacred*. We will work through Heidegger's wording to make such understanding as legitimate as possible and at the same time to verify whether the main tenets of Mimetic Theory might provide us with some useful insights, to move on past Heidegger's own mapping of the newly explored territories, going *after* him, so to say as to drive him out[1].

Entering the maze of Heidegger's wanders about Being, we shall bear in mind that «single question: whether the god is fleeing from us or not, and whether we ourselves are still experiencing this genuinely, i.e., creatively» (Heidegger, 2001b, p. 415): Heidegger's quest is, in fact, deeply influenced by such question, and such aim. How will this matter react with the essential feature of Mimetic Theory according to which, because the mimetic victimage mechanism is no longer working, there is no way we can ever experience any "god" in a genuine and *creative* way?

**Philosophy, myth and the unconcealment**

Ever since the academic courses of 1927/28, Heidegger started to envisage as necessary, for philosophy to regain its full essence, to go back to its origin, to its *Ursprung*, i.e., to myth. It has always been said, he recalls in the *Einleitung* (Heidegger, 2001a), even and already by the Greeks themselves, that philosophy had its origin in myth and thus every philosophizing, according to its own possibility, had and still has to make sure of such origin. Much of Heideggerian jargon has been crafted in and for this endeavour – namely the one he uses in texts that Girard labelled as «at once 'obscure' and fascinating» (Girard et al., 2003) [2]. An obscurity, or difficulty and intricacy,

[1] Vattimo himself was very determined in finding this interpretative opening: "Everything depends on an effort to be faithful to the basic purpose of Heidegger's philosophy, even against Heidegger himself" (Vattimo, 2010, p. 81).

[2] Girard also confronted or made reference to Heidegger in other works, such as René Girard, "Peter's Denial and the Question of Mimesis" (1982).

which is of course not just a matter of Heidegger's inadequacy; according to our first hypothesis, we shall nonetheless consider it as a temporary result, as the unsatisfying way he found to deal with complex philosophical problems for which there was no adequate language, yet.

According to Girard, Heidegger was right to take this perilous path; he did actually «work back towards the sacred», rediscovering «certain elements relating to the many meanings of the sacred by examining the philosophical vocabulary» (Girard et al., 2003). He was nevertheless also convinced that the obscurity and often paradoxical formulations that Heidegger had been somehow forced to adopt as his distinctive style were the price he had to pay both to the relative novelty and thoroughness of the attempt, but also and at the same time a consequence of his resolute negation of every possible valour to Christian philosophy, or rather wisdom[3]. Should one attempt to re-read Heidegger from a mimetic perspective, Girard claimed, his texts would become crystal clear (Girard et al., 2003, p. 273)[4]. Inspired by such ambitious and somewhat arrogant foresight, we will proceed adopting an attitude informed by Girard's intuitions; still, I will try not to fall prey of Girard's radical enthusiasm and not to disregard altogether the intrinsic value of a philosophical approach. In other words, forty or so years later, we must re-read Heidegger, not so much within the radical 'anthropological' perspective enabled by the revelation of the victimage mechanism, yet taking it seriously. Girard, playfully for sure, might have been amused by the rhetorical jest of 'ending philosophy', going a step further Heidegger, which had notoriously been trapped himself in a similar mimetic rivalry with Nietzsche, the *Überwinder* of metaphysics[5]. Yet, instead of falling prey to such amusement, my aim is to push further the knowledge that Heidegger and then Girard have offered by translating the concepts they crafted into

[3] For further enquiries into the related issue of Christian wisdom, see Emanuele Antonelli, "Mimesis and attention. On Christian sophrosyne" (2018).

[4] Again, I dare say such thing because I find myself in the good company of my mentor Gianni Vattimo, who – as Italy's most prominent interpreter of Heidegger – made clear that such was the role Girard's Mimetic Theory played in his own philosophical endeavor. Ex multis, «I am now describing, although not in merely autobiographical terms, the way in which I came to recognize a "completion" of Heidegger in Girard, and also to reinterpret Girard through Heidegger», Id. "Heidegger and Girard", 8, emphasis added.

[5] See Girard, Things hidden, 267: "Heidegger […] is really helping to produce the decisive break he talks about. But his work also operates as a powerful obstacle to this break. He is under the impression that he himself can accomplish what will indeed be accomplished – but in a spirit entirely foreign to that of his philosophy".

one another, well aware that in the best scenario the result that I will be able to provide might raise some dust and shed some light on the fundamental issues at stake, but probably at the same time cover some meaningful and promising spot, with that very same dust: unconcealment as revelation might reveal but not without re-veiling, too.

Let us go back to the source and essential origin of philosophy, reading Heidegger reading myths, through a Girardian lens. The most promising excerpt to start from is a text where Heidegger comments on the myth of Œdipus and on Sophocles' *Œdipus Rex*, one if the not the most relevant case-study in Mimetic Theory[6]. Heidegger is expanding on one of the four fundamental oppositions through which Greek philosophy has thought Being, i.e. the struggle between Being and seeming (Heidegger, 2000)[7], when he calls into question the figure and peripeties of Œdipus.

> Œdipus, who at the beginning is the saviour and lord of the state, in the brilliance of glory and the grace of the gods, is hurled out of this seeming. This seeming is not just Œdipus' subjective view of himself, but that within which the appearing of his Dasein happens. In the end, he is unconcealed in his Being as the murderer of his father and the defiler of his mother. The path from this beginning in brilliance to this end in horror is a unique struggle between seeming (concealment and distortion) and unconcealment (Being). The city is besieged by what is concealed in the murder of the former king, Laius. With the passion of one who stands in the openness of brilliance and who is a Greek, Œdipus goes to unveil what is concealed. In doing so, he must, step by step, place himself into an unconcealment that in the end he can endure only by gouging out his own eyes – that is, by placing himself outside all light, letting the veil of night fall around him – and then

[6] René Girard himself and several authors directly or indirectly related to Girard have applied mimetic theory to the myth of Œdipus bringing forward such clear and irrefutable results that should by now have become common sense. Besides René Girard's extended commentary in Violence and the Sacred ( 1977), see one of the most thorough of these attempts, by Sandor Goodhart, "'Lestas Ephaske': Oedipus and Laius' Many Murderers" (Spring 1978), and the (re-)collection edited by Mark R. Anspach, René Girard, Œdipus Unbound: Selected Writings on Rivalry and Desire (2004).

[7] In Chapter Four, Heidegger also expands on the oppositions between Being and Becoming, Being and Thinking and Being and the Ought. Heidegger is here working to deconstrue these oppositions, as he considers them a wrong way to make sense of Being; they count as a first step in the history of its oblivion. I am not willing to reinstate them, but trying to make sense of them from a different vantage point, and leveraging on that Christian wisdom that Heidegger refused.

> by crying out, as a blind man, for all doors to be flung open so that such a man may become revealed to the people s the man who he is. But we should not see Œdipus only as the human being who meets his downfall; in Œdipus we must grasp that form of Greek Dasein in which this Dasein's fundamental assion ventures into what is wildest and most far-flung: the passion for the unveiling of Being – that is, the struggle over Being itself. (Heidegger, 2000, p. 122).

Nothing could be more revealing: according to Girard, one thing is for sure, Œdipus is not guilty. He is the victim of a scapegoating process, the spot on which the sacred, the victimage mechanism, performs its organizational closure; he is innocent – maybe not entirely innocent, but surely innocent of the accusations that have been repeated over and over again. None of this appears in Heidegger's words, not even the slightest doubt. On the contrary, he states that Œdipus is "unconcealed in his Being the murderer of his father and the defiler of his mother". Most interestingly, such is the case that Heidegger chooses to exemplify a relevant phase in the *historial* struggle between Being and seeming, between unconcealment and appearance.

Let us recall what the historial struggle between Being and seeming is, according to the Einfährung. Heidegger is here recollecting the evolution of the relationship between these two fundamental notions, by arguing that only through the very same evolution of Greek thought, the two concepts slowly slipped away one from another. In the beginning, Being is one and only with its appearance: that is the claim Heidegger put forward when struggling to find the best translation for physis. The pre-Socratic thinkers did not focus on nature, at least not in the sense that we give to this, Latin, word both nowadays and when Heidegger was writing. Physis is what «emerges from itself (for example, the emergence, the blossoming, of a rose), the unfolding that opens itself up, the coming-into-appearance in such unfolding, and holding itself and persisting in appearance – in short, the emerging-abiding sway» (Heidegger, 2000, p. 15)[8]. Being is physis and physis is what persists in appearance. Only later,

> only with the sophists and Plato was seeming explained as, and thus reduced to, mere seeming. At the same time, Being as idea was elevated to a supersensory realm. The chasm, *khorismos*, was torn open between the merely apparent beings here below and the real Being somewhere up there. Christian doctrine then established itself in this chasm, while at the same time reinterpreting the Below as the

[8] Emphasis added.

> created and the Above as the Creator, and with weapons thus reforged, it set itself against antiquity [as paganism] and distorted it. And so, Nietzsche is right to say that Christianity is Platonism for the people (Heidegger, 2000, p. 111).

First and foremost, we might want to notice that, as imputed by Girard, Heidegger does not take into serious consideration[9] that Christian wisdom which allowed Girard to unconceal the *things hidden since the foundation of the world*: those things hidden that are to be unconcealed, freed from the seeming[10], even if in a rather different way than Heidegger might have envisaged. We are dealing with the same issue Heidegger was struggling with, except that he did so by overlooking, and even scorning Christianity. Girard did not. Following Girard on this might mean going against Heidegger, but only insofar as it is necessary to find the way out of this particular *Holzweg*.

By abiding to the traditional false accusation towards Œdipus, Heidegger is misunderstanding, in the good company of most of the history of Western thought, Œdipus vicissitudes, Sophocles' take on it, and the Christian wisdom that he disdains,11 but also disproving part of his own argument about the very struggle between seeming and Being. Since Œdipus is (or taking seriously the hypothesis that, both in truth and according to Sophocles, he might be) innocent, his Being, his unconcealment surely cannot be that of «being the murderer of his father and the defiler of his mother». How much of Heidegger's argument should fall in order to make this right? What does this wrong tell us about the notions in question, i.e., Being, seeming, unconcealment, *aletheia*?

Heidegger tells us that Œdipus was «the saviour and lord of the state, in the brilliance of glory and the grace of the gods» and that he was then «hurled out of this seeming». Once we get out of the illusion of the mythic

[9] A similar take is to be found in Anthony W. Bartlett, "A Flight of God: M. Heidegger and R. Girard" (2003), especially p. 1105: "Once this pattern [penetrating to an abyssal experience of the victim] is conceded, it becomes possible to read Heidegger progressively in Girardian terms, to deconstruct his own thought in the key of violence».

[10] Such is Girard's well-known hypothesis, that Gianni Vattimo refined considering Heidegger to be an active and conscious participant in the history of revelation; « "I would suggest that Heidegger's philosophy is (interpretable as) a sort of philosophical, more or less conscious, transcription of the Judeo-Christian revelation" ( 2010, p. 80). Yet, it's also Vattimo's understanding that, at least at the level of the subjective and «explicit self-interpretation», Heidegger did not take notice of such involvement. He was not willing to take part into the business of revealing things hidden and yet he did, volens nolens (Vattimo, 2010, p. 80).

[11] «At more than one point one feels Heidegger's real hostility towards Christianity», notes Anthony W. Bartlett, undertaking an endeavor similar to ours, (2003, p. 1105).

telling on systemic events, we might want to take seriously the Girardian hypothesis that systemic effects work in both directions, raising up and then hurling down those who find themselves in the right/wrong place at the right/wrong time. Indeed, while wrestling with the struggle between Being and seeming, Heidegger says that «what appears, what is gives itself an aspect, *dokei*. *Doxa* means aspect – namely, the respect in which one stands. If the aspect, corresponding to what emerges in it, is an eminent one, then *doxa* means brilliance and glory» (Heidegger, 2000, p. 108). Heidegger is willing to free the notion of *doxa*, at least in its original meaning, from the bad reputation it eventually acquired. On the contrary, from a Girardian vantage point, it surely is clear that if *doxa* is the consideration and respect in which one stands, both the eminent one and the disgraceful one, both glory and ignominy might be the result of a mimetic systemic effect and thus should alarm the wise one, as something legitimately different from truth, and Being.

Still, following Heidegger's line of reasoning, we must infer that Œdipus' seeming was an eminent one, brilliant and glorious whilst his Being that of a murderer and defiler of his own mother. To clear out what this condition would have amounted to, in his reading of Greeks thought or way of being, Heidegger adds that «to glorify, to bestow and demonstrate regard, is, in Greek, to *place into the light* and thereby to provide constancy, Being. Glory, for the Greeks, is not something additional that someone may or may not receive; it is the highest manner of Being» (Heidegger, 2000, p. 112)[12].

Here is the matter to carefully focus on. Heidegger is attributing glory and Being to the condition of being "placed into the light", regardless of the quality of such light, intuiting that the organizational closure of mimetic events, the spotlight of the sacred, works anyway, regardless of any mundane perception[13]. To be is to emerge into the light and persist in the appearance – to be, is to be seen. Œdipus had attained the highest manner of Being, by being glorified, which is to say by standing in the light; being glorified as king, as *rex*, as he who stands, and holds, and bears, is secondary. Likewise, according to the Girardian reading, to be king is one and the same thing as preparing to being hurled out of the centre of attention – as *sacred king* (Simonse, 2018). To be seen is to set the condition to be hurled out of seeming.

Does this entail any ontological implications? Is there a difference between being hurled out of glory and being hurled out of seeming; between

[12] Emphasis added.

[13] For further investigation into this "logic of collective phenomena", see Emanuele Antonelli, "The Child of Fortune. Envy and the Constitution of Social space" (2013).

losing their glory, and losing their being? Besides, how can Being become nothing, by being hurled out of seeming? According to Heidegger, «the path from this beginning in brilliance to this end in horror is a unique struggle between seeming (concealment and distortion) and unconcealment (Being)» (Heidegger, 2000, p. 112), a struggle which would make the very idea of Being as constancy and persistency crumble. Instead, it is possible that this struggle is not apropos of Œdipus but, as Heidegger himself tells later, without noticing that he let the myth trap him, apropos that by which «the city is besieged», that which «is concealed in the murder of the former king, Laius». The difference, which slipped away from Heidegger's attention, is that it is not Œdipus who was besieging the city, because he is not the murder of the former king, Laius. It is true that «with the passion of one who stands in the openness of brilliance and who is a Greek, Œdipus goes to unveil what is concealed», nevertheless Heidegger does not see that Œdipus does not gouge out his own eyes to place himself outside the light, letting the veil of night fall around him, to endure the unconcealment in which he had entered, nor is he thus revealed to the people as the man he is. On the contrary, he is taken down by the very concealment that he was trying to unveil – the misrecognized mimetic mechanism that took Laius down, too; he is not hurled *out* of this seeming but *by* this seeming. He, who dwelt in the brilliance of glory, is then swallowed by that very same glorifying event/process that had made him eminent in the first place. Mimesis had brought him forward, giving him the role he enjoyed, both in the city and in glory, and mimesis brought him down and out of being. The city still is besieged, not by Œdipus but by the sacred mechanism that makes beings be, in accordance with the ancient Logos of violence.

Missing this means missing it all. No wonder everything appears to be upside down; all the relations and struggles between being and seeming, between unconcealment and falsehood are blurred. Somehow it seems that Heidegger is caught in that very demonic destruction of all rank (Heidegger, 2000, p. 48-49), of all hierarchy (Girard, 2004, p. 164-165), that with some annoyance he was spotting around him.[14] Not surprisingly, since he hurled

[14] I am not referring to the destruction of all rank as in the Abbau of metaphysics envisaged and appreciated since Being and Time, but to what Heidegger label as demonic: «By now in those countries the predominance of a cross-section of the indifferent is no longer something inconsequential and merely barren but is the onslaught of that which aggressively destroys all rank and all that is world-spiritual, and portrays these as a lie. This is the onslaught of what we call the demonic [in the sense of the destructively evil]. There are many omens of the arising of this demonism, in unison with the growing perplexity and uncertainty of

out the Christian wisdom from the very beginning, and thus hindered himself from gaining a different perspective on the relation between seeming and unconcealment.

According to Girard, the paradoxes of Heidegger's attempts should disappear as soon as we re-read him according to Mimetic Theory, so let us see give it a chance, at least on this particular issue.

We might consider the unconcealment in which Œdipus places himself both as the spot of the organizational closure of the mimetic mechanism and as the unveiling of its systemic glory. Yet, these would be two different kinds of unconcealment: one, which would be tantamount to Being as the emerging-abiding sway, as the appearance which is not yet to be reduced nor explained away to mere seeming, and one which would count as Being, in opposition to seeming.

Let us see if we can find in the Girardian conceptual toolbox a way to make a meaningful translation of these two concepts. There is a passage in *Things hidden* where Girard puts forward a fascinating idea about what would be like to be in the situation that he describes as *originary*, where he says:

> I think that even the most elementary form of the victimage mechanism, prior to the emergence of the sign, should be seen as an exceptionally powerful means of creating a new degree of attention, the *first non-instinctual attention*. Once it has reached a certain degree of frenzy, the mimetic polarization becomes fixed on a single victim. After having been released against the victim, the violence necessarily abates, and silence follows the mayhem. This maximal contrast between the release of violence and its cessation, between agitation and tranquillity, creates the most favourable conditions possible for the emergence of this new attention. Since the victim is a common victim, it will be at that instant the focal point for all members of the community. Consequently, beyond the purely instinctual object, the alimentary or sexual object or the dominant individual, there is the cadaver of the collective victim, and this cadaver constitutes the first object for this new type of attention (Girard et al., 2003, p. 99).

Europe against it and within itself. One such omen is the disempowering of the spirit in the sense of its misinterpretation – a happening in the middle of which we still stand today», (Heidegger, 2000, p. 48-49).

Read in continuity with the *Introduction to metaphysics,* this excerpt brings a whole new perspective on Heidegger's text: *a-letheia*, which is unconcealment, is a character of Being, so close to its own essence to be more than a proxy and yet something distinguished. I claim that, should it be translated as non-instinctual attention[15], it might give us a lead to follow.

Œdipus is placed into the unconcealment, he is unconcealed in Being. Heidegger's attempts to make sense of his "*coming-into-appearance*" might find in Girard's notion a perfectly clear translation, coherent to Heidegger's own phenomenological ascendence.[16] What Girard is trying to describe by calling on a non-instinctual attention is the fact that from a certain point in history, the mimetic human being became able to pay attention to things in a totally unprecedented way, a way in which a thing might all of the sudden come up as *just* an object, as a *Gegenstand*, as a *Seiende*, a thing which is just there, a simply present thing, with the only one character *to be*. And such object as a simply present thing would thus require to be made sense of. We would have gained, *volens noles*, the possibility, and at the same time the need, to make sense of things that just were; to find their meaning. As amply argued in *Being and Time*, beings are not usually, nor first and mostly, perceived as things that are, just present, as *Vorhandenen* but as usable, as tools, as *Zuhandenen* already always inscribed in a grid of references. What Girard describes as non-instinctual attention might very well be described as the bracketing, as *epoché*, the suspension of the natural attitude towards the always already existing world: the main difference being that this was not just a choice nor only a technique to be mastered, but an event. *Aletheia* as unconcealment might then be a way to describe the condition according to which, instead of being immersed in nature, obscene, the object *as* object would come to the foreground, for us to stare at. According to Girard, it is because of the sacred, the self-organizing mechanism in which humanity has evolved and educated itself, suddenly, or through millenaries of analogous events, that we might have found ourselves staring at objects as objects, thus opening the realm of *aletheia*, the *Lichtung*. The object unconcealed, unveiled, the *alethes*, is the being (*Seiende*) forthcoming in the emerging-abiding sway, presenting itself to a non-instinctual, and in this sense transcendental, attention. Because

[15] It might also be translated as transcendence, or the awareness of nothing that according to Heidegger makes human beings intrinsically metaphysical. See also Duane Armitage, Philosophy's Violent Sacred. Heidegger and Nietzsche through Mimetic Theory (2021).

[16] «The primary scene of be[-ing] (ontology) is simultaneously a human event (anthropology)» (Bartlett, 2017, p. 125).

of the non-instinctual attention gained through and because of the Sacred, we would be confronted with things as objects, as beings, and by then find ourselves already in the approach that will lead to *metaphysics*.

Before getting ahead, of ourselves, we need to ask one more question: in the first place at least, could this being be *any*thing? Not according to Girard[17], to whom we need to go back, always paying attention to the myth.

According to Mimetic Theory, non-instinctual attention is the by-product of the victimage mechanism: it is the attention that persecutors paid to every victim-being-victimized and then to any and everything else. The event, or its endless repetition in the millenaries of our evolution, is what made humans become humans, it is so to say the essential origin of human beings. What does this entail? Well, it is nothing but a further confirmation that everything that Heidegger says about Being has something to do with the semantic constellation of the sacred. *A-letheia* is the unconcealment produced by the victim-being-victimized: it is the fact that all of a sudden, a culprit, a victim, emerges as the originary being. Being itself, on the other hand, is not the victim-being-victimized, but the process, the self-organizing mechanism that places the victim in the light and thus makes it be the victim.

**The semantic constellation of being**

Recollecting the originary scene of the victimization, we might find ourselves on the way to make room for more clarity. Should the sacred as a whole be what Heidegger is trying to refer to by the notion of Being, then we might reconsider the distinction between Being and being, between Being itself and the thing persisting in presence in a non-instinctual attention: Being (*Sein*) being what makes the single being (*Seiende*) be, i.e., appearing in the mode of presence. Being is the Sacred, the process that generates the spot, which in turn is the *aletheia*, the "there" of the being-there, which in the first place is the victim. Let us note, now, that according to Girard, just as to Heidegger, the difference between Being and beings, and likewise the difference between the Sacred mechanism and the victim, is obliterated, forgot – *méconnue*.

What does this entail in reading Heidegger's interpretation of the myth of Œdipus? In order to appreciate it, we need to clear out a missing theme: the myth of Œdipus only tells us of the swaying of Œdipus from two

[17] For a more comprehensive theory of mimetic intentionality, or attention, see Emanuele Antonelli, La mimesi e la traccia. Contributi per un'ontologia dell'attualità ( 2012, p. 115-125).

different ways of dwelling in the spotlight, the first being glory, the second being disgrace – a "child of fortune" after all.[18] Sophocles' tragedy, to which Heidegger is mindlessly referring, already put into light this seemingly imperceptible distinction – at least according to Mimetic Theory. But it is only thanks to the Christian revelation that we can read Œdipus' myth as the story of a being (the-victim-to-be) being hurled out of the previous seeming – the glorious one, the spot of the (sacred) king – to the second seeming – the mere appearance of the dead body of the victim-already-victimized; on the premises of false accusations.

Unconcealment is not something that is lost on the way, yet, in accordance with Heidegger's extraordinarily sensitivity to the effects of this process, on the aftermath of unconcealment we can distinguish between the false accusations that lead to the fall of Œdipus and Being as the process that finds on Œdipus its organizational closure. Let us try to restate this passage. Both as king and as victim, Œdipus always dwells in the unconcealment, his relation to Being is constant, he is the object of a non-instinctual attention, that very special intentionality that interdividual mimetic events make possible. Yet, by Christian wisdom only, as innocent victim he is recognized as something different than what he seems: a culprit! Thus, in the history of Being, Being is at the same time and in the first place both unconcealment, *aletehia* and seeming. Later, when dealing with the nature of the accusations – which Platonism intuited without fully grasping, – *aletheia* will make place for *orthotes*, correctness and the distinction between Being and seeming will be sealed – *pace Heidegger*. Œdipus is at least innocent of the accusations of being responsible – which in Greek is said *aitios* – of the *miasma.* Is Heidegger deconstructing the distinction between Being and Seeming or is he failing to notice that Œdipus' innocence makes his seeming legitimately questionable - and thus the very distinction between seeming and Being necessary?

We can make an even more originary observation because we can distinguish the mere appearance of the corpse, which is simply present, from Being, which never stops lighting up the scene and kindling the non-instinctual attention. Also, we might reinterpret absolute *presence* as an essential quality of Being qua *ousia* – as opposed to thinking, becoming, and *seeming* (Heidegger, 2000, p. 208-210)[19] – as the mere being-there of the corpse, of the cadaver of the victim, of the trace of the victimage event, the corpse as the present-at-hand, lying-at-hand, *sub-stans*. Such *hupokeimenon* would easily

[18] Sophocles, Œdipus Rex, line 1080.

[19] See footnote 10.

be the forerunner of the later interpretation of being as object, as *Gegenstand*, that which stands against, in the light of the non-instinctual attention.

Focusing on the victim, on the object, on the trace substantivized, would entail entering metaphysics, which according to Heidegger is tantamount to an oblivion of Being itself and of the ontological difference between Being and beings. Should one want to be pedantic, we might find that the word 'sacred' is exposed to – or is exposing, by keeping trace of it – a related ambiguity: being normally used as a noun, a substantive, it is construed as the past tense of a verb, which does not exist. Sacred is thus both the residue of the action of the mechanism that Girard described in the first place as victimizing and the whole process itself, violence being its fundamental essence. The Sacred is what makes the victim sacred, just as Being is what makes the single being, be[20]. Metaphysics is the approach that makes out of the victim the *fundamentum inconcussum* and thus construes God as the supreme being. To make the dead the very fundament of everything that appears is the original sin of metaphysics. To forget the difference between Being and being is just as to misrecognize the difference between the Sacred and what has been made *sacer* – sacrificed. With one difference: to distinguish Sacred and the sacrificed is more than to distinguish between Being and being.

Indeed, to recollect what has been gained so far: Being is the unconcealment, the coming (in the emerging-abiding sway) of the thing into the non-instinctual attention, and thus has intrinsically to do with *aletheia*, the 'there' where the being-there of the simply-present-thing occurs. Nonetheless, and only after Christian wisdom was made available, such thing can come to the fore in its rightful, orthotetic Being – as what it is (innocent for instance); or as seeming – thus as what it seems but is not (a culprit).

To overlook the difference between a guilty, seeming *aitios*, and an innocent victim is a misleading path to follow, even if the premises of Heidegger's analysis are correct.

We shall now look at this issue from a different perspective. Heidegger says that the process through which Œdipus is hurled out of the previous seeming reveals him as the man he is, to the people. According to the Girardian reading of the myth, this sentence is again as revealing as it could be: the people to which Œdipus would be revealing himself as the culprit are in

[20] "Are – but this says: use violence as violence-doers" (Heidegger, 2000, p. 163). In the original German, it reads "Sind, dies sagt jedoch: als Gewalt-tätige Gewalt brauchen", which might be translated more literally as "Are – but this says: as actively situated in violence, they use violence". See Martin Heidegger, Einführung in die Metaphysik (1983, p. 162).

fact those very persecutors that by killing him (or gouging his eyes out and then expelling him out of the polis, which according to Heidegger is the very Da of the Dasein, thus that which makes the human being a human being (Heidegger, 2000, p. 162) made him appear as, seem the aitios, the responsible. From a post-Christ perspective, this is simply a false accusation. He might seemingly appear as the culprit – because of the rushed investigation of which Sophocles points out all the failings[21] – but in truth, he is not. Here happens the definitive distinction between Being and seeming, but also between Athens and Jerusalem: after Sophocles, no one could ever believe, in truth, that Œdipus was responsible of the miasma, because in all evidence he was not aware of the effect that his deeds – even if unworthy of any blame to his eyes – were yet to cause. Thus, Athens converted the polysemic notion of aitia distinguishing its two meanings, cause and guilt; but without doubting of the process. Science, as the Greek endeavour par excellence, was to set its first step by repeating the accusation under the guise of the categorization – category meaning in Greek, to bring 'down to the agora', in order to accuse – and then slowly detaching one from another, but without really putting in doubt the henceforth underlying metaphysical approach of reducing Being (the Sacred) to one cause[22], to one being (the culprit, victimized). Thus, we found ourselves in metaphysics, where being is just what can be categorized – πολλαχῶς, as Aristotle eventually has it. Jerusalem, on the other hand, would refuse to look for the aitios at all, undoing the very notion of guilt – then paradoxically so twistedly related to the Jewish culture. The Heraclitean Logos is this very reduction by way of violence of the opposites to the unity: a reduction of the many to the Hen-Panta (Heidegger, 1985, p. 71), the convergence of the non-instinctual attention of the many persecutors on the one seemingly culprit, the dead victim. The Johannine Logos is the victim being expelled, tortured, victimized and yet, as wholly other, persisting in its absence (Girard et al., 2003, p. 271).

Before getting to the conclusion, one last layer is to be added. According to Heidegger, «once beings are conceived as substances within a causal nexus, ipso facto, this nexus leads (in order to avoid […] infinite regress) to a terminus, in an unconditioned cause that is simultaneously substantive in

[21] See Goodhart, "'Lestas Ephaske': Oedipus and Laius' Many Murderers" (1978), for a thorough recollection of all the clues that Sophocles points to those who have eyes to see and are awakened to spot the difference between the beam light of Being and truth as orthotes.

[22] This might seem marginal to an English readership, but it is telling hat in Italian, 'thing' is said 'cosa' which comes from 'causa', both Latin and Italian for 'cause'.

the highest sense. God here is the *ens causa sui*» (Armitage, 2021, p. 58). If we read this synthesis through the emerging interpretative translation, we get that the accusative (as in accusation) nexus – the never ending, infinite regress of reciprocal accusations – leads to a terminus, the unconditioned cause that is the ultimate guilt, the only guilt that cannot be set upon someone else; the guilt that is simultaneously substantive in the highest sense, a substance, the corpse of the scapegoat. Thus, God is the *ens causa sui* in the sense that God is the one who accuses himself, the one who, just as in Heideggerian reading of Œdipus, gouges his own eyes out to punish himself. Metaphysics is a trial ending with a victim (portrayed as) self-accusing, self-victimizing. This is why, in the ultimate possible sense, as Derrida put it, «deconstruction is justice» [23] because deconstructing metaphysics is deconstructing the false narrative of the self-accusation, self-substantive, victim.

Heidegger said that in order to sublate (*aufheben*) the old metaphysics and pass on to a non- or post- metaphysical thought, we would need a onto-historical thinking with which thinking up (*er-denken*) and anticipating (*vor-denken*) another beginning by remembering (*an-denken*) the first one, in the mode of the polemic explication (*Auseinandersetzung*). A thinking that would operate starting from the old metaphysics, understood and limited in its *Grund*, the truth of Being (Heidegger, 2014, p. 243). Heidegger would probably have not subscribed it, but Girard has provided exactly this new thought (even if he considers it post-philosophical all together): a polemic, inasmuch as mimetic, confrontation that could remember the very beginning, the scapegoating event, thinking it up in new terms, anticipating a new way of making sense – being the ultimate translation of Being 'condition of possibility of meaning'[24] – by *urbanizing* again not only the Heideggerian province (Habermas, 1983) but the Christian Logos itself.

[23] Jacques Derrida, "Force of Law: The 'Mystical Foundation of Authority," in D. Cornell, M. Rosenfeld & D. G. Carlson (eds.), Deconstruction and the Possibility of Justice (New York & London: Routledge, 1992), 35. See also Andrew J. McKenna (2011).

[24] See also Armitage, Philosophy's Violent Sacred: "Beyng is the condition that enables things to be both intelligible and meaningful to us" (2021, p. 46). Beyng translates late Heidegger's Seyn, an attempt to focus on Being beyond its metaphysical reduction to whatness, or essence, in other words beyond the oblivion of the metaphysical difference between beings and Being.

Indeed, this is the last issue to be faced: the non-instinctual attention poses the fundamental problem of meaning[25] to those experiencing it. Suspending the natural attitude meant, in the first place, to lose the immediateness of *Zuhandenheit*, an event and an experience which thus called and have been calling ever since for an active meaning-making approach. The Sacred, which Heidegger is trying to tackle by rethinking the Greek, Heraclitean logos, was a way of *collecting* against the victim, a making-sense by reducing the many to a (portrayed as) *ens causa sui* granting unity: in Girardian terms, it might be defined as an *interdividual mimetic self-organizing meaning making process*. Such *Being* is receding[26] because it is in the process of being wholly *aufgehoben* by the Christian Logos, a collecting procedure aspiring to making sense by uniting in faith, and conscience, always *with* and never *against*[27]. In other words, a collecting which is not self-organizing, nor violent. Thus, Girard has also cleared away those misunderstandings that lead Heidegger into thinking that a new beginning might have had the aspect of a new god, to experience genuinely and creatively, but that in the end seemed, not surprisingly from the vantage point we have conquered, a lot too *collective*, mindless and violent to be new at all. The *Weg* is eventually open.

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[25] As pointed out by John D. Caputo, ever since his Habilitation (1915), Heidegger had located the meaning of Being in Dasein itself. Here it is just about posing that the place of meaning is not in the Dasein but between Daseins. See John D. Caputo, Heidegger and Aquinas: An Essay on Overcoming Metaphisycs, (1982, p. 41).

[26] For the interpretation of Christianity as a sort of sacred receding, see Marcel Gauchet, Luc Ferry, Le religieux après la religion (2004) and also Gianni Vattimo, After Christianity (2002).

[27] Thus, in continuity with Armitage (see footnote 41), we might conclude saying that the Being of Metaphysics is to the Sacred what Beyng is to Christianity.

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# The "lengthy affair" of mytho-poetic education: Plato's myths, Heidegger's hermeneutics, and learning with(out) violence

**Abstract:** This article retrieves ancient and modern perspectives on the status and role of myth in education by revisiting Plato's critique of myth in the light of recent scholarship and spotlighting Plato's so-called "allegory of the cave," particularly the latter's (in)famous interpretation by Martin Heidegger. Reviving the question of myth in the philosophy of education through engaging Plato and Heidegger's mythical elements, the paper provides a more extensive background to recent deliberations on mytho-poetic curriculum theory and the hermeneutics of education.

**Keywords:** Plato, Plato's Cave, Myth, Heidegger, Hermeneutics, Education, Mytho-Poetic

> "In fact, it is possible that the world of myth…
> will open up a completely different hermeneutical problematic."
> (Gadamer, 2007, p.140)

## Introduction

In the beginning was the word: μῦθος, "myth." At one of the original cornerstones of Western philosophy in general, and the philosophy of education in particular, namely in Plato's *Republic,* "myth" was named and critiqued as a problematic kind of narrative discourse and objectionable heritage of stories and teachings which could only partially be allowed into

the ideal educational curriculum with great caution, heavy censorship, and even secrecy and purifying rituals, all to be overseen by a philosophical elite (Plato, 1997, 377b-378e). Even the primordial bedrocks of ancient Hellenic culture and education, Homer and Hesiod, were not to be spared. Prefacing his critique of myths and their popular makers and tellers (poets and women), Socrates insisted with divine reference on the indispensability of discussing the ideal philosophically-oriented education in which mythical stories become an issue: "Then, by god, Adeimantus, I said, we mustn't leave it out, even if it turns out to be a somewhat lengthy affair… Come, then, and just as if we had the leisure to make up stories [μύθοι], let's describe in theory. [λόγος] how to educate our men" (Plato, 1997, 376d)[1]. The ensuing discussion of myth did indeed turn out to be a "lengthy affair": the dialogue on μῦθοι and their making, telling, and censoring (μυθοποίησις, μυθολογία) takes up the remainder of the second book of the *Republic* and extends deep into the third; moreover, the problematization of μῦθος which Plato's writing historically inaugurated would become one of the "lengthiest affairs" of all, one which persists to this day in the tension of interpreting the relationship between μῦθος and λόγος, or translating and understanding such to be between Myth and Philosophy in the wake of Plato's thinking and wording. This lengthy affair could not have unfolded otherwise by virtue of its original qualifications, namely, Plato's Socrates' own admission that mythical stories are "false, on the whole, though they have some truth in them" (Plato, 1997, 377a), his ultimate allowance of censored myths in the education of the πόλις, and the abundance of myths, mythical references, and mythical settings — both traditional ones and creatively, pointedly authored ones — with which Plato's dialogues philosophize. Moreover, in the seventh book of the *Republic,* when Socrates proposes to "compare the effect of education and of the lack of it on our nature" (Plato, 1997, 514a), he proceeds to philosophize through a story which, although he does not call it such, is in Platonic terms as well as for most modern frameworks recognizably a myth: the myth of the Cave.

Plato's Cave (presented in *Republic* 514a–520a), one of the perpetually transmitted and most revisited myths in the history of philosophy, is virtually

[1] "ἴθι οὖν, ὥσπερ ἐν μύθῳ μυθολογοῦντές τε καὶ σχολὴν ἄγοντες λόγῳ παιδεύωμεν τοὺς ἄνδρας." The "making up" or "telling" of "stories" which Socrates says per this popular translation, "μύθῳ μυθολογοῦντές," is a construction which emphasizes the particularity of speaking in/of μῦθος, and the "describing education in theory" is a rather hefty translation of "λόγῳ παιδεύωμεν," which one classic translation renders as "educate in our discourse," i.e., in the philosophers' λόγος (Adams, 1902, 376d).

universally referred to as the "allegory of the cave," as if it were somehow safe from the realm of myth. However, in *Republic* Book II and elsewhere, Plato explicitly rejects the allegorical interpretation of myths. He seems to imply that myths, including those allowed through philosophical-pedagogical censor, are to be conceived, told, received, and "let be" in some different way proper to them as μῦθοι, as stories of a peculiar type and charge. More than two millennia later, something along these lines was intuited or hinted at in one of the most inspirited and controversial modern endeavors to (re) interpret Plato's Cave, namely that of the 20th-century German philosopher and educator Martin Heidegger. Heidegger revisited Plato's Cave in a number of lectures which he continuously re-read, revised, and cross-cited. In the edition of his *On the Essence of Truth* lectures on Plato's Cave notably revised and delivered during his term as Rector of the University of Freiburg in 1933-34, Heidegger devoted part of the introductory session to emphasizing that what is "known by the name of 'the allegory of the cave'"[2] is in fact "the telling of a μῦθος," and that "the myth of the 'allegory of the cave' [*Mythos vom «Höhlengleichnis»*]" is "the single center of Platonic philosophizing," for "Plato always speaks in μῦθος when his philosophizing wants to say something essential with the greatest intensity" (Heidegger, 2010, pp. 97-98). Prefacing his entry into Plato's Cave, Heidegger remarked (2010, p. 97): "Here we also have an opportunity to see how, in later Greek philosophy, μῦθος once again thrusts itself forward besides the λόγος that is appropriate to philosophy. This can only be a sign that we stand in a decisive transition here, *decisive for two thousand years*." Heidegger's insistence that Plato's educational Cave must be appreciated precisely as a myth is significant not only within the context of his own repeated grappling with Plato's Cave and the notion of myth (Arnold, 2022), but even more so from the perspective of how Heidegger's interpretation of the Cave takes up the imperative for which Socrates originally castigated μῦθος, while recognizing and allowing

[2] Question-worthy throughout the English translations of Heidegger's *On the Essence of Truth lectures* (Heidegger, 2010; Heidegger 2013), particularly the 1933-34 edition in which "myth" is evoked, is the rendering of *Gleichnis* as "allegory." Perhaps the translators wished to avoid the Biblical association of the common translation as "parable," and were also conscious that rendering *Gleichnis* as "simile" loses the connection with the story quality of myth, with simile's concern of "likeness" furthermore becoming problematic in the context of Platonic metaphysics. At any rate, nowhere does Heidegger use the term "*Allegorie,*" and even "*Gleichnis*" is often bracketed with scare quotes. Additionally, the translators take note of Heidegger's rich wordplay with Geschichte as "history" and "story," but more often elect to go with the former.

for preserving its "partial truth": the imperative of truthful, philosophically-attuned, ontologically transformative education.

Between Plato and Heidegger, the essence of the visionary notion of education unfolding with(in) the mythical Cave, or the Cave as μῦθος, becomes a question of interpretation, a hermeneutic question *par excellence*. The present essay revisits the question of myth and education with Plato, Heidegger, and contemporary "mytho-poetic" curricular theories to highlight the promises and challenges of mythical education, which Plato, in the end, did not dare to expel from the πόλις, which Heidegger retrieved in philosophical-hermeneutic enactment, and which more recent contributions have taken up in conversation on the hermeneutics of education.

## Going through stories: the hermeneutics of myth between Plato and Heidegger

In recent decades, the relationship between μῦθος and λόγος, or between myth and philosophy, both synoptic and diachronic, has been repeatedly revisited and reinterpreted by a diverse range of scholars operating within widely differing disciplines and traditions. In search of an original, cumulative, comparative, or deconstructed meaning — or lack thereof — of the word and notion "myth" in the wake of the archaic Greek μῦθος, some scholars have traced the decisive inception back to Plato. In contrast, others have denounced the study of "myth," including even in the ancient Hellenic context, as an ideological chimera. Between numerous "theories of myth," whether those advocating, denying, or claiming merely to contextualize their defined matter at hand, "myth" has since Plato come to name, at the very least, a violent history[3].

[3] In a hermeneutic sense, "violence" always names a tension of horizons: on the one hand, a "violent interpretation" is one that coerces a text to reinforce or collapse against one interpretation or any other interpretations, denying not only the text but other interpretations their own voice (Wierciński, 2019, 293). On the other hand, as Heidegger (1997, 137-138) articulated on one occasion, any authentic interpretation that goes beyond reproducing what has already been said necessarily uses "violence" in that it "drives" and "takes out" significance which is not immediately apparent or was even left unsaid, therefore involving a certain "going against" what the author and previous interpreters might have seen themselves as saying. In the case of the history of the interpretation of myth, this violence is abundant and sharp, ranging from aggressive denials of the very existence of myth or the renunciation of whatever myth might have to say in any case, to numerous and grand "theories of myth" claiming to identify a singular, universal hermeneutic key that "explains" myth once and for all. By thematizing "violence," hermeneutics thematizes the horizons of understanding and interpreting and

According to the meticulous, seminal philological studies of Luc Brisson (1998; 2004), Plato can be seen as the first to definitively, systematically "coin" μῦθος as meaning a story, a narrative discourse, which conveys a community's traditions, values, and worldview. In the Republic passages under consideration here, Plato particularly criticized the traditional reservoir of Greek myths for being violent and impious (Plato, 1997, 378b). Brisson interprets that Plato defined myth while consistently grouping such demarcated stories under a common evaluative set of five critical characteristics: myths (1) convey information that is unverifiable and "beyond"; (2) are subject to change over the course of transmissions and renditions, leading to inconsistencies and anachronistic, seemingly scandalous details; (3) are presented in the (often anthropomorphic) images and behaviors of the sensible world; (4) take the form of storytelling, which incites action and reaction, not deduction or argumentation; and accordingly (5) affect behavior and beliefs, not intellect and reason, through a participational style of *mimesis* that is analogous to magical incantations and play (Brisson, 1998; 2004). Brisson, therefore, contends that when Plato speaks of and in μῦθος, he is simultaneously engaged in outlining and critiquing a form of narrative that is inferior to the λόγος of philosophy but which nevertheless plays "for ordinary people a role similar to that of an intelligible form for the philosopher," hence Plato's allowance that certain (philosophically censored) myths can "in both ethics and politics… take the place of philosophical discourse" (Brisson, 1998, pp. 116-17). That myths may substitute for philosophical λόγος as long as they go through philosophical crafting is the other side of the coin of Plato's rejection of allegorical interpretations of myths and his coining of μυθολογία, "mythology." According to Brisson, by μυθολογία Plato meant the telling of a myth that has been preliminarily subjected to "fabrication," "elaboration," "interpretation," and "inquiry." (Brisson, 1998, pp. 147-152). Yet, the admission that "mythology" is to be left as it is, "spared" still as stories (μύθοι), and not quasi-philosophically mobilized into a repository of elements for accounting and "translating" into other discourse(s), discloses the productive ambiguity of Plato's "determining" of myth(-ology). For all of its faults, myth conveys matters to the soul. How myth does so, takes philosophy to appreciate, or summons philosophy to interpret, yet such rationalizing and intellectualizing despoils the dynamic story-quality of myth that already speaks to us before philosophical framing.

cultivates a sensitivity to the original meaningfulness of a text or phenomenon which lends to the interpretation of meaning.

In effect, without myth, the possibility for educating people — or for "something," as Plato says analogously of artistic works, "to strike their eyes and ears like a breeze that brings good health from a good place, leading them unwittingly, from childhood on, to resemblance, friendship, and harmony with the beauty of reason" (Plato, 1997, 401c-d) — would be absent from the city except for its ostensibly "post-mythological" philosophical elite. When it comes to the realms of ethics and politics, Brisson suggests that the thinking at the core of Plato's "sparing" of myth is that myth is the first persuasion in the direction of philosophical education, the "only alternative to violence," which nevertheless "allows, within the human soul, for the preeminence of reason" (Brisson, 1998, 121).

The latter quotation is altogether question-provoking. Given the above rediscovery of Plato's "coining" of μῦθος *vis-à-vis* λόγος, how does myth allow for the "preeminence of reason?" Did it not follow that myth is an inferior substitute for reasoning, a mere persuasive storytelling employed before or in the absence of philosophical education? Does not Plato's rejection of allegory preclude that there is any "reason" to be "deciphered" within myth as if λόγος were merely an appendage to some truth inherently coded in any μῦθος? Moreover, why does Brisson (1998, p. 121) instate such a rigid division between myth and education when Plato in the *Republic* deliberates "mythology" precisely for education?

Myth is not only a lexeme which Plato uses and delineates in certain ways to be deciphered by philologists, but is a fundamental dimension of Plato's philosophizing as such. This affirmation is the testimony brought forth not only by the sheer saturation of the dialogues with myths and mythical references (whose significance cannot be anachronistically reduced to some "cultural hangover"), but also by the perspectives of recent Plato scholarship. The mythical immersion of Plato's dialogues as whole echoes what Benjamin Jowett once remarked on the Timaeus: "We cannot tell (nor could Plato himself have told) where the figure or myth ends, and the philosophical truth begins" (quoted in Murray, 1999, p. 251). As Penelope Murray points out in her contribution to the seminal volume *From Myth to Reason? Studies in the Development of Greek Thought,* "the dialogues themselves are stories… which also share some of the characteristics of his [Plato's] mythical narratives" (Murray, 1999, p. 260). If Brisson read Plato as allowing for the substitution of myth for philosophizing in the realms of ethics and politics, then more recent studies have cogently illustrated how Plato employed both traditional myths and his own μυθολογία or "philosophical myth" to preface, intertwine with, paraphrase, or substitute for supposedly inalienable philosophical

discourse[4]. Echoing Jowett's remark, Kathryn Morgan's milestone study *Myth and Philosophy from the Presocratics to Plato* submits that Plato leads us to "discover that, in the end, it is almost impossible to distinguish a sufficiently advanced philosophical myth from a philosophical theory. All language, even theoretical language, is a story that interprets reality" (Morgan, 2000, p. 14). Morgan's study introduces a hermeneutic breakthrough. In Plato, the arrangement of μῦθος and λόγος is not a stable contrast of universally opposite modes of discourse requiring only "bracketing" distinction. It is rather a dynamic interpenetration, whereby Plato's dialogues thematize the question of the limits of "rationalizing" language and bring into the relief the ceaseless ordeal of interpreting between story and theory, (re)telling and thinking. Mythology (μυθολογία) "must therefore take its place as an intimate and essential part of the Platonic philosophical project," or in the words of Morgan's conclusion, "*Mythos* is the condition of the world we inhabit" (Morgan, 2000, pp. 289, 291). In the wake of Morgan's underscoring of the "dynamic interdependence" of Platonic myth and philosophy, Omid Tofighian's *Myth and Philosophy in Platonic Dialogues* speaks of their "mutual scaffolding" (Tofighian, 2016, p. xii), and explores how the diversity of Plato's myths, their forms, functions, and interpretative contexts, and the reflectivity provoked in distinguishing them, discloses the imperative of "polymythic hermeneutics": "A hermeneutics appropriate for Plato's use of myth accepts different stories, encourages multiple forms of interpretation, and allows various definitions to modify, change, merge, and transform… within an inclusive horizon that accommodates unconstrained narratives voicing many different things" (Tofighian, 2016, pp. 217, 218).

These emerging retrievals of Plato's "mythological philosophizing" are decisively hermeneutic in the Gadamerian sense of bringing the search for descriptions and definitions back into reflecting on understanding and interpreting as transformative events. Revitalizing the dynamism of Plato's thinking and writing, μῦθος and μυθολογία are transformed from a question of substantive definitions and competing demarcations into a thematizing of understanding of the horizons of interpreting what is happening when one speaks of or in myth. It is in this sense that we will now turn to discern how Martin Heidegger's interpretation of Plato's Cave "rediscovers" a vision of mythical education as a happening of truth (*Geschehen der Wahrheit*).

[4] In addition to the studies discussed in particular below, see: Plato, 2004; Collobert, 2012.

This brings us to Heidegger's introduction to his 1933-34 lectures on Plato's Cave, in the final lines of which he emphasized to his students:

> The μῦθος speaks of a story—and in order to understand it, it is essential that we actually go through the story ourselves… Therefore, for you, authentic understanding of the μῦθος does not depend, in the first instance, upon whether you understand Greek well or badly or at all; it does not depend on whether you know much or little or nothing at all about Plato; rather, it depends on this alone: whether you are ready to take seriously the fact that you are sitting here in the lecture hall of a German university—that is, whether something unavoidable, something that has an enduring effect, speaks to you in the story of the underground cave that is to be interpreted (Heidegger, 2010, p. 98).

In this opening appeal, Heidegger expresses an essential characteristic not only of his interpretation of Plato's Cave in particular, but of his post-*Being and Time* thinking and teaching in general, which he later formulated in his lecture *Time and Being* thusly: "The point is not to listen to a series of propositions, but rather to follow the movement of showing" (Heidegger, 1972, p. 2). Instead of imposing a strict analytical framework, Heidegger wants to engage in traveling through a story as it unfolds, in thinking along with a dynamic movement of shifting disclosures through which something more primordial than argumentative propositioning is happening to the reader as they understand themself with(in) the story. Heidegger's reading of Plato's Cave is, like the extensive close readings of philosophical and poetic texts which constituted much of his thinking and teaching in the 1930s, a hermeneutics in enactment (*Hermeneutik im Vollzug*). Heidegger repeatedly highlights this approach throughout his lectures on Plato's Cave: In the first part, he stresses that "This means that what is decisive is the whole course of the happening; our own Dasein should participate in completing this course, and should thus undergo movement itself" (Heidegger, 2010, p. 102); later on, posing the question of what the myth of the Cave reveals of the essential nature of being human, Heidegger reiterates: "We could not yet decide what man is (as viewed now from the allegory [*Gleichnis*] of the cave). This we can decide only if we participate in the entire '*story*'… So if man wants to know who he is, he *himself* must engage in the *movement* of these questions and become unsettled" (Heidegger, 2010, p. 136). According to Heidegger, only through such an attentive "adherence" to going through the mythical story-character of Plato's Cave can "we derive the fundamental character of philosophical Being from the allegory [*Gleichnis*]" (Heidegger, 2010, p. 143).

The conceptual groundwork of Heidegger's enacted hermeneutics is to be found in his fundamental-ontological analysis of understanding and interpreting in *Being and Time*, in his attempt to notionalize the "Historic-Happening of Being" or "Onto-History" (*Seynsgeschichte*) alongside his close poetic and philosophical readings over the 1930s, and in what scholars like Michael Erhmantraut and Iain Thompson have retrieved as Heidegger's envisioned "ontological revolution" of philosophic pedagogy[5]. Nevertheless, Heidegger's reading of Plato's Cave continues to be widely held to be a case of violent and untenable eisegesis that may be expunged through sensitive philology[6]. This predominant view of Heidegger's cave is mostly concerned with Heidegger's argument that the primordial Greek notion of truth, ἀλήθεια, as a dynamic happening of concealment, *Verborgenheit*, and unconcealment, *Unverborgenheit*, is subtly corrupted in Plato's Cave into the modern senes of correctness of representation — a claim which virtually all scholars deny. In his interpretation of Plato's Cave, however, Heidegger is also, or perhaps foremostly, showing that Plato's Cave myth, the movement of the story itself, unfolds, happens as precisely this truthful dynamic of disclosing and concealing.

One of the essential truths of the "fundamental character of philosophical Being from the *Glechnis*" that Heidegger sees disclosed in moving through the story of Plato's Cave myth is παιδεία, "education." Through the course of moving up and out of the cave, Heidegger interprets the Greek παιδεία to mean "education" in a more profound and authentic — ontological — sense than the modern concept. παιδεία is not "merely pouring knowledge into the unprepared soul as if it were a container held out empty and waiting" but is transformative of the soul, "leading us to the place of our essential being and accustoming us to it" (Heidegger, 1998, p. 167). This

[5] See Palmer, 1969; Thomson, 2002; Ehrmantraut, 2010.

[6] Eisegesis as reading preconceived notions into a text has its double in the "philological" presumption that there is already a preconceived, more or less established arrangement of fixed notions within the text that can be reliably, empirically extracted to disprove others. Wierciński (2019, 293) draws out the dynamic tension with exegesis as the reading of meaning out of a text which addresses and shapes a reader's intuitive feeling and critical interpreting, hence interpreting becomes with Heidegger an historic-happening (Geschichte, Geschehen), part of the "History of Being" (Seinsgeschichte) and with Gadamer the fusion of horizons (Horizontverschmelzung) in-between the interpreter and the text as an event of understanding. The tension between eisegesis and exegesis is itself a matter of interpreting, and it is this that Heidegger explicitly thematizes in his reading of Plato's Cave, even if he remains seen as ultimately invested in eisegesis.

"leading" and "accustoming" is a movement, a transformation, "an *innermost change in the Being of man*" (Heidegger, 2010, 157). Through the unfolding of the story of one's education, the human being takes on, and moves forth with, in the words of Andrzej Wierciński, the "ability to experience some specific existential tension that accompanies our constant discovery of the beautiful and very varied world," an "event that keeps a human being in a state of readiness for constant transformation" (Wierciński, 2019, pp. 324, 325). It is in this dynamic, happening experience of thinking through the story of one's educational journey that education promises knowledge, that is knowledge in Heidegger's words as "gaining a foothold and standpoint in the openness of things and their happening" (Heidegger, 2010, p. 182). Likewise, as Heidegger emphasizes, the escaped prisoner's return to those left at the bottom of the cave cannot end with conveying information to them but by making them go through the movement of the story themselves. The latter, Heidegger tells us, is the imperative of the philosopher-pedagogue.

Moreover, the violence that Plato (and not only Plato) saw as problematic in myths is curiously refracted in the plot of the Cave myth. The first prisoner who finds their way out of the cave did not do so voluntarily, but was rather forced to, at each step coerced to endure the pain of the blinding sights, bewildering realizations, and arduous climb into an unknown world that contrast the comfortable seating and flickering slideshow back down below. Yet, Heidegger insists that this violent act of forcing the prisoner to stand up is only the beginning: the whole journey up the different levels of the cave is a continued compulsion. This continued enacting of violence, as opposed to a singular act, becomes further charged when the liberated prisoner realizes that he, too, heading back into the cave, will have to force his fellows to make their ascent. Only at this stage is the prisoner "liberated" not only from the cave, but from the violence enacted upon him, which he too must employ to liberate. All along the way, violence is not simply exerted, but is responded to with endurance and courage. In parallel to this process, Heidegger emphasizes that the liberation of the prisoner is also the entire process, not one act or stage. Heidegger therefore speaks of the experience of the Cave as a "violent liberation and the highest obligation" (Heidegger, 2010, p. 162). When traversed as a story, this "violent liberation" underscored by Heidegger and inlaid by Plato in the cave myth, reveals its double side: the mythical story itself is the alternative to actual violence, and appreciation of endurance becomes a part of our being as we imagine ourselves to be going through the painful, unfamiliar, demanding ascent. In effect, what Heidegger calls the "violent liberation" at work in Plato's Cave myth is about

persistently compelling ourselves to challenge and ask about ourselves on the way of disclosure. This "violence" is not only or not so much an act that we resist or surrender to by committing to go through Plato's Cave, but a force to which we respond that leads us on a demanding journey that we undergo as the truthful story of our education's unsettling of ourselves. The liberation of gaining "access to beings" (Heidegger, 2010, p. 135) is most authentically the undertaking, the happening, the historic story of awakening our being, the transformative turning of the soul that is the twisting and turning of the education in/of Plato's Cave.

Heidegger's storytelling of Plato's Cave is concerned with attuning us to such "happening" with(in) Plato's Cave as the essence of truthful education, whose transformative philosophical potential remains despite changing definitions and philologies of truth or allegorical interpretations. Through the myth of Plato's Cave, in moving with it as a story that demands our participation and affects our very essence, Heidegger explored and facilitated the hermeneutic experience of mytho-poetic education. It is from this perspective that myth, μῦθος, for Heidegger "is that word that indicates this and that about the entirety of human Dasein. It is not the word in which human beings give their account of things [like λόγος], but rather the word that gives them a directive" (Heidegger, 2010, p. 91)[7]. In Plato's Cave, Heidegger tells and shows us, "the originary λόγος of philosophy remains bound to μῦθος" (2010, p. 92). With Heidegger, thus, the (re)turn to retrieve the philosophical-educational truth of Plato's Cave is a return to the hermeneutics of mythical education, to rediscovering the "directive" of myth.

[7] While interpreting Heidegger's notion of the "directive" (*Weisung*) of myth goes far beyond the present scope, it might be worth citing the recent edition of the *Historical Dictionary of Heidegger's Philosophy*: "A directive is a guideline for thinking, a way of leading it along its proper path. Such a directive is neither a product of human thought nor a rational principle, but instead arises through the reciprocal relation between being and thinking and the manner in which the former calls or addresses the latter. A directive implies a grounding attunement, which acclimates thinking and makes it receptive to the voice of being. The need for such a directive is a throwback to the manner in which hermeneutic phenomenology requires guiding precepts to 'lay out' or interpret the structures of care, and, ultimately, the horizon for any possible understanding of being." (Schalow, 2020, p. 106)

**The stories that we are: mytho-poetic curriculum and the hermeneutics of education**

Perhaps to Plato's irony, or more importantly as a testimony to the "lengthy affair" of the hermeneutics of myth and education that began in his dialogues, the recent research program and publication *Our Mythical Education: The Reception of Classical Myth Worldwide in Formal Education* (Maurice, 2021) has illustrated how traditional ancient myths have been continuously present in modern educational curricula around the world in diverse settings and disciplinary and ideological contexts. While myths have survived (and not only merely "survived") in education over the centuries, pedagogical reflection on myth is a more recent development in Anglophone scholarship attributable to James Bradley Macdonald, particularly in the wake of the latter's encounter with the hermeneutics of Heidegger, Gadamer, and Paul Ricoeur. In his 1981 essay "Theory, Practice and the Hermeneutic Circle," Macdonald (1995) contended that the dominant twin paradigms of what he called positivist "control theory" and political "critical theory" do not account for the hermeneutic process that is the "reality of education" and the hermeneutic circle that is the quest of curriculum theory. Macdonald, therefore, proposed as a third paradigm the "mytho-poetic imagination," which thematizes the personal awareness, poetic insight, visualization, imagination, astonishment, and mystery that are all involved in the ontological happening of understanding and interpreting meaning in-between science and praxis. Mytho-poetic imagination is the curricular realization of exploring — and here Macdonald paraphrases Heidegger — "'why there is being rather than nothing,' at the awe, wonder, and anxiety of this puzzle" whose "search is for meaning and a sense of unity and well being" (Macdonald, 1995, p. 179).

Macdonald's initiation of conversation on mytho-poetic curriculum and the mytho-poetic dimension of educational reality has, in the 21st century, blossomed into a rich constellation of considerations and case studies collected in two volumes: *Pedagogies of the Imagination: Mytho-poetic Curriculum in Theory and Practice* (Leonard & Willis, 2008) and *Spirituality, Mythopoesis and Learning* (Willis et al., 2009). Between the 30 texts that make up these volumes, it emerges that mytho-poetic education, defined and exemplified in diverse ways, names an approach to thematizing the dynamic interplay between self-understanding and openness to other, broader horizons of interpretation that happens through participational story-telling, story-reading, and story-making. Mytho-poetic education is seen as trans-formative rather than merely in-formative, exploratory rather

than explanatory, thematizing and continuing the story of one's educational experience rather than concluding an educational analysis of one story.

Particularly noteworthy is Patricia Holland and Noreen Garman's proposal that the mytho-poetic exceeds the confines of a third "category" or "method" or method as suggested by Macdonald, and instead refers to the broader horizon wherein teacher and student or writer and reader are drawn into a constant circle of being motivated to enact and reflect upon the plurality of interpretations and the meaningfulness of seeking to interpret ever anew. Hence, Holland and Garman (2008, pp. 17-18) put forth that "sensing a myth is a particular way of knowing," as being confronted with a mythical story discloses and thematizes the tension between interpretive approaches, which always entails personal awareness, intuitive insight, ambiguity, and vision for self-reflection. Myths are particularly conducive to such transformative (self-)questioning by virtue of what Holland and Garman identify as the "reflexive," "moral," "controlling" (or "influencing"), and "evocative" "powers" of "mythic knowledge" and "poetic expression" (2008, pp. 18-22). Addressing a myth always goes hand-in-hand with being addressed by and called forth by myth, as the "potential effect" belongs neither to the text nor to the reader but to their concert (2008, p. 22). In this hermeneutic in-between, myth is not an object that can be conclusively taught, studied, and explained away, but a bringing-into-play: In mytho-poetic conditions, education becomes an imaginative, transformative journey, an open story of responding and reflecting, rather than a particular class assignment of reading and extracting some established meaning. An apt Gadamer-inspired wording of this experience of such a "concert of conditions" or "interplay" has been offered by Catherine Homan in *A Hermeneutics of Poetic Education: The Play of the In-Between:*

> As oriented toward both what we are and what is beyond, poetry bears witness… Poetry, as the in-between, is fundamentally liminal in this traversing between past and future, self and other, imagined and realized, said and unsaid… By playing along in these dialogues, we become who we are through the conversation that we are (Homan, 2020, pp. 6, 7, 17).

Steven Hodge critically brings mytho-poetic curriculum back into dialogue with Heidegger. Hodge suggests that Heidegger's later thinking on truth, poetry, art, and gods contains an implicit theory of mythopoesis which challenges some of the presumptions of recent mytho-poetic curricular theorizing and thereby promises a deeper phenomenology of mytho-poetic

education. In contrast to personalistic, psychologizing story-making, which potentially reinforces the modern subject-object division that Macdonald sought to overcome through the "mytho-poetic imagination," or instead of, to paraphrastically quote one translation of Plato's talk of μῦθοι in the Republic, just "any old stories" (Plato, 1997, 377b), Hodge redraws our attention to the "anti-subjectivist," "anti-humanistic," "anti-anthropocentric" thrust of Heidegger's retrieval of the "pre-ontological" ground of myth and poetic revelation "beyond the consciousness of the poet" (Hodge, 2009, p. 61, 66). To the point, Hodge stresses that Heidegger takes us back anew to the divine topology of ancient myth and the poetic Muses, which brings into relief the finitude of purely human creativity in the face of the mystery of Being. Instead of "demythologizing" mythical and poetic wor(l)ds to fit personally familiar, modern, secular, scientific convictions, it is precisely the divine and sacred dimensions of ancient μυθοποίησις that rehabituate us to the horizon of asking about our being in the world(s). Thus, posing the question of how Heidegger's esoteric gods and mythopoetic revelations can "be of any practical value to educators" (Hodge, 2009, p. 61), Hodge sees the most practically employable and imaginationally powerful moment in Heidegger's "fourfold" (*das Geviert*), the interplay of Sky, Earth, Divinities, and Mortals. By rediscovering our humble, inquiring role in the fourfold, Hodge suggests that Heidegger-inspired mytho-poetic education can "here and now and in little things" reopen the powerful, awe-inspiring ontological clearing in which myth and poetry speak to our being in a profoundly original, educational way — one that is denied in modern, positivist, technological and informational curriculum.

**Conclusion**

With the founding father of Western philosophy and academic education, Plato, myth came to name a peculiar tension surrounding powerful, persuasive, moving, ostensibly "sacred" and "magical" stories which we tell ourselves and others — stories that are not of our own making, yet which concern ourselves in presenting our world, its beings, and beyond as being as they/we are, stories which are held or supposed to be primordial revelations, yet nevertheless seem to change and become anachronistic, stories whose deep and lofty realities are as if stranded and "scandalized" in the images and behaviors of our sensible world and the finitude of language stretched into the mystery of poetic ambiguity. In the "end," Plato did not expel myth but thought with myth to think through the ideals and limits of philosophy and education. Anything else would have amounted to unprecedented

violence — against Greek tradition, against the "mythically-playful" masses of non-philosophers, against the existential fact that, between Sky, Earth, Divinities, and fellow Mortals,

> A human being is always a teller of tales. We live surrounded by our stories and the stories of others, and from the very beginning of our existence, we learn to see everything in and around us through these stories… [In Ricoeur's words,] 'Our existence cannot be separated from the stories that we tell of ourselves.'… narration has its powerful cleansing potential in allowing things to show themselves as they are: In need of interpretation (Wierciński, 2019, pp. 234-235).

The hermeneutics of education as articulated by Wierciński in the wake of Heidegger, Gadamer, and Ricoeur sheds new light on the promises and challenges of mytho-poetic education by centering learning and teaching around the facticity of (self-)understanding as the human mode of being-in-the-world (per Heidegger), as an event which transpires in confrontation with an other and demands interpretation (per Gadamer), and as identity formation to which access is mediated through constantly (re)authored and (re)read narratives (per Ricoeur). Like Heidegger's invitation to enter the μῦθος of Plato's Cave, the hermeneutics of education calls for "going through the story ourselves," for experiencing and recognizing transformation instead of mere information. In this light, education as a "culture of questioning" poses the question of what happens to us and in us when we understand and interpret, recognizing and purposefully enacting the sense of wonder and astonishment at the challenge of finitely interpreting between seemingly infinite horizons. The confrontation with these horizons and wondering about and finding ourselves between them is significantly magnified in myths, as myths challenge us to interpret our place and story among worlds and beings in which "There is so much which is intangible, inexplicable, and elusive… which belongs to our experience of the world but does not belong to the realm of reason" (Wierciński, 2019, p. 14). As Plato recognized, the role of the "mythologist" is particularly crucial and sensitive: "Education as the culture of questioning follows the magic of a poetic vision. A hermeneutic teacher is a magician who, like a poet, creates the motions for the spell and is a storyteller. The teacher opens up access to reality, which otherwise would remain closed" (Wierciński, 2019, p. 14).

Returning to Plato's Cave with Heidegger, the "motions for the spell" and the opening and closing of different happenings of the truth of our being (*Geschehen der Wahrheit des Seins*) are drawn out through the encouragement

to let ourselves be moved by myth so as to, over the course of going through the story, become accustomed to our being-in-the-world and the truth of the hermeneutic experience that Macdonald saw as the "reality of education" illuminated in mytho-poetic imagination. Heidegger tells us that myth is an "appeal in which Being itself dispenses itself to man and therewith first indicates the paths a seeking might take" (Heidegger, 1992, pp. 128). In turn, Gadamer tells us that myth, like art, is how it is "because in what it says it is equally unfolding things and at the same time holding them back in readiness. The assertion it makes will speak over and over again" (Gadamer, 2007, p. 212). This primordial "directive" and "appeal" which "indicates the paths a seeking might take," this "unfolding and holding back" and "speaking over and over again," is the mytho-poetic story of education that we ourselves are and must ever learn to tell as the beginning and happening of a lengthy affair.

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# Hannah Arendt's reflections on power, violence and terror

**Abstract:** In this paper, I address the question of Arendt's distinction between power and violence. While violence according to Arendt is ruled by means-end reasoning, power corresponds to the human ability to act in concert. Thus power is the essence of all government, deriving its legitimacy from the people acting as a political community, while violence can never lead to the legitimate exercise of authority. Power and violence usually appear together, and violence may sometimes be justified; however, violence should never be equated with power in Arendt's sense. Arendt also considers the relation between violence and terror. While terror involves violence, it is not identical with violence. She illustrates the difference by revealing the characteristic of terror in totalitarian regimes: the capacity to systematically destroy legitimate power and human plurality by destroying the space of action, the common world that is created between people.

**Keywords**: Arendt; power; action; violence; politics; terror.

## 1. Historical context / contemporary events

Hannah Arendt's essay *On Violence* originated from her participation in a heated panel debate that took place 3 years earlier at the famous Theatre for Ideas, a meeting place for New York intellectuals. The discussion was chaired by Robert Silvers of the New York Review of Books. Other participants in the panel were Noam Chomsky, Conor Cruise O'Brien and Robert Lowell (Klein, 1971, vi; Young-Bruehl, 2004, p. 413; Bernstein, 2011, p. 3).

Hannah Arendt (1906-1975) insisted that thinking springs from experience. *On Violence* is packed with references to contemporary events, the "resistance movement against the war in Vietnam" (Arendt, 1970, p. 18), the civil rights movement, the Black Power movement, the student movement, which she described as marked by an "appetite for action"(Arendt, 1970, p. 19), indeed, by an "not yet exhausted supply of confidence in the possibility of changing the world through action" (Arendt, 1970, p. 19). This generation has grown up "under the shadow of the atom bomb" (Arendt, 1970, p. 17), i.e. the new threat of the earth's destruction (Birmingham, 2010, pp. 1-20). The worldwide rebellion of students against an experience, that it is precisely "progress that is leading in so many instances straight into disaster" (Arendt, 1970, p. 20), prompted Hannah Arendt to reflect on the role of violence.

This generation realized that the "apparently irresistible technological progress [...] today threatens the existence of entire ethnic groups and potentially of humanity, indeed of organic life in general" (Arendt, 1970, p. 20). To Stephen Spenders, it was a generation for whom the future is "like a time-bomb buried, but ticking away, in the present"; that is those who can hear the quiet ticking of the bomb despite the noise of the present (Arendt, 1970, p. 21).

The key experiences for Hannah Arendt and her contemporaries were "experiences of wars and revolutions", i.e. they did not experience politics as the collective decision-making preceded by parliamentary debates, but rather as violence, as terror and totalitarian rule; this generation equated political action with violent action (Arendt, 1993, p. 124f.).

After the Second World War, Arendt began striving to formulate a "political action that is not marked by violence" (Arendt, 1993, p. 126). This is not an easy task because the connection between politics and violence has to do not only with the experiences of war and totalitarian rule, but also with a thought tradition that equates power and violence. In her essay *On Violence*, she quotes C. Wright Mills who says, "All politics is a struggle for power; the ultimate kind of power is violence" (Arendt, 1970, p. 36), thus following Max Weber's definition of the state as "the rule of men over men based on the means of legitimate, that is allegedly legitimate, violence" (Arendt, 1970, p. 36). If this is the way we think about power, Arendt argues, then it makes sense to conceive of violence as the ultimate form of power.

This thought tradition begins with Plato and ends, for the time being, with Marx. It is a tradition in which action is either misunderstood as ruling (Plato, Hobbes) or constructed as acts of governance (Kant) (Arendt, 1998,

32) or confused with production (Marx) (Arendt, 2002, 290). Hannah Arendt does not continue along these lines, but makes a new start by linking politics with acting rather than making. This link leads us directly to the centre of her political thinking.

**2. The sharp distinction between power and violence**

What is the difference between fabrication and action? And what role does the distinction between fabrication and action play for key political concepts such as power and violence?

Power and violence rarely occur in their pure form, and yet the distinctions Hannah Arendt makes are not arbitrary. We must be aware that she does not attempt to give an isolated definition of power; what she does is to situate the phenomenon of power in the area of tension between other concepts she developed in *The Human Condition* (1958) - and partly earlier, for example in her study of totalitarianism: action, speech, plurality, natality, the public realm, opinion, conviction and public freedom (Bernstein, 2011, p. 7). These concepts collectively form the texture of her view of political life, and they are the backdrop for her approach to power and violence.

In *The Human Condition*, Arendt writes that power is always "a power potential […] and not an unchangeable, measurable and reliable entity like force or strength." Power is not actually possessed by anyone, "[it] springs up between men when they act together and vanishes the moment they disperse" (Arendt, 1967, p. 252). Hence we read in the essay *On Violence*:

> *Power* corresponds to the human ability not just to act but to act in concert. Power is never the property of an individual; it belongs to a group and remains in existence only so long as the group keeps together. When we say of somebody that he is 'in power' we actually refer to his being empowered by a certain number of people to act in their name. The moment the group, from which the power originated to begin with (*potestas in populo* - without a people or group there is no power), disapears, 'his power' also vanishes. (Arendt, 1970, p. 45)

The close relationship between power and action - "action and power are mutually defined" (Ricoeur, 2010, p. 24) - brings into view the non-hierarchical and non-instrumental character of Arendt's concept of power. As is well known, plurality is the condition for action, and human plurality is characterized by both diversity and equality. Power can therefore only be conceived as an egalitarian and non-hierarchical relationship between people.

Power is, on the one hand, spontaneous and unpredictable - "it arises between people when they act together" (Arendt, 1967, p. 252) (the English language makes this spontaneous character clear in one word: "power springs up" (Arendt, 1958, p. 200) - and, on the other hand, it is not based on subordination and obedience, but on consent (to the initiative) and support (of the one who has taken the initiative or the beginning itself) (Peeters, 2008, p. 174).

This non-hierarchical concept of power is reflected in Arendt's understanding of law. Laws of a political community are "directives" that are accepted rather than "imperatives" that are imposed (Arendt, 1970, p. 96; Ricoeur, 2010, p. 22). We can understand the non-instrumental character of power even better if we add action. First of all, action does not derive its meaning from a goal that is external to action, because action cannot be equated with fabrication.

When it comes to action, it is "no work product but exists as sheer actuality" (Arendt, 1967, p. 262). This understanding of action can be applied to power: power is an end in itself. Obviously, Arendt does not mean to deny that "governments pursue policies and employ their power to achieve prescribed goals" (Arendt, 1970, p. 52) but emphasize that „the power structure itself precedes and outlasts all aims, so that power, far from being the means to an end, is actually the very condition enabling a group of people to think and act in terms of the means-end category" (Arendt, 1970, p. 53).

It is quite different with violence. It is characterized by its instrumental nature. Violence "like all means, always stands in need of guidance and justification through the end it pursues" (Arendt, 1970, p. 52). Then violence can only justify itself through its end. The further in the future the end lies, the more difficult it is to find a plausible justification. The reason why violence can only be rational to the extent that it pursues short-term goals is that when people act, they can never know what the consequences of their actions will be. Simply because they are always acting into an already existing web of relationships in which others are not only reacting but also acting.

The justification of violence through a future end represents an important difference between violence and power, because power is not a means to an end to be achieved beyond it, but an end in itself. Power does not need the kind of justification that violence needs; what it does need is legitimacy: "Power springs up whenever people get together and act in concert, but it derives its legitimacy from the initial getting together rather than from any action that then may follow" (Arendt, 1970, p. 53). "Violence can be justifiable, but it never will be legitimate" (Arendt, 1970, p. 53; Peeters, 2008, p. 182).

In elaborating the difference between violence and power, Arendt captures something essential about power, something we are on the way to forget, namely that power can spring up spontaneously when people act together; it can grow and become revolutionary (Bernstein, 2011, p. 12). One example that illustrates the spontaneous emergence of power is the Hungarian Revolution of 1956, in which Arendt saw a heroic revival of the lost tradition of what she called "revolutionary spirit".

Just as she demonstrates that power must be distinguished from violence, so too must "revolutionary spirit" be distinguished from "revolutionary violence" (Bernstein 2011, p. 14). The "revolutionary spirit" is the publicly perceivable freedom whose goal is to establish a new order (*novus ordo saeclorum*). Arendt argues that the men of the American Revolution understood how to distinguish between violence and power. They understood that power is "the very opposite of a pre-political natural violence" (Arendt, 1965, p. 235). By a new order they meant institutions and organizations based on "promises, covenants, and mutual pledges" (Arendt, 1965, p. 235). The reason why they succeeded in what other nations failed was a mutual confidence that "arose not from a common ideology but from mutual promises and as such became the basis for 'associations' the gathering-together of people for a specified political purpose" (Arendt, 1965, p. 236).

The 2015 Nobel Peace Prize went to Tunisia. Tunisia is the country among the countries of the so-called Arab Spring that succeeded in establishing a new order. It involved the trade union federation (UGTT), the employers' association (UTICA), the human rights league (LTDH) and the bar association. It was this quartet that received the Nobel Peace Prize for its national dialogue, which resulted in the formation of a new transitional government and a new constitution.

The "national dialogue" is emblematic of another difference between power and violence. Violence is mute; and this does not simply mean "that speech is helpless when confronted with violence", but it means that "violence itself is incapable of speech" (Arendt, 1965, p. 20). This is why Arendt can say that "where violence rules absolutely [...], not only the laws [...] but everything and everybody must fall silent". This silence makes violence a marginal phenomenon of the political realm, "for man, to the extent that as he is a political being, is endowed with the power of speech" (Arendt, 1965, p. 19). Arendt refers to Aristotle, who defined man as "a political being and a being endowed with speech" (Arendt, 1965, p. 19): both complement each other. Violence, however, destroys the connection between word and deed.

**3. The opposition between violence and power**

Without deeds accompanied by words, action would turn into a purely technical activity no power could spring from it:

> Power is actualized only where word and deed have not parted company, where words are not empty and deeds not brutal, where words are not used to veil intentions but to disclose realities, and deeds are not used to violate and destroy but to establish relations and create new realities. (Arendt, 1967, p. 252)

We might say that wherever deeds are no longer accompanied by words, the way to violence is paved. „[...] nothing [...] is more common than the combination of violence and power" (Arendt, 1970, p. 48), but they are not only very different phenomena, in fact they are opposites. Power is not a kind of mitigated violence. When it comes to state power, i.e. a special case of power, the temptation is particularly great to "think of power in terms of command and obedience" (Arendt, 1970, p. 48). This is because "in foreign relations as well as domestic affairs violence appears as a last resort to keep the power structure intact against individual challengers – the foreign enemy, the native criminal – it looks indeed as though violence were the prerequisite of power and power nothing but a facade, the velvet glove which either conceals the iron hand or will turn out to belong to a paper tiger" (Arendt, 1970, p. 48).

State power, however, relies on the "support of the laws to which the citizenry had given its consent" (Arendt, 1970, p. 42). Not "violence [is] the prerequisite for power" but "sheer violence comes into play where power is being lost" (Arendt, 1970, p. 55). Arendt explicitly emphasizes that power is the primary and decisive factor. "Even the totalitarian ruler," she writes, "needs a power basis - the secret police and its net of informers" (Arendt, 1970, p. 51). Even during revolutions, the result does not seem to be based on violence, but on the power behind it.

Nevertheless, Arendt is realistic enough to know that "in the head-on clash between violence and power, the outcome is hardly in doubt" (Arendt, 1970, p. 54). Such as the Russian invasion of Czechoslovakia in 1968, or, to add some more recent events, the Tiananmen Square massacre in the summer of 1989, or the storming of Tahir Square in Cairo in the winter of 2011. "Out of the barrel of a gun," says Arendt, "grows the most effective command, resulting in the most instant and perfect obedience. What never can grow out of it is power" (Arendt, 1970, p. 54).

Violence occurs where power is weakened or crumbling. Violence can indeed destroy power, but in doing so it threatens its own power basis. Once violence has lost its power basis, then, according to Arendt, "the well-known reversal in reckoning with means and ends has taken place. The means, the means of destruction, now determine the end - with the consequence that the end will be the destruction of all power" (Arendt, 1970, p. 56).

**4. Totalitarian terror**

Arendt illustrates this self-destructive element of violence's victory over power in the reign of terror. „Terror is not the same as violence", she writes (Arendt, 1970, p. 56). She is referring to the reign of terror that replaces a reign of violence. Terror involves violence, but it goes beyond it, because it is characteristic of totalitarian oppression that it destroys power and plurality. It is characteristic of such systems - and here Arendt refers to two examples of the 20th century, the totalitarian rule under Hitler after 1938 and the terror of the Stalin regime from 1930 onwards - that terror does not end.

Arendt's writings on the phenomenon of violence also include several earlier works on politics, power and violence. In her article "Totalitarian Propaganda" she defines terror as "the very essence of its [totalitarianism's] form of government" (Arendt, 1950-51, p. 242). "Terror," she writes, "continues to be used by totalitarian regimes" (Arendt, 1950-51, p. 241). In this context, the use of terror in totalitarian regimes has nothing to do with "the existence of opponents", nor did the use of violence play a greater role "as a mere reinforcement of political propaganda". It is true that the National Socialists "made a certain capital out of the murders of prominent politicians such as Rathenau or Erzberger [...]" (Arendt, 1950-51, p. 243), but this kind of terror was not exercised because of the "importance of the murdered persons", but in order to "make it clear to the population at large that the power of the Nazis was greater than that of the authorities and that it was safer to be a member of a Nazi paramilitary organisation than a loyal Republican " (Arendt, 1950-51, p. 243). In *The Origins of Totalitarianism* (1951), Arendt states that totalitarian rule, once it has come to power, does everything it can to destroy the remnants of a common world and to further atomise people including through terror. It substitutes for "the boundaries and channels of communication between individual men a band of iron that holds them so tightly together that it is as though their plurality had disappeared into One Man of gigantic dimensions" (Arendt, 1951, p. 465). In this way, the space of action, the very world that is created between people whenever they come together and speak or act with each other, is destroyed. By trying to keep

people literally "incommunicado", i.e. by depriving them of the possibility to exchange and communicate about what is actually happening, total domination destroys the basis of action.

Totalitarian rule is not only a modern form of tyranny, as such it would be content with "destroying the political sphere of people, i.e. preventing action and creating powerlessness" (Arendt, 1996, p. 974), but it becomes "truly totalitarian", when it "on the one hand (destroys) all the relationships between people that remain after the disappearance of the political-public sphere and (when it) on the other hand (forces) that those who are thus completely isolated and abandoned by each other can be reinstated for political activities (although of course not for real political action)" (Arendt, 1996, p. 975).

Where terror begins to "choose its victims based on objective criteria, regardless of what they have thought or done", hearts are devastated and "relationships between people are poisoned". It is no longer possible to talk in families because the bonds of trust have been broken up. Human contacts in the "oases", i.e. spheres of life beyond politics, have been destroyed. "This atomization", writes Arendt in *On Violence*, "an outrageously pale, academic word for the horror it implies is maintained and intensified through the ubiquity of the informer, who can be literally omnipresent because he no longer is merely a professional agent in the pay of the police but potentially every person one comes into contact with" (Arendt, 1970, p. 56).

Totalitarian terror, Arendt makes clear, is different from the terror of tyranny and the terror of revolution. "Wherever we find terror in the past", she writes in *Mankind and Terror* (1953) an essay written at around the same time as her book on totalitarianism and originally broadcast in German by RIAS Rundfunk in March 1953, "it is rooted in the use of force that originates outside the law and in many cases is consciously applied to tear down the fences of law that protect human freedom and guarantee citizens freedoms and rights" (Arendt, 1994, 298).

The terror of tyranny differs from totalitarian terror in that the former comes to an end as soon as "the opposition is destroyed", whereas the latter first begins "when the regime has no more enemies who can be arrested and tortured to death and when even the different classes of suspects are eliminated and can no longer be taken into 'protective custody'" (Arendt, 1994, 299).

Typically, a totalitarian regime does not pass new laws, but rather maintains terror as a power that functions outside the law. Consequently, totalitarian terror does not care about laws; more than that, the very concept of law changes, i.e. "all laws […] become a façade" whose function is

to permanently remind the population "that the laws, no matter what their nature or origin, do not really matter" (Arendt, 1994, 300).

The phenomenon of totalitarian terror, which only roams free when there is no more opposition (Arendt, 1994, p. 303; Arendt, 1996, p. 910), can only be understood if terror is not seen as a means to achieve an end, but as an end in itself. The meaning of totalitarian terror can be properly understood by looking at the concentration- and extermination camps as they reveal two characteristics of totalitarian terror. One is that the camps are not about forced labor, but about treating the inmates as if they had never existed. "Even if they happen to keep alive, [they] are more effectively cut off from the world of the living than if they had died, because terror enforces oblivion" (Arendt, 1996, p. 915). Second, that the government decides in advance who will be deported and liquidated. Thus, the Nazi regime declared non-German ethnic groups to be enemies of the regime, the Bolshevik regime liquidated people who belonged to those groups that were "labeled members of so-called 'dying classes'" (Arendt, 1994, p. 301).

While totalitarian terror under Hitler demonstrated that millions can vanish in concentration camps without a chance to defend themselves against totalitarian terror, the so-called show trials under Stalin demonstrated that it can happen to anyone, that no one except the leader is protected from deportation and liquidation. Former high-ranking party members and police agents are as likely to become victims as perpetrators of the regime. Both facts, the isolation of the camps from the outside world and the extermination of the most seasoned supporters, belong together. Both mean that human beings in their infinite variation and unique individuality become superfluous (Arendt, 1994, p. 304). Totalitarian terror is no longer a means to an end, but the essence of total domination. "The climax of terror is reached when the police state begins to devour its own children, when yesterday's executioner becomes today's victim" (Arendt, 1970, p. 57).

**5. Violence is neither 'beastly' nor 'irrational'**

Violence does not only play a role as a form of interaction, i.e. in the relations between people, but the violent aspect has a broader meaning in Arendt's thinking. Arendt distinguishes between three basic activities: labor, work and action. "Labor corresponds to the biological process of the human body. [...] Work produces an artificial world of things that do not simply associate themselves with natural things, but differ from them in that they resist nature to a certain extent and are not simply worn down by the living processes. Human life, which by nature is homeless in nature, is at home in

this world of things" (Arendt, 1967, p. 16). Action corresponds to the basic human condition of plurality.

The sheer endless variety of fabricated things adds up to the world built by human beings. Now, all fabrication contains an element of violence, for *homo faber*, insofar as he is the creator of an artificial world, must first obtain the material from which he then makes the tools, devices and instruments he needs for his fabrication. "Material", Arendt writes, "is already a product of human hands which have removed it from its natural location, either killing a life process, as in the case of the tree which must be destroyed in order to provide wood, or interrupting one of nature's slower processes, as in the case of iron, stone, or marble torn out of the womb of the earth. This element of violation and violence is present in all fabrication, and homo faber, the creator of the human artifice, has always been a destroyer of nature (Arendt, 1967, p. 165).

Violence is thus part of the instrumental logic of a fabricated world inhabited by acting and speaking people. From the perspective of power, violence is negative as it can destroy power but for purely instrumental fabrication, on the other hand, violence is unavoidable.

If violence is inevitable, does this mean that it is part of human nature and that behavioral research can shed light on it? Konrad Lorenz's famous book *Das sogenannte Böse. Zur Naturgeschichte der Aggression* (1963) triggered disputes in the 1960s, and that not only in the field of behavioral research, but also in new disciplines such as "ethology" (biology of behaviour) and "polemology" (war studies).

Arendt not only doubted that zoologists, for example, could find out anything about the problem of violence between human beings, but she also feared that the new disciplines would produce highly undesirable results that were not consistent with the phenomenon of violence. For the end result of these studies made the act of violence or the aggressive drive appear even more "natural" and attributed to it an even greater role in human coexistence than we are already prepared to assume. She feared that behind the latest discoveries lay one of the oldest definitions of human nature, according to which man is an "*animal rationale*", a rational animal that, insofar as it is rational, is not likely to be violent. What now distinguishes man from an animal is "no longer reason (...) but science" (Arendt, 1970, p. 63). If he is violent, then he "acts irrationally and like a beast if he refuses to listen to the scientists" (Arendt, 1970, p. 63).

According to Arendt, however, violence is not beastly, but stems from human feelings such as rage or indignation as a reaction to outrageous

circumstances that offend our sense of justice. The fact that our reactions can be backed by such feelings does not make the violence irrational; "the opposite of emotional is not 'rational', whatever that may mean", because "in order to respond reasonably one must first of all be 'moved'", but "either the inability to be moved [...], or sentimentality, which is a perversion of feeling" (Arendt, 1970, p. 65). Rage and violence only become irrational when they "are directed against substitutes" (Arendt, 1970, p. 65).

**6. Violence can never be legitimate**

Indignation and the act of violence that may follow it are one thing, glorification of violence for its own sake is another. From her "humanist" perspective, Arendt views the acts of violence of the black riots in the 1960s, as "articulate protests against genuine grievances" (Arendt, 1970, p. 76), and as "perfectly rational reaction" (Arendt, 1970, p. 76). Without hesitation, she quotes Conor Cruise O'Brien, one of the leading intellectuals of the Irish Labour Party, who remarked that violence "can serve to dramatize grievances and bring them to public attention. [...] 'Sometimes ‚violence is the only way of ensuring a hearing for moderation.' To ask the impossible in order to obtain the possible" (Arendt, 1970, p. 78). What Arendt is able to do is to distinguish between the essentially non-violent initial stages be it in the struggle for civil rights or in the resistance movement against the war in Vietnam and a public climate in which certain phrases only serve to disguise that people are succumbing to the "glorification of violence" (Arendt, 1970, p. 18).

Arendt admired the 1968 generation for their courage and "appetite for action" (Arendt, 1970, p. 19). But she was also alarmed by the shrill rhetoric of the student rebellion and the growth of the Black Power movement, for whom "violence [...] was not a matter of theory and rhetoric" (Arendt, 1970, p. 22). She firmly rejected any attempt to legitimize violence *per se*.

Franz Fanon's book *The Wretched of the Earth* (1961) became a kind of creed for many students and served to legitimize violence. As did Karl Marx's assertion that no new society can emerge without violence, as well as George Sorel's claim that violence is essentially creative or Jean Paul Sartre's proposition that violence creates man. These attempts by Marx, Sorel and Sartre to legitimize violence meet with opposition from Arendt. Her main criticism is directed against Sartre's peculiar blend of Marxism and existentialism, a blend that puts him in fundamental opposition to Marx, such as when he claims that this "irrepressible violence... is man recreating himself", or then in preface to *The Wretched of the Earth* he writes, "To shoot

down a European is to kill two birds with one stone... there remain a dead man and a free man" (Arendt, 1970, p. 17). She recognizes in the rhetoric of the New Left violent ideas backed by Sartre's formula: "'Violence [...] like Achilles' lance, can heal the wounds it has inflicted'" (Arendt, 1970, p. 23), which, in her opinion, are more detached from reality than Sorel's myth of the general strike. For Sartre, violence is not a marginal phenomenon, but rather violence and counter-violence dominate history; Arendt, on the other hand, insists that "violence does not promote causes, neither history nor revolution, neither progress nor reaction; but it can serve to dramatize grievances and bring them to the public attention" (Arendt, 1970, p. 78).

**7. Neither fascination with violence nor pacifism**

The fact that in her essay *On Violence* Arendt is not prepared to endorse violence as a means to bring about the end of war in Vietnam does not mean that she was a pacifist as a matter of principle. Having escaped from the Gurs camp in southern France and landed in New York with her husband and mother in 1941, she wrote as a columnist for *Aufbau*, an immigrant newspaper that became the central publication of German-speaking Jewry in all those countries where Jews were still able to live freely during the Second World War. In her contributions, she advocated the Jewish people's struggle for freedom. In November 1941, in her column entitled "The Jewish Army—The beginning of Jewish Politics?", she called on the Jewish people to fight "with weapons in hand for their freedom and the right to live as a people" (Knott, 2000, p. 23).

During the Vietnam War, she also supported a group called "The Resistance", whose members destroyed their draft cards (Knott, 2000, p. 194). She donated $100 to their political efforts. But when Mary McCarthy asked her in her letter of 19 December 1967, "Did you participate in the protests of our friends?" (Brightman, 1997, p. 311), Arendt replied, "I did not participate in resistance activities" (Brightman, 1997, p. 318). As a kind of explanation, she adds, "The 'activists' are in a mood for violence, and of course so are the Black-Power-people" (Brightman, 1997, p. 318; Baselow and Ludz, 2016, p. 194).

But that does not mean that she is a pacifist. Indeed, in 1973, she gave the following reply to Dwight Macdonald when he invited her to join the War Resisters League, an international pacifist organization to which he himself belonged:

> I hate to say ‚no' to you, but I feel I cannot join the War Resisters League. I am not a Pacifist either in the 'relative' or the 'absolute' sense and I am not sure that I would 'refuse to support any kind of war', as you put it. You know of course that I supported the war against Hitler rather enthusiastically. Today, evidently, one could not support any war between the great powers because of nuclear weapons […]. Pacifism, at any rate, is not likely to save us. (Baselow and Ludz, 2016, p. 195)

Indeed, Arendt not only supported the war against Hitler, but also other wars, such as the Israeli Six-Day War in 1967 and the Yom Kippur War in the autumn of 1973 (Baselow and Ludz, 2016, p. 196). On the other hand, she joined the protest against the Vietnam War, but in a non-violent way. She supported "The Fellowship of Reconciliation", a branch of the Catholic Worker, as well as a number of other pacifist groups (Baselow and Ludz, 2016, p. 196). And she contributed to covering the cost of the "Congress End the War" ad printed by the New York Times by donating from her private library a copy of the first edition of Immanuel Kant's *Zum ewigen Frieden* and a cheque for $50 (Baselow and Ludz, 2016, p. 196; Young-Bruehl, 2004, p. 452).

When it came to the question of whether or not to support a particular war, she apparently reserved the right to decide for herself in each case. This does not change her view that there is a clear boundary between power and violence. "There are no quantitative or qualitative transitions between power and violence," she writes; "neither can power be derived from violence nor violence from power, neither can power be understood as the gentle mode of violence nor violence as the most flagrant manifestation of power" (Arendt, 1970, p. 58).

As already said, violence is instrumental by its very nature; it may be rational for short-term goals. But even if it is consciously kept within a framework of short-term goals, if the goals are not achieved quickly, there is a danger that violence will be introduced "into the whole body politic" (Arendt, 1970, p. 79). It is true that the "practice of violence, like all action, changes the world, but the most probable change is to a more violent world" (Arendt, 1970, p. 80).

How can this be countered? By not letting local sources of power seep away or dry up. Or to put it another way, by having a "participatory democracy" in which "people feel that they are acting together" (Arendt, 1970, p. 83). Because "what makes man a political being is his faculty of action; it enables him to get together with his peers, to act in concert, and to reach out for goals and enterprises that would never enter his mind, let alone the

desires of his heart, had he not been given this gift - to embark on something new" (Arendt, 1970, p. 81).

We do not know where the seemingly unstoppable development of technology will lead us, "but we know, or should know," Arendt concludes, "that every decrease in power is an open invitation to violence - if only because those who hold power and feel it slipping from their hands, be they the government or be they the governed, have always found it difficult to resist the temptation to substitute violence for it" (Arendt, 1970, p. 86).

**8. Concluding remarks**

The ideal of politics as acting and speaking together in the public sphere, which Arendt develops in *The Human Condition,* enables her to disentangle the fundamental confusion between fabrication and action, between violence and power. She carefully distinguishes power from violence:

> Power is what keeps the public realm, the potential space of appearance between acting and speaking men, in existence. […] what keeps people together after the fleeting moment of action has passed […] and what, at the same time, they keep alive through remaining together is power. […] And without power, the space of appearance brought forth throught action and speech in public will fade away as rapidly as the living deed and the living word. (Arendt, 1967, p. 252f.)

Moreover, "power is actualized only where word and deed have not parted company, where words are not empty […] and deeds are not used to violate and destroy but to establish relations and create new realities" (Arendt, 1967, p. 252; Knauer, 1980, p. 728).

Violence can destroy legitimate power, but it never can create power. Violent acts can be "inspired by compassion and a burning desire for justice"(Arendt, 1970, p. 66), but according to her, "the tactics of violence and disruption make sense only for short-term goals" (Arendt, 1970, p. 79). Most important, Arendt is quite clear that "violence is not and cannot be politically instrumental for two reasons. Firstly, because the instrumental reasoning that underlies the use of violence is antithetical to politics, because it identifies politics mistakenly with the achievement of pre-defined ends. Secondly, in any case, because those who confuse violence with power, misunderstand the inherently unpredictable consequences of violence" (Frazer and Hutchings, 2008, p. 103). Consequently, she argues, "the practice of violence, like all action, changes the world, but the most probable change is to a more violent world" (Arendt, 1970, p. 80).

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# The violence of space

**Abstract:** The main goal of this paper is to analyze how "space happens to us" in the "unstable equilibrium" between the need to assert for oneself and the necessity to belong to a surrounding world. We will argue that when such an equilibrium is disturbed, "space can become violent." We will take a phenomenological approach in our work, trying to intertwin E. Minkowski and M. Merleau-Ponty's insights on "lived space" with Bruce Bégout's concept of "ambiance."

**Keywords:** Lived space; atmospheres; distance; syntony.

## 1. Lived space

We are not indifferent to space.

As we begin to interpret the places where our lives take place, we are convinced *from the start* that space can be welcoming or unsettling, protective or menacing, homely and harmonious, or disturbing and confusing. Our endless task of interpreting the spaces we dwell in is largely determined by such a dramatic rhythm of belonging and displacement, comfort and discomfort, security and threat.

This would not be the case were space but an inert, homogeneous, objective, and empty extension, defined and projected as an external container of distinct objects. If we want to understand the fundamental experience of

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space, we must begin by freeing ourselves from those conceptions of space that prevail in physics and mathematics. As noted by Erwin Straus, although such scientific conceptions are historically prior to the first detailed analysis of what phenomenology will call the "lived experience of primordial spatiality," (Strauss, 1966, p. 4) they remain "logically and systematically posterior" (Strauss, 1966, p. 4) to them. Therefore, those scientific conceptions cannot account for the primitive way of *appearing* of space itself.

In this sense, it is not by a set of objective prerequisites that we first learn about what space is, as if the first condition for space to be known was to impose upon it a hovering inspection of qualities and measures; on the contrary, and because we are embodied beings, we first know space by experiencing it, by belonging to it, by living it. In other words, the first condition for space to be understood is *the possibility itself of space not to be unknown to us.* And space is not unknown to us because it somehow *happens to us,* or better still: *because it somehow happens in our lived body.* What I mean by this is that space does not originally appear to us as an exterior object or an abstract construction, but as a fundamental situatedness that somehow seems to be unfolded by our lived body's way of belonging to its surroundings. In this sense to understand space is to understand the close connection between situatedness and embodiment, between human "being-in-the world and spatiality, thus acknowledging that such a connection is essential to who we are and to our ability to understand ourselves.

**2. An Atmospheric density**

But how does space *happen to* us? To try to answer this question, we could begin, for instance, by describing how the experience of space unfolds or announces itself in multiple ways at the level of our sensory experiences. We find at such a level of experience that space can *happen to us* in many ways, in different layers and in countless "tonalities," as it seems to "motivate" all our senses and not just vision and touch. Let us consider the example of "hearing music," taking into account Maurice Merleau-Ponty's descriptions in *Phenomenology of Perception* (1945).

Merleau-Ponty's main argument is this: as we listen to music in a concert hall, and when we open our eyes after a moment of intense delight,

> visible space seems to me cramped compared to that other space through which, a moment ago, the music was being unfolded, and even if I keep my eyes open while the piece is being played, I have the impression that the music is not really contained within this circumscribed and unimpressive space (Merleau-Ponty, 2005, p. 257-258).

Music does not just "fill" the visible space as an object; in fact, music "undermines it, invests it, displaces it," and shakes it like a "storm." Better still, music seems to unfold "another space": a space of deep and dense involvement that seems to "insinuate" itself in the darkness of our closed eyes and on the deepest layers of our way of listening.

This "other space" is not unimpressive but a powerfully *inspiring* and *penetrating* space that overwhelms us by its sheer *expanding proximity*. In this circumstance, lived space does not really correspond to an atomized fragmentation of exterior stimuli, taken from different senses as exterior data to be further organized; on the contrary, what seems to be true is that a *unique multi-layered spatiality* crosses, or invades, our embodied way of being in the world as if *motivating* (and, in a way, supporting) the synaesthesia of all our senses. This means that, at the deepest level of our lived experience, space is not the experience of opaque *qualia* that would be "received" "from the outside" by different senses. Space *qua phaenomenon,* on the contrary, *happens to us* as a fabric of imbrication and overlapping that "speaks" directly to the entire body (Merleau-Ponty, 2005, p. 372) that is our "vehicle of being in the world" (Merleau-Ponty, 2005, p. 94).

It is not a detail that, in this context of his analysis, Merleau-Ponty comes to use, the concept of *sympathy*. This is, in fact, a telling reference that the French philosopher finds in Eugène Minkowski's important work on *lived time*. For Minkowski, "sympathy" is a kind of immediate and global feeling of an *indivisible all* ("*tout indivisible*"), that must be understood as primordial and irreducible to any relationist assemblages of "feelings" (Minkowski, 1970, p. 73; 63). Merleau-Ponty will add that sympathy is thus an "emblem" of both the *expressive* dimension of lived space and the pathic or affective communion that sketches the primordial ground of a *spatialized* way of being-in-the-world. The implications of such a thesis are important. I want to underline one of those implications: without being able to elude the theoretical tensions operating within the *Phenomenology of Perception*, Merleau-Ponty nevertheless seems to be acknowledging that *space itself*, as it is experienced in *flesh and blood*, "is not constituted in full clarity," but always "recovered by a knowledge that remains latent," something like an "atmosphere offered (…) to my entire body." (Merleau-Ponty, 2005, p. 244).

Merleau-Ponty is worthwhile quoting here:

> (…) every perception is a communication or a communion (…). The fact that this may not have been realized earlier is explained by the fact that any coming to awareness of the perceptual world was hampered by the prejudices arising from objective thinking. The function of the latter is to reduce all phenomena which bear witness to the union of subject and world, putting in their place the clear idea of the object as in itself and of the subject as pure consciousness. Objective thinking therefore severs the links which unite the thing and the thing and the natural world embodied subject, leaving only sensible qualities (…), preferably visual qualities, because these give the impression of being autonomous (…). But, in reality, all things are concretions of a setting, and any explicit perception of a thing survives in virtue of a previous communication with a certain atmosphere (Merleau-Ponty, 2005, p. 373).

Perception "survives" because it is supported by a "certain atmosphere": this is a crucial claim. Merleau-Ponty suggests that our "medium of experience" has an environmental tone, that the "primordial layer at which both things and ideas come into being" (Merleau-Ponty, 2005, p. 255) is a certain atmospheric fabric of involvement. But was Merleau-Ponty able to characterize all the fundamental characteristics of atmospheres?

**3. The vehemence of space**

Bruce Bégout has recently argued, in a compelling and original way, that Merleau-Ponty remains limited in his descriptions by a "relational perspective" and by a logic of "junction", which is the case even in his late works regarding the "mediating" background of the carnal being (Bégout, 2020, p. 174) These are not enough to comprehensively tackle the concept of atmosphere. Bégout's proposal, in turn, will be to go beyond the history of couplings and consider that the background of lived experience is originally environmental; in other words, atmospheres (Bégout favours the term "ambience") must be understood as the very "memory of the original belonging of the elements to the background," (Bégout, 2020, p. 52) as a debt, therefore, of the very "merging dimension (*dimension mérsive*) of the environment," (Bégout, 2020, p. 258) without which the significant "link" between the one which feels by belonging and what is felt by imbrication would not be unfolded.

Even so, we could argue that Merleau-Ponty's approach remains an important and useful one, particularly, if we consider the way he acknowledges that the *previous communication with a certain atmosphere* does not correspond to a simple harmonious involvement but is also and foremost a question of *conflict*:

> Sometimes between myself and the events there is a certain amount of play (*Spielraum*), which ensures that my freedom is preserved while the events do not cease to concern me. Sometimes, on the other hand, the lived distance is both too small and too great: the majority of the events cease to count for me, while the nearest ones obsess me (Merleau-Ponty, 2005, p. 333).

Contemporary psychiatry has paid particular attention to this paradoxical way of appearing of a tonal or atmospheric lived space that points to a conflict between "distance" and "immersion," between "independence" and "synchronization." Eugène Minkowski's (Bégout, 2020, p. 92[2]) analysis of "lived space" - the "non-mathematical and non-geometrical space" (Minkowski, 1970, 400[3]) we "live in" - is particularly relevant in this respect. According to Minkowski, "lived space" cannot be characterized in terms of objective and measurable relations or intervals that separate two points or objects. (Minkowski, 1970, p. 402) Such relations of distance have an unmistakably quantitative and purely static character. They define the objective or geometrical space. In lived space, however, "distance" is something completely different. Lived space is an "oriented space." It is organized around a lived subjectivity that remains an "absolute" here – a "me-here-now," as Minkowski puts it; such a *me-here-now* is not an enclosed "object" but an *open and dynamic centre* that unfolds a "lived distance" to his surroundings.

[2] We could also study here Binswanger, Straus, Tellenbach, Blankenbourg, among others. They all try to transport onto the clinical analysis of mental pathologies philosophical references from phenomenology (mainly Husserl and Heidegger), with the goal of grounding a philosophical anthropology out of the "non pathological conditions of being-in-the-world".

[3] Minkowski, *Lived Time*, 400: "The intelligible aspect of space seems to act as a foil for time. Here, on the contrary, where we are dealing with lived space, this aspect not only will be of no help but will constitute something of an obstacle. The hold that it has on our thought will quite often mask the true nature of the phenomena having to do with lived space. In our study of these phenomena we will constantly find ourselves involuntarily diverted toward the notion of geometric space, and thus we will tend to replace these phenomena with their mathematical aspect. In spite of this, I will attempt to deal with the problem of lived space, always keeping in mind that I can offer only an initial study".

This means that we do not just see objects or people more or less distant from us, but we perceive "life bursting all around" and "participate" in it (Minkowski, 1970, p. 402-403).

Let us be more precise here: if it is true that the experience of lived space is not understandable in terms of an objective, measurable extension, it also cannot be grasped as a simple indistinction between the lived subject and his surroundings. In fact, lived space seems to correspond to the experience of a certain felt "independence." (Minkowski, 1970, p. 403) "There is a distance, Minkowski argues, that "separates me from life," and it is such a lived distance that, at the same time, "unites me with life" (Minkowski, 1970, p. 403).In other words, what allows us to have a human life and to be a part of the world is a kind of "free space" (Minkowski, 1970, p. 403) around us that we can use without being constrained by the concreteness of our surroundings. To be able to "live our lives," we need a real feeling of being surrounded by a "distance" in which we feel at ease and free to act. And it is such a lived distance, corresponding to an "open space" for our actions, that enables us to "participate" in our surroundings. The way we belong to the world is thus "achieved across, or rather with the help of, a distance which unites us to it" (Minkowski, 1970, p. 403). We are united because we "can feel separate by the 'sphere of ease' in which our lives can unfold" (Minkowski, 1970, p. 403). This is a lived distance, but a distance, nevertheless. What this means is that we do not "participate" in our surroundings by simple amalgamation or fusion but by a subtle "negotiation" between the assertion of ourselves (possible in the lived or felt the distance of a "free space" around us) and the need to belong (Bégout, 2020, p. 102), between the capacity to distinguish ourselves from the environment and the syntony "that allows us to vibrate in unison with the environment" (Minkowski, 1970, p. 73[4]).

Here we must consider, according to Minkowski, an important difference regarding the experience of lived time: in lived time, the fusion of personal élan (Minkowski shares at this point a Bergsonian perspective)

[4] We could apply into the analysis of space the distinction between schizoidism and syntony that Minkoswki considers two fundamental modes of exitance: "In taking up Kretschmer's research, Bleuler is led to the notions of schizoidism and syntony. In going beyond the domains of characterology, he sees in them the expression of two fundamental principles of life. Syntony alludes to the principle that allows us to vibrate in unison with the environment, while schizoidism, on the contrary, designates the faculty of detaching ourselves from that environment. Moreover. these two principles, in spite of their apparently contradictory character, do not exclude each other. The one is as indispensable as the other." (Minkowski, 1970, p. 68)

with the encompassing atmospheric rhythm of life itself is complete – as the accomplishment of human life in connection to reality is fundamentally grounded in the *environmental* feeling of the all-embracing temporal flux of life. In lived space, on the contrary, the atmospheric fabric of belonging is always sketched between "affirming the 'me-here-now'" and the need to connect and belong "to an *ambiance becoming distant*" (Minkowski, 1970, p. 403).

Two major implications derive from such a thesis: on the one hand, it becomes clear that these two principles of our lived experience, despite their apparently contradictory character, do not exclude each other: to "keep a distance" and to "be in tune" are both indispensable to our way of being-in-the-world. Both principles have their role in fulfilling, and, in a certain way, establishing the balance between them, or their harmonious and "tuned-in" coexistence, which seems to be the ground for a balanced, proficient, and happy existence *in place.* But, on the other hand, such harmony is never always possible to maintain: the "lived distance" that allows us to "participate" in space without being "touched" in an *immediate way* (Minkowski, 1970, p. 402) can always be destroyed by the eruption of a certain way of appearing of space that *touches us dramatically,* that can invade us *totally,* to the point of dissolving the *protective free boundaries* of the *me-here-now.*

**4. The violence of space**

Minkowski's distinction between the visual *clarity of daytime* space and the darkness of nocturnal space is of major importance here. When the French psychiatrist defined "lived distance" for the first time in his book, he was referring to what we usually call visual space; more precisely, it is the clarity of this visual space "which forms the backdrop against which my own life and the lives of other living beings come to unfold and against which the contact with ambient becoming is established with the aid of lived distance." (Minkowski, 1970, p. 405). But this is not all: according to Minkowski - and this is a crucial aspect - we must also understand that the clarity of visual space "is not the only fundamental substance of life; we also live in the night" (Minkowski, 1970, p. 405).

To a certain extent, the "clear" space of day represents the presence of something that "I can see" and in relation to which I can preserve my individuality. I belong to visible space, but I manage to resist dissolving in it; to a certain extent, "I see it in front of me" and "around me," meaning that I can maintain the autonomy of myself as a perceptive subject in relation to

what I see. On the other hand, the nocturnal space corresponds to a complete environmental merging.

At night, space is transformed and becomes a real contiguity, as all distances are suspended: "I no longer have the black night, complete obscurity, before me; instead, it covers me completely, it penetrates my whole being, it touches me in a much more intimate way than the clarity of visual space" (Minkowski, 1970, p. 405; Minkowski, 1999, p. 155-156). The "black night" destroys any kind of detachment. Never "in front of me," the "black night" infiltrates me in a disconcerting and dense way; it mingles with my ideas, feelings, and perceptions. As the night falls, silhouettes and edges dissolve; objects gain new and bizarre forms; spectres and mysterious images come to life. The dark space of night is more personal than clear space, more intimate in its intrusiveness. As Merleau-Ponty puts it, in the darkness of night

> I am no longer withdrawn into my perceptual look-out from which I watch the outlines of objects moving by at a distance. Night has no outlines; it is itself in contact with me and its unity is the mystical unity of the *mana* (…); it is pure depth without foreground or background, without surfaces and without any distance separating it from me (Merleau-Ponty, 2005, p. 330).

At night, even "oriented space" itself is no longer the reference for our way of belonging to our surroundings; on the contrary, the density of "black night" seems to dissolve all kinds of distance and boundaries. In a certain way, this was already the case in the concert hall: visible space is subverted, and a merging space appears; this "other space" is a space that "touches" us, that penetrates us as if it were the "black space" (Minkowski, 1970, p. 405) of night – a space of pure depth without surfaces or profiles, a space that enwraps me, that infiltrates all my senses, that suffocates my recollections and dissolve personal identity. If we "feel the music," it is because we merge with the *blackness* of a penetrating space that allows for the pathic imbrication of the here and there, interior and exterior, subject and world.

According to Bégout, what is valid for "black night" is true for any atmosphere (Bégout, 2020, p. 53): as a manifestation of the affective unit of a "medium of experience," atmospheres are what merge. But is it not the case that the atmospheric merging seems to be, in all respects, "an excessive and pathological syntony that erases the limits between the I and life." (Bégout, 2020, p. 103) For most of our lives, we try to merge with what is happening around us (we want to "live it" to the fullest): be it a party, a show, a movie, a house, a book, a sports event, a relationship, etc. But we cannot deny that

atmospheres can penetrate us in a hostile, disturbing, sad, or negative way. In these cases, it is curious to note that our response will be to try to salvage the "lived distance" and resist the merging. At the heart of atmospheres, there is always an *unstable equilibrium* (Wiercinski, 2003) that can signal a dangerous frontier between a peaceful accomplished, balanced life and a disturbed, insecure, and oppressed life. An excess of distance will make me "lose" the world, but syntony can also be aggressive, tyrannical, and, as Bégout puts it, "became dystonia" (Bégout, 2020, p. 105).

Space can harm us.

In fact, "the irrational in life – as Minkowski has convincingly argued – is not restricted to lived duration but is found in space as well, without, in this instance, being based on the time factor." (Minkowski, 1970, p. 412) This does not mean, however, that, for Minkowski, all experiences of the darkness of night will lead to clinical pathological states. It is true that we can analyze the cases of schizophrenia in terms of the duality of "clear space and black space" and argue that the person with schizophrenia does not live in the clear visual space of lived distances and that he is incapable of asserting his "in-dependence" as he feels utterly invaded by an oppressive *non-distant* "black space" full of persecutory spectres. But what is decisive here (besides the importance for psychiatry of such remarkable analysis) is to understand that an excess of syntony, "like black space" (Minkowski, 1970, p. 405), typical of the person with schizophrenia (we could also consider other examples, such as the case of the agoraphobe) *happens to us all* as a possibility of lived space.

I have been arguing that there is an intimate connection between self and environing world, between person and spatial situatedness. To use one last time the Heideggerian phrase, human "being-in-the-world" is, as Merleau-Ponty suggested, grounded in the intertwining or imbrication of lived body and lived space. It is the description of such an entanglement that demonstrates to what extend the "intimate connection" we mentioned is not a merely contingent feature of human psychology, but – as we learn from E. Minkowski and B. Bégout – a fundamental *atmospheric* structure that makes possible the sort of life we call "human" and the kind of identity we constantly try to recover as our own. In this sense, it is not surprising that the related notions of spatiality and embodiment, place and self, nourish the endless task of interpreting our way of *dwelling.* And perhaps it all begins, in this path of interpretation, precisely when the unstable equilibrium between the assertion of myself and the need to belong is menaced or disturbed, and we try, in response, to resist disturbing atmospheres of excessive syntony by putting our suffering into words.

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# Saying something concerning truth, violence, and education

We might just be *saying something*—participating in
a conversation rather than contributing to an inquiry. Perhaps
saying things is not always saying how things are.
—Richard Rorty (italics in the orginal)

**Abstract:** This essay undertakes a brief engagement with Martin Heidegger's reading of Sophocles' "Ode to Man" to orient hermeneutic engagements with three paintings (Goya's *Saturn Devouring His Children*, El Greco's *Purification of the Temple*, and Hodler's *Truth*) to say something about hermeneutic education, truth, and violence.

**Keywords:** Hermeneutics, Education, Violence, Truth, and Painting

## Joining in, making room, going otherwise

> Once man-made, historical processes have become automatic, they are no less ruinous than the natural life processes that drives our organism and which in its terms, that is, biologically, leads from being to not-being, from birth to death.
>
> —Hannah Arendt

> If we eliminate the risk of love (violence), we eliminate the promise of love (non-violence).
>
> —John Caputo

We are always in the middle of things even things we experience as new or the start of something other. This hermeneutic insight ought to belong to the understanding we take into all conversations, especially perhaps those undertaken in educational settings. It is a helpful reminder to note things are always already underway, and our coming to them is made possible by this already and ever-continuing being underway. However, it is also the case that this already underway is most often headed in a direction at odds with and headed away from the orientation hermeneutic education seeks. To the extent Arendt is showing us something of note in the epigraph above, then those whose task it is to educate have as a challenge the disrupting of the automatic—understood in this instance in terms of the programed and seemingly natural responses we often make, which hide the inviolable nature of interpretation.

The automatic response to a violent wrong suffered is too often to answer in kind thus leaving us in a cycle it is right to call "ruinous." Athena, who we believe must—in concert with other of the gods—keeps a watch over educational places, understands violence (at some point at least) is to be constrained in the name of justice. At the end of both Homer's *Odyssey* and the *Oresteia* of Aesculus, Athena is said to have had enough. Something else besides a desire for violent blood revenge is to be our interpretive motivation and with this other way of seeing, then, comes the disclosure of possibilities to act otherwise. Does not the constraining of the Furies in the *Oresteia*, for example, make us believe Hamlet surely read, studied, and learned from the trilogy, learned that racing toward blood revenge is not the best nor obvious response to the message of the Ghost, his father? Notwithstanding Freud and Rank, this lesson learned at Wittenberg accounts, at least in part, for the Elsinore delay.

In any event, hermeneutic education leads us to be wary of a too quickly conceived, that is automatic, response. By way of interpretations of three paintings I shall say some things about violence, truth, and education and how stopping and tarrying before art might give us time to decline an automatic response. I shall commence with a quite brief explication of selected passages from Heidegger's reading of Sophocles' "Ode to Man" from *Antigone*, and then proceed to interpretations of three paintings. Goya's *Saturn Devouring One of His Children*, El Greco's *Purification of the Temple*, and Hodler's *Truth* will each in its own manner will out for us a way of understanding respectively: a self-absorbed narcissistic violence in the first, an outer-directed something beyond oneself in the second, and the originary founding violence demanded of human being-in-the-world in the last. These

interpretations, it is hoped, will be of some assistance to our thinking about our themes and how hermeneutic education might resist and challenge automation metaphorically understood.

## II
## Violence as holding sway

> Man transcends all other life because he is, for the first time, *life aware of itself*. Man is *in* nature, subject to its dictates and accidents, yet he *transcends* nature because he lacks the unawareness which makes the animal a part of nature—as one with it.
>
> —Erich Fromm (italics in the original)

In his reading of the opening line of the choral "Ode to Man" Heidegger finds therein man's being called the most uncanny (the strangest of the strange, the most wonderous of all wonders). In this name he finds both something *terrible* and a *violence* that is inviolable in the essence of Dasein. As he works out his interpretation of *deinon* these two ways necessary to think human being-in-the-world are each qualified in a manner that brings them together and sets them apart from commonplace understandings of the words. With respect to *terrible* Heidegger says: "it does not apply to petty terrors and does not have the degenerate, childish, and useless meaning that we give the word today"(Heideger, 2000, p. 159). Insofar as the meaning of *deinon* as the naming the terrible with respect to the overwhelming sway of *phusis* the constant exposure to which Dasein must respond with violence needs qualification, *violence* too needs its nuanced understanding: "we are giving the expression 'doing violence' an essential sense that in principle reaches beyond the usual meaning of the expression, which generally means nothing but brutality and arbitrariness" (Heideger, 2000, p. 160). At the origin of being-in-the-world, then, is a need for a violence that keeps the overwhelming sway from devastating Dasein itself. It is out of this inescapable having to be in this manner that allows violence in its both creative and its debilitating sense to be manifested in the world. Said otherwise, the violence that makes room for the creative beings who we are able to become is also the room wherein Dasein finds its ability to use violence in its sense of violating, occluding, misshaping, or destroying our possibilities of authentically being-with-one-another.

Furthermore, Heidegger suggests that in seeking to free ourselves from the constant onslaught of the overwhelming Dasein runs the risk of settling too easily and then too firmly and customarily into a set way of living. This settling, as it were, bars from us ways we might otherwise pursue. Writing of this not having a way out of the familiar, Heidegger avers: "Their not having a way out consists... in the fact they are continually thrown back on the paths that they themselves have laid out; they get bogged down in their routes, get stuck in ruts, and by getting stuck they draw in the circle of their world, get enmeshed in seeming,... In this way they turn around and around within their own circle" (Heideger, 2000, p. 168). This "shutting ourselves out" from the creative use we might make of our orgininary condition has innumerable consequences for our being in the world and makes, I am contending, a special call to education.

It is a task of education to offer interpretations of this originary condition, to offer interpretations of how we might assume our responsibility in a world disclosed through this originary holding out against the overwhelming. Furthermore education allows us to understand how in seeking our safety from the overwhelming we might well fail in some significant sense to make the most of our being-together or worse still mar it unnecessarily. Education as the conversations fitting to finding new ways out of the old must first it seems undo the threat of the "automatic" as outlined above in light of the words from Arendt with which we began. If the familiar in conjunction with the habitual is the necessary point of departure for education, then it cannot be allowed to remain its end point. The forceful means of getting to the destinations of education as somewhere else other than this may appear as justified in response to the violence of the mere repetition of the same and to the violent defenses made by the workings in favor of the status quo. Moreover, this same force will be needed to understand how much damage is done by obscuring truth as the ground of education itself.

I shall now proceed to thinking with three paintings: the first (Goya) to see how violence can misshape both current and future (educational) endeavors, the second (El Greco) to see how a force may be needed to counter the violent profaning of (educational) space, and lastly (Hodler) to witness truth as a primal force opening up the worlding of the world as the primordial space for any (education) undertaking worthy of the name.

## III
## Goya and Saturn *devouring one of his children*

> Yet you can never actually measure tears. If you try to measure them, you measure fluid and its drops at most, but not tears.
>
> —Martin Heidegger
>
> And you cannot measure dreams.
>
> —Adam Phillips

There we are in the painting.[1] This 19th-century Spanish painting depicting an ancient mythological tale—Goya's black painting of Saturn devouring one of his children. Out of the dark and frighteningly ominous background and old and somehow aging-before-our-eyes Saturn emerges hunched, or squatting, or perhaps falling to his knees (and before whom we know not) preparing for a strange act of contrition that seems surely to be too late. In this awkward pose, his hands clutch one of his children—already dismembered by Saturn's own doing—as his mouth gapes in anticipation of another cannibalistic mouthful. The opposite of nourishing appears in the wake of this devouring. This rage and fury attempting to avoid the prophesied future is getting nowhere toward that end and produces instead something dreadful. The painting presents the violent lengths to which those who have a tenuous grip on illegitimate power will go to halt that which cannot be halted—call it time or the future. A closer look—indeed, a look into Saturn's eyes—allows us to see he seems to know the jig is up.

Bulging in their madness and terror, wide but not quite focused they express a futility. In those dark rings, one around the sunken socket housing the white of the eye and the other around the dilated pupils, which are so wide as if to confirm how dark things are in this scene, we see the hopeless of this violence. We see almost more than we can bear to look at long. The look holds something in it, something which says remorse will not be enough. The look is both cast down to the body to be devoured in the next impending bite while at the same time the look has a hold on some other thing, which as the viewer we also sense we are able to see (more on which below).

[1] Francisco Goya y Lucientes, *Saturn Devouring One of His Children*, mixed technique, wall covering transferred to canvas, 1820, Museo del Prado, Marid, Spain. A fine reproduction is available at the museum's website.

This desperate holding on expressed in the eyes is echoed in the mouth and hands of Saturn as well. The devouring is not just this cannibalization, this going in for yet another bite of flesh and bone. The hands show themselves as if Saturn has two more hungry mouths to feed in addition to the one he is about to fill again. The hands are devouring the corpse as well in their own way. Goya paints these hands with fingers plunged deep into the body of the child. The upper spine of this suffering child tilts away to our right almost appearing broken and below this rightward pitch and, along what remains straight in it, Saturn's fingers press through the flesh on each side.

We know anything so violently grasped so as not to lose it is something already lost, or worse. The force of the grip is palpable, so strong in fact it seems to have the consequence of extending toward his gaping mouth the last remaining limb of the child (its other already consumed along, presumably, with its head). Through our imagining Saturn's fingertips, the internal organs of the body make their way to our senses even as they are not directly on the canvas. The painting is so visceral by being so profound in its execution that these organs are no less meaningfully before us than if they had been painted on surface of the canvas.

The destruction wrought by this type of violence destroys surface and depth alike. If we understand the child here as a figure of the future, we see in this image what grip violence has on the what-is-to-come; the manner in which these hands have a hold on things has the consequence of demonstrating to us how the misshaping of the future happens in advance. It is this misshaping of ourselves and our collective being-together toward a future that education means to overcome. Education attempts to provide the thinking necessary to twist free from this fate because education is, at the least, a concern for the future.

It will repay our attention to return once more to those eyes (similar eyes are found in Goya's *Casa de Locos*, *The Madhouse*). Exactly this devouring, this all-consuming violent praxis, this heartbreaking lunacy is conveyed in those eyes. Notwithstanding the horror conveyed by Saturn's eyes, they seem to say also: "Something in me understands the heinousness of this; if only I could stop." Something addictive is here disclosed, some strange not-wanting to do that gets carried out regardless. The eyes in particular, yet the entire painting as a whole, gives off the sense of a strange glimmer that even tyrants sometimes understand it could be otherwise. Maybe a faint, even fleeting hope could come from the fact that sometimes (although quite rarely to be sure) tyrants tire. Sometimes it dawns on them that what ought no longer go on is what they are doing. This recognition that one might

become—that somehow one still retains the possibility of becoming—the actor of another desire is also played out before us in these eyes, even as it is too late for the Saturn depicted here. Any hint of an it-could-be-otherwise is evidence of the possibility of beginning the undoing of appears to be an automatic and ruinous response. This gives education some hope, even in the face of this type of violence.

## IV
## El Greco and *the purification of the temple*

> The university is sometimes criticized for being too remote from the real needs of the day. But the point can be turned and the opposite criticism made: Is not the university too much a part of the society? To be consistent, should not the campus be more sharply distinguished from the marketplace... ?
>
> —D. S. Carne-Ross

There we are in the painting. This time El Greco's *The Purification of the Temple*.[2] The two sides mark two quite differing responses to the forceful act of purification Jesus undertakes here as he occupies the center of the picture. Those being driven from the temple are in stark contrast to those who both await the cleansing and are also, somehow, engaged already in the practices for which room is being made. Thus, the picture seems to have a number of "times" in it, and this not including the picturing of two bas reliefs, one of Adam and Eve being exiled from the garden on the left side nor the scene of Abraham and Isaac on the right. In any event, there is much going on here. The present shows those who are being forcefully moved away are in various states of defense, warding off the actions involved in the purification acts of Jesus. The future is also there at the same time, as those for whose sake the purification is occurring are shown conversing in the devoted manner for which the place was originally created. These two times pictured at once achieve something in this retelling of the story that is prohibited in the writing we find making up the gospel accounts. In this way the painting thinks the story again and otherwise in its own idiom and

[2] El Greco, *The Purification of the Temple,* oil of canvas, ca. 1600, The Frick Collection, New York, New York. A fine reproduction is available at the museum's website. Although there are a number of such scenes painted by El Greco, I shall confine this reading to the one before which I stood and experienced in person.

moves somehow beyond the original without abandoning it (this picture will never be mistaken, for example, as the retelling of Esther's dilemma).

The sellers have missed the mark. They can be said to have, in undertaking the practice of exchange here, landed in the wrong place. At the same time, they have by their actions made this place wrong, or wronged this place by their activities. The latter says by mistaking the sacred for the profane, they have wronged the temple—the place set aside for something other, a place where what ought to take place therein is barred from doing so by their wronging. By landing here and practicing thus, they have misappropriated the place, transforming it through their actions to a place in need of the arrival of Jesus in the manner in which he is there. He answers and responds fittingly to the situation as he understands it.

Freeing of the temple from its having become a place of exchange and returning it to a place of disclosure, is what Jesus can be said to be achieving in the picture. This act of purification, then, returns the place to its genuine function by opening the space again to what belongs there. In the left side of the canvas are those whose actions are defiling and profaning the temple, caught by El Greco in a series of reactions which include fleeing, taking cover, wailing. Some gather their wares; some take a defensive pose. The one who Jesus has just passed is dressed in a blue robe the color of which matches the sash wrapped around the red robe of Jesus, his hands raised as if they are an accompaniment to words being spoke. One imagines, judging from these hands and his speaking face, his words are meant as a counter-discourse to that of Jesus; they appear as an attempt to justify his action—if not the actions of all of those being driven away by the force of Jesus.

This force is what predominates in the picture. Jesus has his eyes cast on the eyes of the figure who is directly across from him in the picture plane. The being eye-to-eye with this figure catches our eye. His yellow robe has slipped from his shoulders and now seems sure to be on its way to the checkered tiled floor, making him the immediate target of the lash-wielding hand of Jesus. It remains ambiguous whether the scarlet-clothed arm of Jesus is stretched across his body as the end of a thrust already completed or is drawn there in preparation of a backhanded lashing yet to be delivered. Whether it is the conclusion of or the preamble to the act of delivering a blow, the hand of El Greco has no doubt captured here a formidable force.

If such forceful lashings are the acts of purification, at least in part, then the picture plane from back to front shows things well underway, and the opening it has created takes our eye deep into the background of the painting. It is through the arch behind the action where we might be said

to see the place where commerce is welcome. Be that as it may, commerce does not belong here where it is: inside the Temple and in the painting's foreground. What belongs here, the painting seems to say, is what occurs on the right-hand side of the picture.

Returning to the center of the picture and the figure of Jesus, we see, even though his feet can barely be said to be touching the ground, he is nonetheless path breaking. As he moves in a way that separates the two groups of accompanying figures, he makes a new path, one unique to the setting. This new path is neither any of the well-worn ones one might imagine nor those suggested by the checkered floor. He moves not along either row of squares already set out on the floor as it is, rather a new route is created that transverses them, opening a new way for learning to be. At the risk of turning too fine a phrase we might say by breaking out of all predetermined paths he has by his pathbreaking created in its wake something new by making it what it was before and ought to be again.

Art historians have no doubt named for us those figures who are represented on what we are calling above the future-side of the painting. Even as grateful as we might be to have these identifications, I leave them aside and simply say this side of the picture is the promise of how a space made for conversation and not crass exchange might appear in the aftermath of cleansing. Too much, as we all know, that is not fitting to hermeneutic education already has taken up its place and, in many ways, taken over the space meant to be set aside for learning. Today, as it has been in the past, much depends on context and perspective as to who is to be understood as the heretic.

We need room to learn. Sometimes the purification of the educational space necessary to allow for learning is less forceful, less dramatic than depicted in *The Purification of the Temple*. Despite its being able to happen anywhere if enough work is undertaken, education happens in a manner less dependent on overcoming harsh, cold, and less-than-inviting circumstances if it happens in places fitting to its essence. In the following passage from Medard Boss concerning the room in which Heidegger's teaching in Zollikon was originally meant to take place, we are given to understand how a small change of venue, perhaps only a few blocks in strict measure, can be so decisive in its rightness that it remains fitting for a decade:

> The choice of this location [a large lecture hall] proved rather inauspicious. The recently renovated auditorium had such a hypermodern, technological appearance that its atmosphere was simply not conducive to Heidegger's thinking. Therefore, the impending second seminar was moved to my house in Zollikon. All subsequent seminars continued there for the entire next decade (Boss, 1987, p. xviii).

Hermeneutic education (and an education in hermeneutics) creates a change of orientation with respect to leaving behind the quotidian and everyday way of speaking and thinking automatically and can be facilitated by a change of place. By being undertaken in a room designed for what needs to be done there, education can be said to have more of a chance.

## V
## Hodler and *truth*

> The human being's being-open to being is so fundamental and decisive in being human that, due to its inconspicuousness and plainness, one can continuously overlook it in favor of contrived psychological theories.
>
> —Martin Heidegger

There we are in the painting. This time with but a solitary figure who stands at the center of Ferdinand Hodler's *Truth*. [3] Long before we understand whatever we shall come to understand of this picture, we cannot help but feel welcomed by it. A strange hominess pervades the picture and yet there is something uncanny about it that pushes against the initial welcome. Not a rejection by any means, just something that lingers in the sense it hints that something profound is being asked of us. If it is a beckoning, it is also a challenge.

The nude figure in *Truth* looks at first glance far too thin to bear the name. Such thinness, with ribs visible beneath her skin, would be alarming if it were not for her wide and knowing eyes and the not-quite-a-smile that forms confidently and radiates from her firmly set lips and mouth. Every moment spent yielding to this picture increases her strength. It becomes in

[3] Ferdinand Hodler, *Truth*, oil on canvas, 1898, Art Institute of Chicago, Chicago, Illinois. A fine reproduction is available at the museum's website. The artist has made other paintings with this name yet not quite the same scene. Again, I restrict myself here to the one before which I have stood and which I have experienced.

time overwhelming. It becomes clear she is up to the task. The challenge it makes to us begins here to unfold.

In the lower third of the canvas she stands feet a bit apart achieving a kind of balance. She stands on a rock, which in overall appearance seems to be round yet is seven-sided, each side hued somehow out of the earthy pillar whose base, if there is one, is beyond the picture's edge. Where she stands is firm but not limitless, not all-encompassing. Indeed, the rock/ground is surrounded by empty, clouded space—a vast non-ground. As solid as the ground beneath her feet may be—and it looks considerable—it is not infinitely extended. More than that, her small standing place is quite circumscribed making her site unique, bounded by the very ground on which she stands. A movement of any length would exhaust the space of her ground and have the consequence of sending her tumbling into the surrounding abyss.

Truth in Hodler's painting, then, is grounded yet confined, on a solid footing that only extends so far. If we were to imagine she is able to stand elsewhere, then it will be, it seems, on another ground similarly circumscribed. One imagines further still that all possible other groundings cannot be the infinite, solid, unfragmented expansion of where she now stands but rather an archipelago of other rounded settings, other weigh stations in the abyss.

The figure in *Truth* thus stands in the manner just sketched, yet this is not all that the picture discloses about truth. In the upper third of the picture, we find her arms stretched out wide making a strong line that runs through her shoulders through her upper arms, which bend at the elbows, and is parallel to the stance-supporting ground we have described. At the elbow of both left and right arms the forearms bend to create near right angles on each side of the canvas. At the end of these two raised-to-the-sky forearms are hands turned palm upwards, pushing toward the top corners of the picture.

These wide-"stretched arms bending at the elbow and wrists hold open our view against encroaching blotches of white paint that appear over the picture's mostly purple-grey background. This holding open against the threatening-to-obscure white billows (which we refrain from calling clouds yet would not be wrong in doing so) make way for a vista opening to the sides of and deep behind the figure. We see what the figure in *Truth* allows by her keeping the encroaching elements at bay. We see beauty and light on purple cliff faces (a deeper purple than the background) rising on each side of the picture and what easily passes for water waving, roiling, and ebbing between and beyond the dark cliffs behind the figure.

This holding open and letting be seen brings the top portion of the painting into contact and conversation with the lower portion. The top

portion's arms pushing against the closing in of what would obscure our view altogether is accomplished on the strength of the solid-enough standing ground in the lower portion. This connection runs through the picture's middle third where another aspect of the truth is revealed. The nakedness figured in the middle third of *Truth* has nothing in common with the too-popular English phrase "naked truth," which is used to insist interpretation will be unnecessary (and in such assertions cover over how much interpretation has always already accomplished). To the contrary, the nakedness appearing in *Truth* says rather: "I have added nothing—it is your responsibility to interpret, to make something of what shows itself in the disclosure I make possible."

Lastly, the figure in *Truth*, judging from the length of her hair, which falls beyond her waist to rest upon the unseen yet surely curving buttocks, is mature—appearing neither young nor old. The look that radiates from her face also provides evidence and confirmation of this maturity. Taken all together, the picture says to us: as long as truth is, it shall be up to the task of holding open a clearing so we are able to see. *Truth* (now let's call her by her Greek name: *aletheia*) does not issue propositions, does not provide blueprints for behavior, nor does it dictate anything in particular. It says nothing, save for this—in an ever-whispering summons—*question and interpret*.

## VI
## Violence, truth, education

> Whoever would achieve this [becoming cultured] must recognize that life itself is an art, perhaps the finest of the fine arts—because it is the composite blend of them all.
>
> —Alain Locke

So much more, so much other, indeed so much that might be at odds with what I have brought-forth here belongs to these paintings. However, that turns out to be, the above interpretations are not offered to say these paintings simply *illustrate* philosophical concepts, which are superior to them by virtue of being written; rather, they are attempts to say what these paintings think in their own manner and in doing so bringing-forth what they give to us for our thinking and questioning.

Education is in a sense, of course, a bit violent insofar as it disrupts the all too familiar. It means to wrest understanding from its presumptions that what has been long and firmly held is natural and thus unchangeable. For this reason, then, hermeneutic educators are described somewhat well as "heretics" because they dissent from what most persons take as being

gospel (as the phrase goes in US English). The professor's dissent begins here stepping outside what everybody already knows and so never questions. The hermeneutic education championed here often begins with this walking away from the tyranny of the familiar by attempting to get out of the rut and attempting to twist-free from what has us enmeshed in paths of mere repetition. It means to twist away from the violence that threatens to devour it, it means to begin by overturning a few things to make a space open and readied to think things otherwise, it means to disclose that which common understandings cover over by staying on the routes already trod. It attempts to do all this so as to disclose as the beginning of something new *the wonder of disclosure itself*.

Perhaps it is not so uncanny, then, to pose this way home to education by saying something about twisting free of Saturn's violent clutches, about freeing the places of education for their task with righteous force, and about orienting ourselves in the disclosure of *alethiea*, which forcibly holds back the violence of the constant overwhelming sway of all things.

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# The power of imagination in *the Red Shoes*

**Abstract**: In the 1948 movie *The Red Shoes,* the power of imagination and artistic vocation are metaphorically represented as a pair of red dancing shoes. Just as in Andersen's fable, the shoes are enchanted: they can open up new horizons and possibilities of existence and artistic expression to the one that wears them. But their inexhaustible power can also possess her, demand complete devotion, or even dance her to death. A hermeneutic reading of the three key scenes from the movie inspires a reflection on the dialectics of the power of imagination and its productive as well as destructive potential.

**Keywords**: Imagination, Power, The Red Shoes, Vocation, Violence, Hermeneutics.

## Introduction

Imagination is one of the most powerful human faculties. What do we mean when we say that imagination is powerful? Is the imagining subject powerful by virtue of exercising their imagination? Is it the imagination itself that has the power over the imagining subject? When we think of the representations of the dialectical power of imagination*, The Red Shoe*s, Michael Powell's and Emeric Pressburger's 1948 masterpiece movie inspired by Hans Christian Andersen's fable, comes to mind. There, the power of imagination is catching, ambiguous, ephemeral, and very concrete. Sometimes it approaches us, wearing red shoes, and invites us to the dance. How do we respond to this invitation?

***Femme/homme immaginant(e)***

We can talk about the power of imagination in terms of the objective genitive (*genitivus obiectivus*), which is "the genitive that determines the person or the object that are being the subject/object of activity" (Wierciński 2019, p.34). The genitive indicates "the bearer of the feature expressed by the defined noun" (i.e., power). In this sense, the power of imagination is the potentiality of seeing beyond what presents itself directly to the senses, imagining that things can be different[1]. It concerns imagination's capability to generate or prevent change.

The power of imagination can also be expressed with the subjective genitive (*genitivus subiectivus*), that is, as the power that constitutively belongs to the imagination as such (Grondin, 1987). The power of imagination is not something that exists outside of itself, irrespective of the imagining subject (Wierciński 2019). It is the kind of power that extends to an imagining of the one who imagines. The one who imagines belongs to and co-creates that which can be imagined. Reflecting on the power of imagination uncovers that it is a faculty (*facultas imaginandi*). A faculty is a capacity, a potentiality, a capability. To be capable, following Paul Ricoeur, means that one can do things that pertain to being a human being (Ricoeur, 2008). Imagination, from the hermeneutic perspective, is not a competence that is learned or acquired, but it is a capability of being a human being. It is a way of being in the world, a longing for belonging to the world. In this sense, a human being is a f*emme/homme immaginant(e)*. But what does it mean when we say that we are imagining beings? What do we do when we imagine? Or, what is happening to us when we imagine?

Against the long tradition which sees imagination as a merely representational faculty (see Aristotle, 1993, Plato, 1975, Nussbaum, 2001, Sheppard, 2014, Kearney 2020),[2] in modern philosophy, Kant invites us to envision a productive model of imagination:

[1] In *Being and Time*, Heidegger concludes that potentiality stands higher than reality. (Heidegger, 2008).

[2] Richard Kearney draws attention to a long dismissal of imagination in the history of philosophy: "Named alternatively *eikasia* and *phantasia* by Plato and the Greek thinkers, imagination is roundly condemned as a pernicious strategy of simulation: one that tempts mortals to take themselves for omniscient gods, whereas in fact they are merely playing with reflections in a mirror." (Kearney, 2019 p.23)

> The power of imagination (*facultas imaginandi*), as a faculty of intuition without the presence of the object, is either *productive*, that is, a faculty of the original presentation [*Darstellung*] of the object (*exhibitio originaria*), which thus precedes experience; or *reproductive*, a faculty of the derivative presentation of the object (*exhibitio derivativa*), which brings back to mind an empirical intuition that it had previously. (Kant, 2007, 7:167)

For Kant, the *productive* imagination creates something that precedes the experience, whereas the *reproductive* imagination is derivative of experience. Reproductive imagination allows us to see with the mind's eye the images or impressions guarded in our memory. Productive imagination creates new and unprecedented impressions. To imagine is either to *re-vision* or to *en-vision*. The latter, productive aspect of imagination, is crucial for Hannah Arendt in her reading of Kant:

> What Kant calls the faculty of imagination, to make present to the mind what is absent from sense perception, has less to do with memory than with another faculty, one that has been known since the beginnings of philosophy. Parmenides called it nous (that faculty "through which you look steadfastly at things which are present though they are absent") and by this he meant that Being is never present, does not present itself to the senses. What is not present in the perception of things is the it-is; and the it-is, absent from the senses, is nevertheless present to the mind (…) To put this differently: by looking at appearances (given to intuition in Kant) one becomes aware of, gets a glimpse of, something that does not appear. This something is Being as such (Arendt, 2014).

Referring to Parmenides, Arendt stresses that what can be seen with our senses can lead us to see something beyond them, to see the appearances with "the eyes of the soul." Such seeing, which discloses something that *is*, even if it is not present in perception, is called imagination. When we imagine, we get a glimpse of that which never presents itself to the senses, that is, Being.

With Arendt, to imagine pertains to Being just as being pertains to Being. But how can she claim it, since what we imagine clearly does not exist in the same way as what we perceive exists? What Arendt hints at is that the Being of the imagined is the Being in the mode of presence and in the mode of absence (Heidegger, 1977). Against the accounts that encourage us to see imagination as the surreal, referring to Parmenides, Arendt says that the

imagined is as real as the Being itself. To imagine, in the productive sense, is not to bring something out of nothing but to bring something, the it-is, into the open, into the possibility that can become actuality. To imagine is to participate in the mystery of Being, to get a glimpse of it, and to see that things can be different (*to what the things might seem).* With Gadamer, we can also say that we welcome that something is different and that someone might be right (Gadamer, 1975). Imaginative creativity is the capacity to bring forth the possibility of being different. And such bringing-forth is already a creation. The act of imaginative transcendence of reality 'makes present' that which is absent. Imagination is an act of creation. When we imagine, we 'make present' images, sounds, or emotions that were not present before the act of imagining, and yet "they gain a certain degree of presence" (Ward, 2006, p. 440). Imagining makes another world internally present, which "expands our own being in the world, externally" (Ward, 2006, p. 440). This transcendence is perhaps most apparent in the act of reading, where, through signifiers, we enter the imaginative world of the story. But surely such imagination is not limited to the literary narrative art/arc (Blundell, 2010)? Paul Valéry draws particular attention to the transcendental aspect of imagination in dance, which he calls *une poésie générale de l'action des êtres vivants* – general poetry of the action of living beings (Valéry, 1957, p.13)[3]. Imagination that is at work in dance allows the dancer to search, through their transgressive and transformative movements, for the limits of instantaneous powers of Being. The dancer's body has, thus, similar power to that of the poet's mind. This power distances the dancer (sometimes excessively) from the ground, from reason, from known concepts, and from the logic of common sense[4].

The dialectical power of imagination is vividly displayed in the movie *The Red Shoes*, which tells the story of a ballet company staging a ballet piece, *The Red Shoes*, based on Andersen's tale The Red Shoes *(De røde sko)*. We are invited to enter a magical world of a tale within a tale within a tale (which reminds of a play within a play in Hamlet), where the imagined and the real are indistinguishable.[5] The original Andersen's tale is about Karen, a girl who dreams of impressing everyone at a ball with her beautiful shoes

[3] My translation.

[4] Imagination pertains to all aspects of creation, weather we consider mental or physical world of possibilities, actions, or transformations.

[5] In this regard, Diana Diamond relates this structure to Freud's theory of the dream within the dream: "it is clear that *The Red Shoes,* the fairy tale nested in the ballet nested in the film, embodies the affirmation of Vicky's painful and seemingly irresolvable conflicts,

and dance. She puts the red shoes on and dances exquisitely the whole night through, to the amazement and awe of everyone present. However, after the ball, she realizes that she cannot remove the shoes. They force her to dance to exhaustion until her feet are chopped off tragically (Andersen, 1997). The movie's Karen is Victoria Page (Moira Shearer), a ballerina noticed by the legendary Impresario Boris Lermontov (Anton Walbrook) after the two have an exchange about Vicky's vocation to dance.[6] At first disinterested in her skills, Lermontov is so intrigued by the conversation with Vicky that he devotes her more and more attention, finally giving her a lead role in The Red Shoes ballet. On the day of the premiere, Vicky begins to dance, but it is only after she puts on the actual red shoes that she amazes the audience. We are treated to a fourteen-minute ballet sequence unparalleled in the movie-making history to date. When Vicky falls in love with the ballet's composer, Julian Craster (Marius Goring), she needs to choose between a life alongside her beloved and a life devoted to dance. In the end, the red shoes make the decision for her.

Three scenes from the movie appear crucial for the contemplation on the power of imagination: the legendary ballet sequence, the exchange with Lermontov at the cocktail party, and the ending scene where Vicky is confronted by Lermontov and Craster in her changing room.

**The party: *why do you want to dance?***

To understand the complexity of the power of Vicky's imagination, it is indispensable to consider the topic of vocation as disclosed in the cocktail party scene, where we also encounter Boris Lermontov. In the first sections of the movie, we do not see Lermontov. We are invited to imagine the legendary ballet director, which reinforces his powerful introduction. His name is repeated among the audience, written on the posters. The director himself sits behind a curtain, from which only his hand emerges to give a *yes* or a *no* to the invitations by the higher-class audience. The Caesar of the Ballet gives a verdict on their social life or death. One fortunate Countess is granted life, having offered substantial funding to the ballet. At the Countess's cocktail party, we see the Impresario for the first time. Walbroock's calm and confident

alternately denied and affirmed in the different layers of the narrative that ultimately determine her fate." (Diamond, 2016, p. 113).

[6] As Linda Ruth Williams points out, "Lermontov is molded on the early-twentieth--century mogul of the Ballets Russes, Sergei Diaghilev, given to firing dancers who lack his single-minded dedication." (Williams, 2017, p. 10).

aura of authority leaves no doubt that this man is not to be played around with. As soon as he realizes that he was tricked into attending the cocktail party to see a ballet performance by the Countess's niece, he refuses to watch the show and recedes to the bar. Unable to show her dancing skills to the ballet director, the red-haired, glamorous niece – Vicky, approaches him at the bar and pretentiously tries to get his attention. Out of this provocative meeting, a conversation is born.

Even though Victoria is desperate in Lermontov's eyes, even though she is slightly pushy, he asks: "Why do you want to dance"? He opens up a dialectic of question and answer, Whereby "the question and the answer belong together" (Wierciński, 2019, p. 26)[7]. It might be Lermontov's benevolence to overcome the previous negativities and open himself up to the creative and ambiguous dialogue. This creative ambiguity gives Victoria a chance to show Lermontov her true colors. Being asked the pro-vocative question (provocative meaning a question about vocation)[8]: "why do you want to dance?" (Powell & Pressburger, 2010), she answers with an equally provocative answer: "why do you want to live?" Victoria responds in the most profound sense of provocation. Her reply is, indeed, much more provocative than Lermontov's question. By asking him, "why do you want to live," she changes the dynamics of the dialogue. She transforms a question about dancing into a question about living. A question about vocation becomes an existential question. Lermontov's answer to Victoria's question, "Well, I don't know exactly why, but, er, I must," and her final response: "That is my answer, too," remind of Rilke's *Letters to a Young Poet*:

> Find out the reason that commands you to write; see whether it has spread its roots into the very depths of your heart; confess to yourself whether you would have to die if you were forbidden to write. This most of all: ask yourself in the most silent hour of your night: must I write? Dig into yourself for a deep answer. And if this answer rings out in assent, if you meet this solemn question with a strong, simple "I must," then build your life in accordance with this necessity; your whole life, even into its humblest and most indifferent hour, must become a sign and witness to this impulse (Rilke, 2010, p. 6).

[7] A Wierciński explicates: "A dialogue operates on the model of question and answer. We are always interpreting the content of a dialogue as an answer to a question, which in turn raises new questions requiring new answers."

[8] Lermontov's question to Victoria could be merely provocative, in the sense of trying to get rid of her, or pro-vocative, in the sense of asking her about her vocation.

The "strong and simple: I must" shows the dialectical power of imagination. It reveals that the disclosure of truth is also a closure. Understanding this, Rilke indicates to the young poet that to disclose to himself what his vocation is, is to put himself under the power that makes him do what he *cannot not do*. The power of imagination, dis-closed in vocation, does not make us do what we do not want to do. Instead, it is the capacity to hear a call (from Latin *vocatio*) to which we need to respond (in the sense of *re-spondeo*, which is related to responsibility understood in the existential sense, i.e., as a necessity to give an answer). Thus, a search for vocation and a search for identity are inseparable:

> Recognizing the poetic vocation is not so much a matter of analyzing one's self, but rather, having an insight into what is mysterious in poetry when it persists in its challenge for a human being to stick firmly to realizing his/her life's work; and also recognizing that the true poetic vocation is inseparable from the poet's examination of his/her own call to be a human being. In that sense, the two dimensions of this vocation cannot be separated from one another. Reflection on the personal aspects of the vocation is an essential part of the struggle for one's own identity (Wierciński, 2019, p. 447).

The power of imagination related to vocation is the power of recognizing what we cannot live without and who we cannot give up on becoming. For Vicky, there *is* no life without dance. If she is not a dancer, she *is* not. The artist recognizes herself in art. She understands herself in and through art. She forms and transforms herself through art.

The experience of art is radically transformative. It calls us to become a new self – "you must change your life" (Rilke, 1947). Gadamer would say that the picture we are looking at captivates us – keeps us captive. Perhaps at this point, the power of imagination turns into coercion/violence? In the cases of Vicky and Lermontov, we sense that their "must" does not refer to violence or lack of freedom but stems from their deepest in-sight about who they ought to be. The only way they can 'actualize' their freedom is by doing what they *cannot not* do. The Kantian understanding of imagination and vocation in *The Power of Judgement* reminds that imagination is "a power to assert our independence in the face of influences of nature, to diminish the

value of what is great according to these, and so to place what is absolutely great only in its (the subject's) own vocation." (Kant, 2002, 5:269)[9].

**The ballet: the imaginary is the real**

Victoria follows the call of her vocation and gets a lead role in the Ballet Lermontov's newest production, The Red Shoes. As the ballet is about to commence, we browse through the libretto with the audience present at the theatre. Astonishingly, Victoria plays "The Girl" and not Karen, the original Andersen character. Is Victoria's character just any girl? Or anyone? Or, is it for The Girl to determine who she is to become?

Backstage, before the show, everyone is worried about something. The red shoes are lost, the scenography leaves much to be desired. The chaos, effort, and nuisances of backstage life show that art is happening in life. The everyday is the milieu of the revelation that only some have the capacity to witness. Amidst this turmoil, Lermontov comforts the tense Vicky, reminding her that during the performance, music is all that matters. If she lets herself be guided by music, everything will be alright. The seemingly ordinary advice discloses that "listening" is what guides us through the dance and through life. We are called to listen to how life revibrates within us and how it moves us. However, "only he who already understands can listen [*zuhören*]" (Heidegger, 2008, p. 174). *Whoever has ears, let him hear* (Mt 11: 15).

The ballet begins before the curtain goes up. Against the red fabric of the curtain enters a solitary persona. The Shoemaker holds a pair of red shoes in his hands. In a fascinating sequence, he presents the shoes and invites the audience to the dance. We are tempted to give in to the red shoes' power. "Wouldn't you love to wear the shoes?" – the Shoemaker seems to be asking. The curtain goes up and uncovers that it is not only the red shoes that are on display. There are blue, green, and yellow shoes of distinct shapes and sizes fitted for different dancers and shoe lovers alike. Perhaps we could try a pair on. But the red shoes are meant for only one ballerina: Vicky. They are calling her; she cannot resist them. She sees her imagined self, dancing with the red shoes on. Her projection is nothing like the Vicky we see onstage: the imagined Vicky has her hair down, her skirt is short, and her ballet shoes are red. Looking at the imagined version of herself, Vicky sees whom she yearns to be. The power of her imagination enables her to see what is not physically there, yet it is just as real for her.

[9] For an extensive hermeneutc analysis of *The Power of Judgement*, see Marino, & Terzi (2021), Makkreel (1990).

The being of Vicky's imagined self is the being in the mode of presence and in the mode of absence. The power of Vicky's imagination enables her to see what is there the way that (only) she can see it. She *en-visions* (*vor-stelen*) something that is not *visioned* (*vor-gestelt*) in the physical sense but what she can nonetheless *see* with the same degree of presence. When Vicky sees her reflection at the Shoemaker, it is both her immediate and imagined reflection. She sees through the appearances of herself and toward the transcendental – toward what she could become. Even before she puts the red shoes on, she experiences the power of seeing herself the way she *envisions* herself.

Vicky's imaginary reflection transmits lightness, confidence, and mastery. She is alluring, mesmerizing. The power that the "real" Vicky cannot resist sucks her in as she gets closer and closer to the red shoes. They are tailor-made for her. They magically jump on her feet by themselves. Vicky commences an unusually difficult and fast solo, one that she could not accomplish without the red shoes. Her imaginary microcosm is weird, strange, scary, mysterious, fascinating, hypnotizing. The enchanted ballet transforms into a journey to Vicky's unconscious, where we witness the condensed, displaced, and dramatized conflicts and passions that she faces in her artistic journey offstage. Two figures reappear in various settings: that of Lermontov and that of Craster.

Following Vicky through different sequences, we rejoice with her as she dances her way into the ball. Having arrived, she shines: the crowd is amazed, they compete for her attention and attempt to dance with her. She cannot. The shoes pull her in an unknown direction. Vicky's lack of control over the red shoes reveals that we do not have full command of our imagination. The images come into us and take us into possession to express ourselves in creative art. Those powers can bring about something that can construct us, but also something that can destruct (destroy) us. The alluring power of the possibilities might bring us to destruction and almost self-annihilation. Czesław Milosz calls a poet a secretary of an invisible force, someone who makes themself available to the force, not by intentional decision, but rather by being who they are. They are tormented by the ideas and express them as they come (Miłosz, 2001)[10]. It is a matter of their radical existential responsibility that the spirits that go through them (the good or the evil spirits) will

[10] "I am no more than a secretary of the invisible thing/That is dictated to me and a few others./Secretaries, mutually unknown, we walk the earth/Without much comprehension. Beginning a phrase in the middle/Or ending it with a comma. And how it all looks when completed/Is not up to us to inquire, we won't read it anyway."

fall on the productive ground. Vicky makes herself available to the force of the red shoes, with all the beauty and the terror that they bring about. As long as she has them on, she dances along to their rhythm.

The rhytm is unforgiving. Vicky's solitary dance among the cemetery columns annunciates the unavoidable. She attempts to return home, but the shoes pull her back on the stage—her "real" home— where she belongs and does not belong (see Heidegger, 1977, Wierciński, 2010)[11]. In the last scene of the ballet, Vicky's dress is worn-out, wrecked. She is exhausted, she cannot dance anymore, yet dance she must. She approaches the church and asks the priest to free her from the burden. She wants to have her shoes taken off. Perhaps, being unable to deal with the radicality of the exigencies of the life of a dancer, she feels that she is collapsing under the pressure of the artistic vocation. The only help she envisions in this situation is the gift of being relieved from her personal confrontation with the demands of life. She puts her whole hope into a supernatural power that can absolve her from the requirements of personal/artistic vocation. Realizing the inescapability of an existential answer to vocation overburdens Vicky to such an extent that she pleads for mercy. But mercy is not granted. She cannot be dispensed from an answer to her vocation. After a fiery duet with Grimsha, Vicky collapses at the altar. She finally has her shoes taken off, but without them, she dies. The shoes caused Vicky's ultimate exhaustion, but ultimately, they were what kept her alive. The tragic possibility of the artistic vocation is disclosed: the power of the artist's imagination can give them life and take their life. The prophetic scene, which announces what happens to Vicky offstage, shows the con-fluence of the imaginary and the real. The imaginary *is* the real.

**The dressing room: the de-cisive act**

In the following scenes, the inescapability of making the decision about the vocation is condensed (*ver-dichten*) in a powerful, dramatic exchange between the two most important people in Victoria's life: her director and her fiancée. Each of them asks her the decisive question: what do you want? The previous dialogue (Why do you want to dance? Why do you want to live?) seems particularly tragic now, as Vicky needs to choose between *to*

[11] In the *Letter on Humanism* Heidegger calls homelessness "the symptom of the oblivion of Being". Homecoming means rediscovering our essence in our primordial relationship to Being. (Heidegger, 1977, p. 220)

*dance* and *to live*[12]. She is confronted, on the one hand, with the decisiveness of her fiancée, who, despite the enormous promise of his future career and artistic life, declines it in order to be with Vicky. On the other hand, Lermontov, who is entirely devoted to art, expects nothing less from her. Both men leave Vicky ex-posed, un-dressed, as she has to perform the decisive act. Engaging Lermontov and Craster, she discovers that her love for art is as genuine as her love for the lover. Being thorn in-between those two loves, she finds herself unable to make the decision. Her significant hesitation (we are again reminded of *Hamlet*) shows how serious she is in giving the response, how responsible she feels for her vocation and for her relationship[13]. Hers is not a hysterical but a deeply existential indecisiveness. She struggles, trying to envision the combination of the two ways of being. The very powerful con-frontation, which is also a powerful con-fusion, brings Vicky into despair. Her ultimate decision is as final as it is tragic. If there is one decisive thing she does, led by the shoes, it is the running into despair.

Was there another scenario for Vicky? In the dressing room, when the three main heroes confront each other, they need to give a radical response to their lives. The response is the matter of finding the right measure – not a statistical measure that can be applied to everybody, but a measure that is a challenge that everyone has to take upon themselves to determine. "Man is the measure of all things" (Plato, 1906, p. 14 ) – it is upon each one of us to find the right measure for our lives. In the final scene, three life horizons meet. Craster's and Lermontov's horizons are opposed. Vicky finds herself in the middle of this opposition. Not being able to find the right measure for herself, she ends her life out of total despair. The power of her imagination gave her life and took her life. Perhaps, if she was not put under the enormous pressure of instantaneous choice, she could envision an alternative future for her, where the horizons fuse in imaginative and creative ways. Or, she would never encounter the way to reconcile the two callings in her life and would need to make the tragic choice sooner or later?

The power of imagination, which brings about an enormous and unlimited potentiality, entails an enormous responsibility. The radical responsibility also entails the radical freedom to decide for ourselves (see

[12] Feminist critiques of the movie notices the patriarchal and narcissistic tendency to force women to choose between career and family life, making us believe that it is unimaginable to reconcile the two. (see Diamond, 2016).

[13] In this regard we can also recall Freud's interpretation of *Hamlet* (see Freud 1997). Diamond notices that *The Red Shoes* is "a tale perhaps inspired by the thwarted desires of its author, the homosexual son of a shoemaker and a frustrated dancer" (Diamond 2016, p.105).

Ricoeur, 1992). Discovering the power of imagination calls a human being to discern, that is, to make decisions. The most challenging decisions regard the discernment of our vocation (Heidegger, 1966). Our task is to address and readdress the question of vocation without any premature answers that lead to unilateral solutions. Indecisiveness in human life with relationship to the vocation does not necessarily mean a weak determination toward living life to the fullest. The power of imagination, in the end, is the power of seeing the vastness of the potential ways of being. With Gadamer, the horizon always moves with us. Just as in dance, every next step brings about new possibilities, which can lead us in new directions (Gadamer, 1975). Appreciating the beauty of the horizon that opens up with each new step requires radical openness to what happens. Whoever has feet, let them dance!

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# The ill body. Between power and rebellion

**Abstract:** This article examines the issue of the ill body from two perspectives which are at the same time two parts of this paper. The first one which follows Michel Foucault, concerns production of the specific type of the subject, namely the patient and includes a scrutiny of the hospital as a disciplinary apparatus. The goal of the second part is to analyse illness as a counter-apparatus which undermines any given order. I argue that power, violence, the process of subjectification and a way of eluding their moulding force are reflected in the issue of the ill body. For the ill body simultaneously is extremely vulnerable (as something that needs to be fixed) and invulnerable (because of the rebellious 'nature' of illness) to the apparatus investments.

**Key words:** hospital apparatus, discipline, profanation, illness, subjectification, Foucault, counter-apparatus.

## Introduction

This article examines the issue of the ill body from two perspectives which are at the same time two parts of this paper. The first, following Michel Foucault, concerns production of a specific type of the subject, namely the patient and includes a scrutiny of the hospital as a disciplinary apparatus. Here I deploy Foucault's history of medicine without questioning his discoveries and his knowledge as a historian of ideas. The goal of the second part is to analyse an illness as a counter-apparatus which undermines any given order. I argue that power, violence, the process of subjectification and a way of eluding their moulding force are strongly reflected in the issue of the ill body since the ill body is simultaneously extremely vulnerable and invulnerable to

the apparatus investments. The movement of evading power has, indeed, its educational potential. However, it would be rooted in the rebellious 'nature' of illness itself that works in us, in the name of emancipation, rather than in intentional actions of a consciousness agent. Moreover, the latter, taken the form of health education, appear to be a part of biopower machinery. For one cannot ignore the fact that medicine and in consequence also a definition of what health is, is not "objective, neutral, and without investment in securing its own authority and legitimation" (Hancock, 2018, 455). On the contrary it is always "a product of society and not something that stands independent of it" (*ibidem*, 456). Consequently, we must continuously "confront the ways that medicine always intersects with economics, power, and social life, elements that are always constitutive of one another" (*ibidem*).

Although the phenomenon of health is of vital importance both as a reverse of illness and, remaining in horizon offered by Foucault, as a power construct, an analysis of this issue exceeds the scope of the paper that is focused on the ill body within the hospital walls. Additionally, mental disorders are out of interest, even though they appear to be much more of a Foucauldian theme[1]. It is also important to mention at the outset that illness should be distinguished from disease. The second is understood as the physiological process or, to speak more precisely, physiological dysfunction and "falls within the domain of empirical science" (Carel, 2016, 17) whereas illness, as living with a disease, would primarily belong to the humanities.

Before turning to the disciplinary apparatus directly, a brief reminder of Foucault's approach to power needs to be recalled. "For Foucault, power is not reducible to the State, nor any one authority, set of laws, or centralized institution. Power is not restricted to political institutions nor is it reducible to them, where one class can dominate over another, or where power is simply the reproduction of the relations of production. Therefore, power cannot be understood as a false-consciousness produced by ideology or propaganda; rather, power is constitutive of all social relations, norms, and practices, working on the dominant as well as the dominated" (Hancock, 2018, 449-450). Such a perspective on power redefines the concept of violence, which is not brutal and unpredictable but, conversely, may be subtle, discreet, modest and devious, taking the form of the relentless work on the body as it happens for instance it the case of the hospital machine.

[1] Foucault deals with the issue of mental illness in his book *History of Madness and lectures Psychiatric Power: Lectures at the Collège de France 1973-1974; Abnormal: Lectures at the Collège de France 1974-1975.*

It is hard to disagree with Gilles Deleuze's claim (1992, 3) that after World War II we moved from the disciplinary societies, located by Foucault in the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries, to societies of control or "biopolitical control" (Hardt and Negri, 2000, 344)[2]. Yet, it does not mean that all forms of "these environments of enclosure" (Deleuze, 1992, 3), these "molds" (*ibidem*, 4) have disappeared. On the contrary, disciplinary forms like schools or hospitals remain present in our times though in a transformed shape. Thus, despite changes in the field of medicine and the functioning of hospital institutions, such as the emergence of neighbourhood clinics, hospices and day care, the hospital remains the disciplinary structure. It organises and works through a space of enclosure and produces a certain type of subjectivity "by structuring the parameters and limits of thought and practice" (Hardt and Negri, 2000, 23).

**I. The hospital apparatus or how to produce the patient?**

To examine the issue of producing patients, that is turning a human being into the subject, into the patient, I will use Foucault's term of apparatus (*dispostif*[3]) which remains a key term for his thinking on power and subject. As he clarifies in an interview in 1977, an apparatus can be understood as "a thoroughly heterogeneous ensemble consisting of discourses, institutions, architectural forms, regulatory decisions, laws, administrative measures, scientific statements, philosophical, moral, and philanthropic propositions – in short, the said as much as the unsaid … The apparatus itself is the system of relations that can be established between these elements" (Foucault, 1980, 194). Thus, an apparatus remains inscribed into a play of power and as such is linked to certain limits of knowledge which arise from it and, at the same time, condition it. To put in other words, an apparatus always consists in: "strategies of relations of forces supporting, and supported by, types of knowledge" (*ibidem*, 196). However, what is more important for the purpose of this paper is the fact that this nexus of knowledge and power produces subjects. For this reason, thinking of apparatuses implies thinking on a process of subjectification. It can be said that the hospital apparatus or hospital understood as an apparatus captures living beings, turning them

[2] Hardt and Negri write: "Imperial command is exercised no longer through the disciplinary modalities of the modern state but rather through the modalities of biopolitical control".

[3] As Stuart Elden notices: "*Dispositif* is one of the most difficult words in Foucault's work to translate adequately, meaning straightforwardly 'apparatus' but also the arrangement or set-up of a web of practices and their attendant discourses" (2006, 44).

into objects of knowledge and procedures, that is into patients. As a result, one's intimate relation with their illness and even death is, as it were, taken away from them and located into a mediating power apparatus.

Foucault compares the hospital to the prison – at a certain stage of their historical transformations – posing a rhetorical question: "is it surprising that prisons resemble factories, schools, barracks, hospitals, which all resemble prisons?" (1995, 228). The similarity between prisons and hospitals is visible even at first glance when looking at hospital uniforms. Distinctive clothing easily allows one to recognise whether they are dealing with medical personnel or a patient. Moreover, prisons, hospitals, schools or factories remain hierarchical institutions and in the case of hospitals the hierarchy of a clinic is strengthened by the hierarchy of academic degrees. All abovementioned apparatuses work and focus on a single body and they are, indeed, an art of the human body. It is always the body that is at issue, "the body and its forces, their utility and their docility, their distribution and their submission" (*ibidem*, 25).

The process of transformation of the body – regardless of whether it takes place at schools, prisons or hospitals – is aimed at conducting one from point A to point B, leading an individual out of an undesirable state of being a child/criminal/ill. In other words, all three states are guided by the assumption: there is something wrong with you and this needs to be fixed, you need to be fixed by proper conditioning. And throughout this process, a docile body, being an object and a target of these interventions, is "subjected, used, transformed and improved" (Foucault, 1995, 136).

The interest in the body appeared relatively late, because in the eighteenth century and it was linked to the emergence of discipline while up to then the main object of interventions of the state and its institutions had been the soul (*cf*. Foucault, 2004, 7). Correspondingly, a therapeutic function of the hospital was also an invention of the eighteenth century. Up to then the hospital, run by charitable personnel, had been a place where people went to breathe their last (*cf*. Foucault, 2004, 10) and which had been focused not on curing the body of the poor, but a salvation of their soul as well as the souls of the staff members who took care of them. According to Foucault, before that time medicine and hospitals were two separate domains which did not overlap, "which were sometimes paired but differed fundamentally" (Foucault 2007, 143). The heart of medicine was elsewhere. The hospital served as an institution of spiritual and material assistance of the poor[4]. This function

[4] See also Foucault's *The Birth of Social Medicine* (2002) on socialisation of medicine.

of the hospital coincided with the ideas of exclusion and separation since a patient, as a carrier of disease and a dangerous element, needed to be kept apart from other members of society. Thus, until the end of the eighteenth century, being a patient of a hospital meant being poor and on the point of death. Not surprisingly, the medics who were summoned to the hospital were not those who enjoyed a lot of prestige. Recognised doctors stayed away from the hospital; their practice was limited to private consultations (*cf. ibidem*, 150). Perhaps unconscious fear of the hospital, as a place where one goes not to receive treatment but rather to die, still resides in some of us as an echo of that past situation. A passage from Aleksandr Solzhenitsyn's Cancer Ward might be a case in point: "Pavel Nikolayevich went white around the mouth, stopped dead and whispered to his wife, 'Kapa, I'll die here. I mustn't stay. Let's go back.' Kapitolina Matveyevna took him firmly by the arm and said, 'Pashenka! Where could we go? And what would we do then?'" (1969, 2).

As Foucault points out, although disciplinary mechanisms can be dated from ancient times[5], they were shaped into their current form throughout the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries. The form of discipline existed in antiquity and in the Middle Ages was isolated and fragmentary and only since the seventeenth century would it spread all over the social body becoming a new technique of the management of men (*cf.* Foucault 2007, 146). Yet, the concept of discipline should be distinguished both from an apparatus and an institution. It is a modality for the exercise of power "comprising a whole set of instruments, techniques, procedures, levels of application, targets" (Foucault, 1995, 215). In comparison with traditional power, based on the Hobbesian model of sovereignty [6], discipline is discreet. "It is not a triumphant power, which because of its own excess can pride itself on its omnipotence; it is a modest, suspicious power, which functions as a calculated, but permanent economy" (*ibidem*, 170). A beautiful picture, and at the same time an essence of difference between those two models of power, is to be found in Foucault's *Psychiatric Power* when analysing a treatment that King George III was given. The French philosopher notes: "In fact, the king`s [George III]

[5] "Discipline is a technique of exercising power, which was not so much invented but rather elaborated in its fundamental principles during the seventeenth century. It had existed throughout history, for example in the Middle Ages, and even in antiquity. For example, the monasteries constitute an example of a place of power of which a disciplinary system was at the heart. Slavery and the great slave companies existing in the Spanish, English, French, and Dutch colonies were also models of disciplinary mechanisms. We can go back to the Roman legion and in it we would similarly find an example of discipline" (Foucault, 2007, 146).

[6] See for instance his lectures *The Society Must Be Defended* (2003b).

madness, unlike that of King Lear, condemned to roam the world, fixes him at a precise point and, especially, brings him under, not another sovereign power, but a completely different type of power which differs term by term, I think, from the power of sovereignty. It is an anonymous, nameless and faceless power that is distributed between different persons. Above all, it is a power that is expressed through an implacable regulation that is not even formulated, since, basically, nothing is said, and the text actually says that all the agents of this power remain silent. The silence of regulation takes over, as it were, the empty place left by the king`s dethronement" (2006, 21). This description seems to go to the heart of disciplinary power that remaining subtle, "anonymous, multiple, pale, colorless" (*ibidem*, 22) is more dangerous than the former one.

Foucault describes discipline in terms of technology or methods which allow the detailed control over the activities of the body, and which enable "the constant subjection of its forces and imposed upon them a relation of docility-utility" (1995, 137). The aim of disciplinary apparatuses is to form and/or work on a productive and efficient body. The relation of docility-utility resounds especially loudly in the economic domain yet cannot be limited only to this sphere because when Foucault writes about production, he "means not only 'production' in the strict sense, but also the production of knowledge and skills in the school, the production of health in the hospitals, the production of destructive force in the army" (*ibidem*, 219). This requirement of effectiveness inherent in disciplinary power and imposed on the body, cancels a traditional division into a dominator and a dominated since both are those over whom disciplinary power is exercised. Neither students and teachers nor workers and managers or prisoners and prison guards can be caught with idle hands. However, in the case of the hospital, a concept of productivity needs to be supplemented. Although we can easily think of the hospital as a place that, serving recovery, returns to society those who seem to be useless, those deserters "the army of the upright" (Woolf, 2002, 12)[7], there are some other aspects of productivity of the ill body that cannot be ignored. The ill body may be regarded as useful, as far as, it reveals the secrets of illness, as far as it becomes a place where illness discloses its deepest mysteries at medicine's service. The same way, the dead body might be productive as much as living one, but I will return to this. This task of the hospital machinery overlaps a modern medicine task of maintenance a state of being healthy that is being

[7] Virginia Woolf writes in her essay: "we cease to be soldiers in the army of the upright; we become deserters. They march to battle. We float with the sticks on the stream".

useful. Taking this into account, health education may be perceived as an effective instrument of biopower that asserts control over health. As Denise Gastaldo notices: "Its [health education] involvement with prevention and health promotion, as well as its educational nature, enhance the set of power techniques that come into play in the management of individual and social bodies" (1997, 114).

Furthermore, at present, medicine relates to the economy not only through supplying society with capable of working, "strong individuals" (Foucault, 2004, 16), but also through making health a consumer object that has been put on the market among other goods. Health has become an object that can be produced and consumed and as such "it has acquired economic and market value" (*ibidem*). Medical advertising not only generates consumer demands for certain medications but also, according to Hancock, reorients "the understanding of health and healthcare decisions/treatments in general" (Hancock, 2018, 440). Thus, doctors have become "almost mechanized intermediaries between the pharmaceutical industry and client demand" (Foucault, 2004, 18), "simple distributors of medicine and medication" (*ibidem*). These transformations of the medical realm are parallel to the phenomenon of medicalisation of society which is a situation when medicine exceeds its traditional field "defined by the wishes of the patient, his pain, his symptoms, his malaise" (*ibidem*, 12) and spreads throughout the entire social body. The medical interventions take a different form starting with the purification of water and ending with an occupational medicine examination. And although these undertakings seem to be neutral, one needs to bear in mind that they remain endowed "with an authoritarian power with normalizing functions" (*ibidem*, 13). Much remains to be said in analysing these issues, but such an inquiry lies beyond the scope of this paper since even though the market medicine principally is based on a fear of illness as something that can make one be out of the game, it is essentially connected with health, evoking such questions as 'what can I do to maintain or improve my health?', 'what can I do when my health is failing?'.

Returning to the issue of the dead body it needs to be mentioned that its role is much more important than a role of a giver information about illness. According to Jeffrey Bishop – who draws on Foucault's discovery that at a certain point of history of medicine death has been conceiving of as able to elucidate life – the dead body has gained a paradigmatic status as an object of medical inquires. The constant flux of life, seen from this perspective, appears to be the worst enemy of a medical insight since it "prevents medicine from having a stable object of knowledge" (Bishop, 2009, 344) whereas death,

in halting this flux, makes a true knowledge possible to acquire. The "body becomes an object that must submit to the measure of the gaze. Making this measuring difficult is that this body, as alive, is in constant flux. But the dead body is more stable, more knowable, and, as a kind of template for knowing, more transferable to other bodies in the space of the polis" (*ibidem*, 343). This special status of the dead body seems to be important regarding discipline. Could one imagine more disciplined, more docile subject than the dead one? What other body would fulfil so eagerly assigned tasks?

**I a. The art of distribution of bodies and controlling their activities**

To make the body a productive body, in each sense mentioned above, is possible only if it is caught up in a system of subjection (*cf.* Foucault, 1995, 26). The process of subjection may be based on a direct coercion or, on the contrary, it may be "subtle, make use neither of weapons nor of terror" (*ibidem*). Yet, in both cases it involves a certain physical order that captures and moulds the body. The discipline manifests itself in details, in fastidious organising the space and time, in the "meticulousness of the regulations, the fussiness of the inspections, the supervision of the smallest fragment of life and of the body" (*ibidem*, 140). It blossoms in registering, monitoring, constituting files, observing, and controlling changes, arranging facts in columns and tables.

The aspect of discipline that codes a space, is clearly visible especially in the case of the prison and the hospital. In the last one, each body and each thing must be on their places and watched over. Patients are "individualized and distributed in a space where one could oversee them and record the events that took place" (Foucault, 2007, 148). Each body on their bed, each bed in a right room, each room in a right ward, each ward in a right building. In analysing a historical transformation of the hospital as the disciplinary institution, Foucault points out that the methods of fiscal and economic supervision preceded the techniques of medical observation. Originally, the main concern had been to keep under control precious, for many reasons, things rather than men. And the medical supervision over patients, in terms of discipline, has appeared later. This fact seems to be important since the management of things prepared the ground for the government of people. The machine was already obtained, with its tools and procedures, and human objects easily were merely added to non-human objects, becoming a component of the set of manageable elements. In today's hospital, administrative, fiscal, and economic dimensions remain crossed with medical one. They can be found in the system of verification of identity and health insurance

of patients, regulating their comings and goings, storing their belongings, keeping medicines under lock and key as well as recording their use.

A crucial component of functioning of each disciplinary apparatus is to create around the body environment that would be amenable to control. Thus, at a certain point in history, an architecture starts to serve an idea of transformation of individuals. It has been no longer built to arouse admiration (as with palaces) or to enable vigilance of an external space (as with fortresses), but to allow "an internal, articulated and detailed control – to render visible those who are inside it" (Foucault, 1995, 172). Consequently, hospitals discontinued being merely shelters. With the emergence of discipline, the hospital, including all power of its materiality, has become a therapeutic agent. And as such, that is as a place of a simultaneous cure and surveillance, it could not be any longer dark and obscure. The "hospital building was gradually organized as an instrument of medical action: it was to allow a better observation of patients, and therefore a better calibration of their treatment; the form of the buildings, by the careful separation of the patients, was to prevent contagions; lastly, the ventilation and the air that circulated around each bed was to prevent the deleterious vapours from stagnating around the patient, breaking down his humours and spreading the disease by their immediate effects" (Foucault, 1995, 172).

As I have already mentioned, discipline works not only on space but also time. It is exercised through location of bodies as well through controlling their activity: a useful, disciplined body is produced by deploying a meticulously planned schedules of its activities. The implementation of the idea of timetable, derived from the monastic communities and based on three pillars, namely to "establish rhythms, impose particular occupations, regulate the cycles of repetition" (*ibidem*, 149), can be easily found in each hospital machine. There is an allotted time for tests, taking medications, meals, visiting from family, sleeping, and resting.

Here the question arises, namely to what extent the coronavirus pandemic has changed (strengthened or maybe paradoxically weakened) the mechanism of medical discipline? Although the answer to the question goes beyond the scope of this paper it needs to be posed since we might deal with interesting situation when fully shaped system comes across its origin. Since according to Foucault (1995), the plague that broke out in Europe at the end of seventeenth century, gave rise to disciplinary projects and the

plague-stricken town as well as a later mechanism of Bentham's Panoptic[8] remain a schema of discipline.

**I b. The examination**

Foucault, making a differentiation between traditional and disciplinary power, unveils the role of an order of visibility embroiled in and used by power. In the first case the one who stays visible is the sovereign; he may be observed and admire in his glory by the invisible subjects. The disciplinary power, as a technique "which contains a constant and perpetual surveillance of individuals" (Foucault, 2007, 147), reverses this order. The power operates through its invisibility and the subjects – on virtue of "a principle of compulsory visibility" (Foucault, 1995, 187) – are those who are supposed to be seen. As Foucault puts it: "Their visibility assures the hold of the power that is exercised over them. It is the fact of being constantly seen, of being able always to be seen, that maintains the disciplined individual in his subjection" (*ibidem*). At this point, a concept of the examination, as a mechanism of objectification and as a ceremony in which power rejuvenates its vigour, needs to be introduced. Disciplinary power, through the procedure of examination, creates what, following Foucault, might be called "the space of domination" (*cf. ibidem*, 187). In this space, disciplinary power emits its potency by arranging objects: the subjects are presented as objects under the vigilant eye of power which manifests itself merely by a gaze that carries out an assessment. In that way, the examination constitutes the individual as an effect and object of power, as an effect and object of knowledge. This mechanism of power can be found not only at schools or hospitals, but also at prisons or workplaces where it takes the form of evaluation or appraisal which in an objective, neutral manner verifies whether the system deals with the good subject or, on the contrary, using Louis Althusser's expression, with the bad one (*cf.* Althusser, 2014, 269).

In a medical examination, a patient's body is exposed to the watchful gaze of doctors, "the gaze of a permanent corpus of knowledge" (Foucault,

[8] "Bentham's Panopticon is not a model of a prison, or it is not only a model of a prison; it is a model, and Bentham is quite clear about this, for a prison, but also for a hospital, for a school, workshop, orphanage, and so on […] it is a mechanism, a schema which gives strength to any institution, a sort of mechanism by which the power which functions, or which should function in an institution will be able to gain maximum force. The Panopticon is a multiplier; it is an intensifier of power within a series of institutions. It involves giving the greatest intensity, the best distribution, and the most accurate focus to the force of power" (Foucault, 2006, 73-74).

1995, 190), becoming an object of observation. The body becomes unveiled to make it betray its secrets that on a regular basis are hidden under clothing. Moreover, specialised technique displays its bones, organs, tissues, veins, and arteries giving an internal image of the body. Also, its fluids, like blood or urines, or temperature may be forced to testify, to speak and tell the inner story of illness. There is no way for a body to become more naked, in its physicality, than during a medical examination.

What also does the examination with the body is to introduce individuality into the field of documentation, into the domain of archives in which "the modern play of coercion over bodies, gestures and behaviour" (*ibidem*, 191) has its origins. The art of registration and collecting data of individuals, so familiar to us, has the medical genesis. It falls at the beginnings of a plague epidemic that Foucault conceives of as a turning point in the history of disciplines, when monitoring becomes one of critical needs: „It was the problem of the hospitals, where it was necessary to recognize the patients, expel shammers, follow the evolution of diseases, study the effectiveness of treatments, map similar cases" (*ibidem*, 189). Thus, being an object of an account stops being a privilege reserved for only few since a description becomes a means of control and a method of domination. In other words, a procedure of writing, in the context of individual's life, is no longer a policy of heroisation, but a procedure of simultaneous objectification and subjection. Although, the power of writing, as an integral part of the mechanism of discipline, closely intertwined with the examination, has followed the pattern set by a traditional method of administrative documentation aimed mainly at reporting[9], it has introduced into the procedure its specific elements since what was at stake was an efficient control of the body.

The strict connection between the examination and writing allows two important things. Firstly, it offers the possibility of the formation of the individual as a describable and analysable object of knowledge. Secondly, it enables the formation of a comparative system that makes "possible the measurement of overall phenomena, the description of groups, the characterization of collective facts, the calculation of the gaps between individuals, their distribution in a given 'population'" (*ibidem*, 190). In consequence, the medicine which emerges in the eighteenth century is simultaneously a medicine of the individual and the population. The examination with its techniques of documentation pins down everyone in their own particularity.

[9] See for instance Henri de Boulainvilliers' report in *The Society Must be Defended* (Foucault, 2003b).

As a result, the individual becomes tied, by received status, to the features, the measurements, the marks which define and transform them into a 'case'. The individual as a 'case' not only may be identified, described, measured, judged, and compared with others 'cases'[10] but also trained, corrected, classified, or normalised.

**I c. The paternal power**

Yet, there is another modality of power exercise that cannot be omitted when thinking of the hospital apparatus, namely a paternal power. Analysing a history of medicine Foucault shows that this form of power appears at the beginning of the nineteenth century, and one would venture to say that it is still present in the relations between a doctor and a patient. According to this, a good doctor should make himself a master of his "patients and their affections" (Foucault, 2003a, 88). He ought to "assuage their pains; calm their anxieties; anticipate their needs; bear with their whims; make the most of their characters and command their will, not as a cruel tyrant reigns over his slaves, but as a kind father who watches over the destiny of his children" (*ibidem*). What is crucial is that, in this relation, a patient is assigned the role of a child. It means that, right from the start, an encounter between a patient and a doctor is asymmetric and a patient is the one who is weaker and dependant. It is also a relation between someone who knows and someone who does not know or to be more precisely a someone whose knowledge is not a right knowledge and as such is excluded from the discourse. A patient's knowledge can be included into a type of knowledge that Foucault calls "subjugated knowledges" (Foucault 2003b, 7). By this term he understands "a whole series of knowledges that have been disqualified as nonconceptual knowledges, as insufficiently elaborated knowledges: naive knowledges, hierarchically inferior knowledges, knowledges that are below the required level of erudition or scientificity" (*ibidem*).

[10] This medical approach, in an interesting way, echoes in Louis-Ferdinand Céline's *Death on the Installment plan* in a passage where he sums up a doctor's life: "The hangovers of the 14,000 alcoholics of the district, the gastric catarrhs, the excruciating stoppages of the 6,422 cases of clap that he wasn't able to cure, the ovarian pangs of the 4,376 menopause cases, the querulous anxiety of 2,266 sufferers from high blood pressure, the irreconcilable contempt of 722 bilious headaches, the persecution mania of 47 tapeworm owners, plus the 352 mothers of children with worms, and the nondescript mob, the vast horde of masochists with manias of every kind, the eczema patients, the albuminous, the diabetic, the fetid, the palsied, the vaginous, the useless, the 'too muches', the 'not enoughs', the constipated, the repentant queers…" (1971, 32-33).

The privileged knowledge, a medic's knowledge, becomes a source from which a "power of expertise" (Bishop, 2009, 339) draws its strength and where it finds a validation in becoming 'the truth'. Such truth, indisputably, chains the patient to his diagnosis "as if there is something essential, some ontological characteristic that defines that person, qua diagnostic category" (*ibidem*, 345). However, even though a doctor is privileged as a possessor of a medical knowledge at the same time they are subjected to this knowledge or in other words they are privileged until they are a medium for it.

The asymmetry which pervades a relationship of a patient, and a doctor is strengthen by a figure of bed that is central both for a baby and a patient. A horizontal position, which is forced when lying in bed, is what distinguished the ill body from "the army of the upright" (Woolf, 2002, 12). The bed appears to be the celebration of weakness, dependence, impotence, and uselessness. It is a place dedicated to the undressed body and being unclothed makes it vulnerable and more available to be touched. There is no stronger illustration of this disproportion of forces than a situation when someone who stays with their clothes looks at someone who must get undressed. Naturally, getting undressed and being naked function also in different contexts and may, to an equal degree, be a tool of domination.

The similarity between a child and an ill is also reflected in a differentiation of social expectations that become less severe towards those who lies in bed. As Wool notices: "There is, let us confess it (and illness is the great confessional) a childish outspokenness in illness; things are said, truths blurted out, which the cautious respectability of health conceals … But in health the genial pretence must be kept up and the effort renewed—to communicate, to civilise, to share, to cultivate the desert, educate the native, to work by day together and by night to sport. In illness this make-believe ceases" (*ibidem*, 11-12). Yet, there might be another conclusion of the above passage, namely, that illness, despite being liable to be captured into disciplinary system, also has a liberating potential. And this led us to the second part of this paper.

**II. The Body Eluding Discipline or Illness as a Counter-Apparatus**

The aim of the hospital disciplinary apparatus, as it was said, is to produce a docile body that will be in thrall to all medical procedures. Yet, the ill body, because of its illness, so in a way *ex definition*, is undisciplined. One may say that at the very basis there is irreducible clash between the hospital as a medical disciplinary apparatus and illness. And not because hospitals are supposed to reduce illness but because of their, so to say, 'nature'. The emergence of the hospital in the form we know today, that as a medical,

and at the same time, disciplinary institution was dictated, among other things, by an urgent need for controlling the economic and social disorder that illness might cause (*cf*. Foucault, 2007, 145). Thus, the main impulse to transform hospitals did not come up for therapeutic reasons but arose from fear of chaos. Furthermore, if one considers illness as a distortion and interruption[11], must also acknowledge its constant potential for deformation of any given order. As Deleuze says: "Illness is not a process but a stopping of the process" (Deleuze, 1997, 3). Bearing in mind that an apparatus cannot be identified with discipline being a broader concept and the ill body may be captured also into other power form than disciplinary one, what Foucault proves in history of medicine (2003a), one might say that illness is a kind of Agamben's profanation which "deactivates the apparatuses of power" (2007, 77) and liberates what has been "captured and separated by means of apparatuses" (2009, 17). In other words, illness can be thought of as such, that is as a counter-apparatus due to its potential to undermine the imposed order and transgress its limits, also limits of language, but I will return to this. The ill body, as something that needs to be fixed, evokes the hospital discipline (or in a broader perspective a medical apparatus) at the same time endlessly undermining it. Illness, in one move, maintains and transgresses discipline. The ill body, seized by a medical apparatus becomes the subject, the patient. However, illness, in its ceaseless work, pushes at the medical structure and opens it to something that does not belong to the established order. Yet, one might notice that illness separate and close in its own structure the same way an apparatus does. It is true, but only partially. Indeed, illness and pain isolate and detach from the world of healthy people, they draw the line between those two worlds, but at the same time they release a new, unknown, and never explored by the end, space. A strong illustration of this feature of illness can be found in one scene of Bergman's *Cries and Whispers* where dying Agnes confesses: "I died, do you understand? But I can't asleep". This sentence is one of the most enigmatic and puzzle in the whole Bergman's movie because it mixes the order of death and life. It leaves a plenty room for interpretations and one of them may be: "I do and at the same time I do not share the world with you, I do, and I do not belong to the order that you do, but when I do not it does not mean that I stop my journey".

[11] Also from the perspective of the individual experience, illness appears to be a kind of rupture: "Illness is a breakdown of meaning in the ill person's life. Because of the disruption of habits, expectations, and abilities, meaning structures are destabilized and in extreme cases the overall coherence of one's life is destroyed" (Carel, 2016, 14-15).

This rebellious element of illness could have two overlapped reasons. First one is its bodily character. Even though the body can be easily trained, moulded and trapped in a 'soul' (in Foucauldian terms), as a social-cultural construct, there always remains a biological, not trainable aspect of it. As Virginia Woolf notices, a body never allows forgetting about itself: "All day, all night the body intervenes; blunts or sharpens, colours or discolours, turns to wax in the warmth of June, hardens to tallow in the murk of February" (Woolf, 2002, 4). And the ill body seems to be much more disobedient than the healthy one. It is easy to imagine a situation when one minute a patient obediently pop a pill that is a part of the treatment and the next their undisciplined body vomits, getting rid of it. In a way, one might say that there is an underground fight going on between the ill body and a medical discipline. It is like everything in a hospital regime would insist on being the exact opposite of illness. Even a white colour that dominates in hospitals seems to challenge what belongs to illness through exposing blood, urine, or excrement. The hospital sterility and cleanliness, with an air of superiority, oppose the body that swells, bleeds, smells, and excretes, that is captured in a spider's web of tubes, and unable to keep the order. The second reason why illness can be regarded as a counter-apparatus lies in a presence of pain associated with illness. Pain can have many different facets; it can be severe or mild, constant, or coming in waves. Yet, regardless of the form, it is always there, settled in the ill body, always in readiness to hit. The interventions of our bodies, mentioned by Woolf, if strengthened by pain, become a force that cannot be ignored and even if they do not destroy the order of health, the order of *logos* (in all meanings of this word *i.e.*, as reason, sense, order and speech), they cause an erosion of it. To make this clearer, let us imagine a face distorted by pain that almost makes this face unrecognisable, a body bowed in convulsions, unable to speak, think and listen, thrown onto, what Susan Sontag calls, "the night-side of life" (1978, 3)[12]. Such a body, as deaf on an interpellation's call (*cf.* Althusser, 2014, 264), slips away any apparatus investments. And what is left, at some point, is the body without the subject.

As abovementioned, illness interferes the process of rational thinking as well as a verbal communication with others. The first example of this situation that can be given seems to be obvious: it is when disturbances of the mind

[12] She writes: "Illness is the night-side of life, a more onerous citizenship. Everyone who is born holds dual citizenship, in the kingdom of the well and in the kingdom of the sick. Although we all prefer to use only the good passport, sooner or later each of us is obliged, at least for a spell, to identify ourselves as citizens of that other place".

make a message impossible to understand as it happens, for instance, when one is delirious. The second barrier holding a process of communication can be found in the fact that sometimes there is nothing to say expect it hurts. However, it does not mean that there is nothing say at all, it means that there is a lot to say but only on condition that one follows the path outlined by pain. This, however, requires that a changed 'hierarchy of the passions', different than the one that belongs to the world of health, comes into being. Woolf, writing about a need for discovering a new language able to describe and express what illness is, a language that would be "primitive, subtle, sensual, obscene" (2002,7), adds that what we need firstly is "a new hierarchy of the passions" (*ibidem*). She says: "love must be deposed in favour of a temperature of 104; jealousy give place to the pangs of sciatica; sleeplessness play the part of villain, and the hero become a white liquid with a sweet taste—that mighty Prince with the moths' eyes and the feathered feet, one of whose names is Chloral" (*ibidem*). But if such a new hierarchy would appear for a moment, if such a new language would be invented, do they be sharable with others, with those who do not belong to "the night-side of life" and even with those who do? Wouldn't they be fleeting, unable to sustain, accidental and singular, destined to eventual immersion in chaos? Even Woolf noticing that because of illness "the world has changed its shape" (*ibidem*, 8), adds immediately that "such an experience cannot be imparted" (*ibidem*).

**III. Conclusions**

For many reasons illness is being marginalised in modern-day philosophy (*cf.* Carel, 2016, 205-206), also in the field of philosophy of education. Yet, against this state of things, some attempts, aimed at reminding its phronetic role, are made. Within this perspective illness is regarded as "a unique form of philosophizing" (*ibidem*, 208) able to transform human attitudes and beliefs. "While the execution of most philosophical procedures such as casting doubt or questioning is volitional and theoretical, illness is uninvited and threatening. Illness throws the ill person into a state of anxiety and uncertainty. As such it can be viewed as a radical, violent philosophical motivation that can profoundly alter our outlook" (*ibidem*). In the centre of this approach one can find a picture of suffering Epicurus who endures pain with dignity and serenity. He writes to Idomeneus: "My continual sufferings from strangury and dysentery are so great that nothing could augment them; but over against them all I set gladness of mind at the remembrance of our past conversations" (Diogenes Laertius, 1925, 549). Pain is here something not only bearable but also manageable by mind, something that a human beings

can govern the way they govern their lives. And although one can dispute a conviction that suffering ennobles and illness edifies, arguing that it is only a desperate attempt at giving meaning something senseless, unquestionably, they have a power which every rupture has, and which can be described as negative power. In this regard suffering and illness not necessarily create some new qualities but deny, refuse, and destroy already existing and as such also liberate. They halt or undermine daily routine. They throw us out of the given order and make us forget of who we are, where we were going to and what we ought to desire within the confines of society. And through this gesture of "no" coming from the body, one, even if for a moment, becomes *no*-body, the body freed from any subjectification.

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# The slow violence of air pollution: an educational challenge to what is potentially invisible

**Abstract**: In the article - starting from the personal experience of a person living every day in Warsaw, a city struggling with the problem of smog in the autumn and winter - I consider the issue of air pollution in terms of Nixon's 'slow violence' as a violence dispersed in time and space, and potentially 'out of sight' (Nixon, 2013). Then, following Thom Davies (2018), treating slow violence as a form of Mbembe's necropolitics (Mbembe, 2003), I reflect on possible, from the educational point of view, actions that could make slow violence visible and at the same time help citizens to emancipate themselves from the shackles of politics subordinating life to the power of death, reducing it to existence of the 'living dead'. Referring to the critical reflections of Henry A. Giroux (1988a, 1988b) and the literary reflections of Olga Tokarczuk (2019), I put forward the thesis that critical education, which would be able to create a parabolic story, universalize human experience and thus transcend the boundaries of the ego, has the potential to live up the representational and narrative challenge posed by the relative invisibility of slow violence.

**Keywords:** Air pollution, Slow violence, Necropower, Critical pedagogy, Parabolic story.

> It is not what goes into the mouth of a man that makes him unclean and defiled, but what comes out of the mouth; this makes a man unclean and defiles [him]
>
> Matthew 15:11

**Introduction: smog as a silent and slow killer**

The author of this article lives in Warsaw, the capital of which in the autumn and winter is shrouded in deadly smog, a slow and silent killer. Warsaw, like other cities in Poland, has been at the forefront of the most polluted regions in Europe for years. According to the World Bank Group data cited by Wojciech Nazar and Marek Niedoszytko, as many as '36 out of the 50 most polluted cities in the European Union are in Poland' (Nazar & Niedoszytko, 2022, p. 1). In November 2022, Warsaw – next to Cracow – was also in the top ten most polluted metropolises in the world according to the *iqair.com* ranking (Gruszczyński, 2022).

The smog in Poland is mainly London-type smog. It appears in the heating season and contains chemical substances harmful to health: mainly PM2.5 and PM10 suspended dusts; nitrogen and carbon oxides; sulphur dioxide (Adamkiewicz & Matyasik, 2019). The formation of London smog is also influenced by weather conditions, in particular the phenomenon of thermal inversion appearing, resulting in a gradual increase in air temperature with height. Thermal inversion contributes to the equalization of the air temperature with the temperature of the rising smoke. As a result of this process, the pollutants accumulated in the smoke lie low above the ground, in a layer with uniform temperatures. The phenomenon of thermal inversion is usually accompanied by windless weather, which prevents the blowing away of accumulated pollutants.

The name 'London smog' is not accidental and refers to the tragic event that took place at the beginning of December 1952 in London. Within eight days (from December 2 to 9, 1952), a thick layer of smog accumulated in London because of mass heating of apartments with coal (the smog episode was preceded by cold and humid days) and the emission of industrial pollutants. The smog paralyzed the entire city. Due to poor visibility, public transport stopped working. Not only outdoor sports events were cancelled, but also cultural events organized in buildings (concerts, theatre performances, etc.), as polluted air penetrated even into their interiors, making it impossible to watch them. At first, the smog did not cause panic among Londoners, who were used to the sight of dense fog. It was only the medical statistics published a few weeks later that shocked the public opinion. It turned out that 4,000 people died because of the 'Great Smog', although

in fact the mortality rate among Londoners remained at an elevated level for several months (Dawson, 2017; Logan, 1953; Mishra, 2017). The tragic events of 1952 led four years later to the adoption of 'The Clean Air Act' and to increasing environmental awareness and taking specific pro-ecological actions (Dawson, 2017). Although today London is not completely free of smog, the air quality is getting better every year. Unlike Great Britain and other Western European countries, Poland, as I mentioned at the beginning, is still one of the world's leading countries with the most polluted air. The main emitters of smog in Poland are households that use low-quality fuel (mainly coal) and municipal waste for heating, road transport and industry ('Skąd się bierze smog?', 2021). This situation is correlated with higher morbidity and mortality. For example, in Warsaw, pollutant emissions – the main pollutants being PM 2.5 and PM10 particulate matter 'cause approximately 1600 attributable deaths and 29,000 disability-adjusted life-years (DALYs) per year and that about 80% of this health burden was due to exposure to PM 2.5' (Holnicki, Tainio, Kałuszko, & Nahorski, 2017; quoted in: Nazar & Niedoszytko, 2022, p. 4). The aforementioned DALY coefficient 'expresses the years of life lost as a result of premature death and the years lived with a disability of a certain severity and duration. One DALY is (…) one year of healthy life lost' (Murray, 1996, p. 7). In the capital of Poland, in Warsaw, 'a short-term exposure to increased PM2.5 and PM10 concentrations by 10 μg/m3 results in an increase of relative risk (RR) of death by 0.7% and 0.3%, respectively' (Maciejewska, 2020; quoted in: Nazar & Niedoszytko, 2022, p. 4).This is worrying data.

The issue of air pollution is not only a problem of science dealing with environmental protection or public health. This problem can also be analyzed in the context of humanities and social sciences, including education. In this article, I consider the problem of air pollution in terms of Nixon's 'slow violence' (Nixon, 2013) and related Galtung structural violence (Galtung, 1969). Then, following Thom Davies (2018), treating slow violence as a form of Mbembe's necropolitics (Mbembe, 2003), I reflect on possible, from the educational point of view, actions that could make slow violence visible and at the same time help citizens to emancipate themselves from the shackles of politics subordinating life to the power of death, reducing it to existence of the 'living dead' (Mbembe, 2003). Isn't the life of citizens exposed to breathing polluted air actually a form of experiencing death while living?

**Slow violence: 'out of sight' and in sight**

The term 'slow violence' refers to Rob Nixon's book: *Slow Violence and the Environmentalism of the Poor*, published in 2011. Let's look at its most important theses.

Focusing on the world's slow-moving environmental disasters, Nixon defines slow violence as the kind of violence that 'occurs gradually and out of sight, a violence of delayed destruction that is dispersed across time and space, an attritional violence that is typically not viewed as violence at all' (Nixon, 2013, p. 2). In contrast to violence, which is usually perceived as spectacular, immediate (fast violence), imposing, sensationally visible; slow violence is a form of violence that is rather incremental in nature, and its catastrophic effects are felt on different time scales (Nixon, 2013).

According to Nixon, the invisibility of slow violence poses representational challenges to how we construct narratives and strategic planning: 'Climate change, the thawing cryosphere, toxic drift, biomagnification, deforestation, the radioactive aftermaths of wars, acidifying oceans, and a host of other slowly unfolding environmental catastrophes present formidable representational obstacles that can hinder our efforts to mobilize and act decisively. The long dyings—the staggered and staggeringly discounted casualties, both human and ecological that result from war's toxic aftermaths or climate change—are underrepresented in strategic planning as well as in human memory' (Nixon, 2013, pp. 2–3). In the society of the spectacle, which feeds the viewers with sensational information and images, it is difficult to break through with a narrative about slow violence. In order for what is hidden and dispersed in time and space to become visible, as Nixon suggests, a change in the way of creating a narrative is needed. Therefore, the author of *Slow Violence* proposes to focus on the following questions and consider possible answers to them:

- 'How can we convert into image and narrative the disasters that are slow moving and long in the making, disasters that are anonymous and that star nobody, disasters that are attritional and of indifferent interest to the sensation-driven technologies of our image-world?
- How can we turn the long emergencies of slow violence into stories dramatic enough to rouse public sentiment and warrant political intervention, these emergencies whose repercussions have given rise to some of the most critical challenges of our time?' (Nixon, 2013, p. 3).

The conceptual antecedent of Nixon's slow violence is structural violence. This concept was coined in 1969 by Johan Galtung, who extended the concept of violence beyond direct contact between people (subject-object relationship) and pointed out that if a structure or social institution harms people by preventing them from meeting their basic needs, then we are dealing with structural violence (Galtung, 1969). As Galtung explains: 'when one husband beats his wife there is a clear case of personal violence, but when one million husbands keep one million wives in ignorance there is structural violence' (Galtung, 1969, p. 171). The common denominator of structural violence and slow violence is drawing attention to the broader, systemic determinants of violence. The difference between the two theories is that slow violence has a distinct spatio-temporal element.

The spatio-temporal dimension of Nixon's slow violence is also noted by Thom Davies, who states that this concept encourages us to expand our imagination about what constitutes harm to us; looking beyond what is immediate and obvious in social injustice (Davies, 2022). Nixon's concept of slow violence, writes Davies, 'invites us to include the gradual deaths, destructions, and layered deposits of uneven social brutalities within the geographic here-and-now. At the same time, by unchaining our geographical imaginations from the shackles of the present, (...) provokes us to delve into the past to unearth the violent structures of inequality that saturate contemporary life, and may well lay waste to the future' (Davies, 2022, p. 410).

These brutal, veiled structures of inequality, that Davies mentions, are not only linked to environmental catastrophes, but they can also be extended to other dimensions of social life. Jenna Marie Christian and Lorraine Dowler (2019), for example, propose that Nixon's slow violence be viewed through the lens of feminist research, denaturalizing binary divisions, and suggest a relational policy in which slow and spectacular violence would be treated as one complex: 'Slow and routinized harms of racism and sexism accumulate in deadly ways, even as the long-term consequences are detached from their public causes. Everyday discourses of hate and xenophobia can fuel racist hate crimes. Routinized and naturalized forms of rape culture produce the conditions for actual rape. The slow march of economic and political exploitation can incite explosive and violent responses, like an act of terrorism, and an act of terrorism can then be used to justify a generation of oppressive changes to immigration or policing policy with violent impacts that stretch across time' (Christian & Dowler, 2019, p. 1072). According to Christian and Dowler, revealing the co-consistency of these binaries (slow *versus* fast), showing how slow forms of violence are related to fast ones, and

how the latter shapes the slow ones, would make slow violence more visible. Going beyond this binary division, which de facto depoliticizes and thus removes slow violence from the field of social vision; by combining rather than separating the consequences and causes of slow violence, it could be a way to politicize it and challenge the impunity of its scattered perpetrators (Christian & Dowler, 2019).

As I mentioned, Nixon defines slow violence as being 'out of sight'. This raises an epistemic question: for whom, exactly, is slow violence out of sight? This problem was pointed out by Thom Davies, who, referring to his many years of ethnographic research conducted in 'Cancer Alley' (this is an area in the United States, in the state of Louisiana, along the lower section of the Mississippi River, where numerous petrochemical plants emitting strong toxic substances such as benzene, formaldehyde into the environment. This more than 100 km long 'petrochemical corridor' is called 'Cancer Alley' because there are large concentrations of people suffering from cancer because of contaminated air), put forward the thesis that the communities living in this area are beginning to see the impact of the slow violence of polluted air on everyday life (Davies, 2022). In other words, the slow violence they experience is not entirely out of sight. According to Davies, the slow violence in 'Cancer Alley' does not exist because of its invisibility. It persists because the stories, narratives of the victims of this violence do not count, they do not matter to political decision-makers (Davies, 2022). It should be added that this toxic area is inhabited mainly by ethnic and national minorities, people with low economic capital, which prevents them from changing their place of residence. Davies argues that ignoring these local, informal claims about the environmental injustice experienced by 'Cancer Alley' communities 'helps create a self-reinforcing cycle of brutality', that is not only slow and structural, but also epistemic (Davies, 2022, p. 421). The politics of brutality understood in this way leads to the creation of 'sacrifice zones', places where some communities are exposed to the possibility, the risk of dying while alive (Davies, 2018, 2022). I will develop this topic in more detail in the next section of the article.

**The politics of the 'death worlds'**

The theoretical discussion about the slow violence associated with polluted air can be extended - as proposed by Thom Davies (2018) - by referring to the concept of necropolitics created by Achille Mbembe (2003), which Mbembe built on Foucauldian criticism of the concept of sovereignty and its relation to war and biopower (Foucault, 2003; Mbembe, 2003). The

basis of my considerations in this area will be mainly the research findings of Davies, supplemented with my own references to the theories of Foucault and Mbembe.

Thom Davies points out that in contrast to biopolitics, understood as a form of exercising power, control over the proportion of births and deaths, reproduction, fertility of a given population; a form of regulating power that has the ability to 'make die' and 'let die' (Davies, 2018; Foucault, 2003); the source of the slow violence responsible for environmental damage is not a single, exclusive power of the sovereign, but a power that – as Mbembe, quoted by Davies put it – emerges from 'a labyrinth of forces at work' (Davies, 2018, p. 1539; Mbembe, 2001, p. 174). In other words, we are dealing here with forces that are dispersed, incoherent, entangled in 'a complex assemblage of corporate power, state authority, local regulations, and capitalist structures of accumulation' (Davies, 2018, p. 1539). The gradual experience of slow violence through, for example, exposure to polluted, toxic air, which – as I showed at the beginning of this article – can lead to greater morbidity and premature death, is not the result of deliberate actions of biopower, but the result of dispersed forces and actions of necropower, which subordinates life to the power of death (Mbembe, 2003). According to Davies, this subordination of life to the dictates of death is something more than Foucault's idea of the law of sentencing to death. In the field of necropower and necropolitics, citizens are exposed to the possibility of death (Davies, 2018). This distinction outlined by Davies is convincing and clear until the author tries to explain it by contrasting the expressions 'make die' and 'let die'. It is worth noting that both expressions refer to Foucault's reflections on the changes and transformations that took place within the political law in the 19th century. The expression 'make die' is related to the classical theory of sovereignty cited by Foucault, whose basic attribute was – let us recall – the 'right of life and death'(Foucault, 2003, p. 241). In other words, life and death are not natural phenomena, they belong to the area of political power, the sovereign can condemn to death and let live (Foucault, 2003). In the nineteenth century, however, this right was supplemented, as Foucault notes, by a new right, a form of power that was exactly the opposite: 'to "make" life and to "let" die' (Foucault, 2003, p. 241). Thus, Davies contrasts the necropolitical idea of 'exposing people to the possibility of death' with the idea of 'make die' from the classical theory of sovereignty, while at the same time associating the former with the new law of biopower, which speaks of 'let die', which as a result, blurs the proposed distinction. Regardless of these ambiguities, what distinguishes the idea of exposing people to the possibility of death from the

classical theory of sovereignty and the theory related to biopower technology is that in the former, people who experience slow violence experience it, as Davies writes, 'at the hands of an unlocated, dispersed perpetrator. No one is directly killed by pollution as a means of biopolitical control. Rather, communities (...) are allowed to suffer the attritional violence of environmental pollution, often through the "violent inaction" of regulating authorities' (Davies, 2018, p. 1540).

Mbmembe theorizing about necropolitics (as those forms of action that subordinate life to the power of death) refers, among others, to slavery – 'one of the first instances of biopolitical experimentation' (Mbembe, 2003, p. 21). The author of the concept of necropolitics points out that while a plantation slave is kept alive, he is kept alive 'in a state of injury' (Mbembe, 2003, p. 21). His existence is in many respects 'a form of death-in-life' (Mbembe, 2003, p. 21). Referring to this reflection, Davies puts forward a rather bold thesis that the life of a slave experiencing gradual mutilation on plantations resonates with the equally slow experience of polluted air by people living in the modern, globalized world: 'just as [...] the colonized bodies [of slaves – P.Z.] were kept in a state of gradual injury through processes of imperial domination, Nixon's interpretation of slow violence shows how the uneven spread of globalization and pollution similarly keeps marginalized groups in situations and spaces of wounded subjugation' (Davies, 2018, p. 1540).

While the common denominator of both these experiences (the slave and the person experiencing the effects of polluted air) is the policy of inaction created by necropower, the difference is that the slave experiences violence from a visible, specific perpetrator. And the perpetrator or perpetrators of the slow violence of polluted air are, as already mentioned, dispersed, difficult to locate. Of course, it is debatable whether it is possible to equate the violence experienced by slaves working on plantations with communities experiencing the effects of long-term exposure to polluted air. As Mbembe points out, the overseer on his plantation behaves in a brutal, cruel way. He can whip a slave and he can take his life - often it depends on the whim of the master and ruler, whose aim is to 'instilling terror' (Mbembe, 2003, p. 21). The slow violence of polluted air takes a less obvious (less visible) form of brutality, e.g., in the form of upper respiratory tract and heart diseases, which can also lead to death. Regardless of these differences, both experiences of violence are the result of policies that create 'death worlds' in which the lives of vulnerable communities are more like those of the 'living dead' (Davies, 2018; Mbembe, 2003).

**Revealing the (in)visible: slow violence as an educational challenge**

The slow violence representational challenge mentioned by Nixon is actually an educational challenge. However, in order to undertake this challenge, thinking about education should first be freed from the neoliberal-instrumental paradigm that dominates in its area, reducing educational institutions to the role of factories serving economic efficiency. Let us recall with Giroux that schools are more than storehouses of enterprises. They are also social forms of life, which should, among other things, shape people's ability to think and act critically (Giroux, 1988b).

This reflection on education, although known for many years and repeatedly articulated by critical educators, still seems to be losing not only to the neoliberal-instrumental narrative, but also to positive education, which is becoming more and more popular among educators. The term is used to describe scientifically (empirically) proven interventions and programs in the field of positive psychology that contribute to the development of well-being among students, parents, and educational institutions (White & Murray, 2015). Developing mental well-being including positive emotions (pleasure of life), commitment (a state in which we devote ourselves to a task that gives satisfaction), interpersonal relationships (developed e.g. in the workplace), a sense of meaning from the task performed and the awareness that it is needed; achievements and the ability to appreciate them (Seligman, 2011), carries the risk of excessive individualization of educational discourse, separation from the outside world, from social and cultural 'being' (Folkierska, 1990). In other words, this risk of excessive individualization may lead to students withdrawing into the private sphere (closing within the limits of their own ego) and not engaging in activities in the public sphere for the common good. Paradoxically, positive education is 'water for the mill' of neoliberal ideology, which willingly uses (by way of interception) slogans about well-being and self-development to build an even more effective policy of transforming citizens into *homo consumens* (Barber, 2008). In fact, these two approaches are the embodiment of Huxley's 'Brave New World', where all people are happy, focused on developing well-being, and possible existential anxieties are mitigated by *soma* (Huxley, 2006).

Let us imagine the pedagogies that could meet the representation and narrative challenge of slow violence. Who, then, during school and university classes, but also outside of them, in other public spheres, not only institutional ones, could create such sensitizing (Nixon would say - 'thrilling') stories containing images and symbols that this elusive, but ubiquitous form of violence, has become as visible to our students as fast violence? I believe

that such a person could be, for example, a 'transformative intellectual', to refer to the concept coined by Henry A. Giroux (Giroux, 1988a). I will now try to transfer this figure to the ground of my previous reflections on slow violence and to specify it a bit in this context.

According to Giroux, a transformative intellectual is a politically engaged person, an interpreter enabling a critical understanding of the surrounding reality, a pedagogue developing an educational discourse that 'unites the language of critique with the language of possibility, so that social educators recognize that they can make changes' (Giroux, 1988a, p. 128). In the context of the slow violence' problem that I am analyzing, a transformative intellectual could explain to students and discover with them (through a critical discussion) the multidimensionality of this phenomenon, considering the complexity of slow violence raised by Christian and Dowler (2019). Its close links with spectacular violence, as well as its connections - referring to Davies' considerations (2022) - with structural and epistemic violence. In the latter case, the very discussion about disregarding the voice of those who are aware of slow violence and its disastrous effects on health and the environment would strengthen their narratives, extracting these stories from the abyss of discourse dominated by the narratives of 'fast thinkers' (Bourdieu, 1998) often at the service of postmodern necropower. A transformative intellectual as a translator, or one who reveals in the course of a critical discussion what is potentially invisible (such as slow violence) would thus create an educational space that would be a counterbalance to the aforementioned neoliberal and positive pedagogies, giving students the opportunity to become 'citizens who have the knowledge and courage' (Giroux, 1988a, p. 128) to fight against slowly violent environmental injustice; the struggle that would make it possible to transform the 'worlds of death' into 'worlds of life' in which citizens would have equal access to an unpolluted natural environment. Unveiling slow violence by a transformative intellectual might look like creating a parabolic story that universalizes human experience. 'When a reader follows along with someone's story written in a novel' – writes Olga Tokarczuk – he can identify with the fate of the character described and consider their situation as if it were his own, while in a parable, he must surrender completely his distinctness and become the Everyman' (Tokarczuk, 2019, p. 6). This resignation from his individuality does not mean that man ceases to be himself: he 'is at once himself, a person living under specific historical and geographical conditions, yet at the same time he also goes well beyond those concrete particulars, becoming a kind of Everywhere Everyman' (Tokarczuk, 2019, pp. 5–6).

The aim of critical discussion understood in this way would therefore be to empower the student, i.e., to develop both the ability to think critically (as the ability to perceive contemporary world problems in a parabolic perspective) and the ability to act. Let us make it clear, referring again to Giroux, that empowerment applies not only to individuals but also to the social field: 'The Freedom and human capacities of individuals must be developed to their maximum but individual powers must be linked to democracy in the sense that social betterment must be the necessary consequence of individual flourishing' (Giroux, 1988b, p. 92). Thus, the educational process understood in this way goes beyond individualistic, deuniversalizing human experience, neoliberal and positive pedagogies – it is closely related to acting for the common good.

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# Populism, counter-democracy, and counter-education. Notes on the imagination about antidote to the crisis of liberal democracy[1]

**Abstract:** Despite the convergence in the wording, the concepts of Ilan Gur-Ze'ev's counter-education and Pierre Rosanvallon's counter-democracy remain independent of each other, but they have a common denominator, which, in my opinion, allows us to look at the complexity of the relationship between education and populism from a pedagogical point of view and perceive its ambiguity. As for populism itself, its media and political understanding most often confronts it with democracy, seeing populism as a kind of threat. In such a context, it is easy to present education in its various form as an unequivocal antidote to the threat so understood. However, some researchers of populism, such as Margaret Canovan, Roger Eatwell, Matthew Goodwin, or Pierre-André Taguieff, recognise the complexity of the relationship between populism and democracy, its ambiguity, which may also help to revise the view on the role of education in preparing citizens to face the populist challenge. Consequently, it can be assumed that the findings of P. Rosanvallon, I. Gur-Ze'ev and M. Canovan allow the question of populism in educational theory and practice to be raised anew. The theoretical perspective I have adopted will allow me, I believe, to develop two propositions: first, that populism is to some extent a development, an increase in the inalienable property of democracy, which in effect turns against itself;

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second, that this property also characterizes education. This is related to what democracy and education promise us, or what we think democracy and education promise us, and which, if they are lacking, do not arouse our enthusiasm or the interest necessary to defend or develop them.

**Keywords:** populism, counter-democracy, crisis of liberal democracy, counter-education, civic education, theory of education, critical pedagogy.

The distinctive ways of understanding, present both in the public discourse of modern Western societies and in the scholarly literature of the two phenomena of populism[2] and education, allow them to be characteristically contrasted. In the eyes of the critics of populism (e.g. Mounk, 2018; Müller, 2016; Mudde, Rovira Kaltwasser, 2017. See also: Eatwell, Goodwin, 2018, p. 7-21, 47-70; Moffitt, 2018, p. 1-16), the suspicion of populism is tantamount to recognising that a particular movement, political party or organisation poses a significant threat to the proper functioning of Western liberal democracies, contrary to how the leaders of these movements, parties or organisations and their members or supporters perceive and portray themselves as well as the state of democracy in particular countries. According to critics, populists proclaim, among other things, that they are devoted ordinary citizens of the states which are only nominally democratic. For the fundamental ideas of democracy have been distorted, squandered or simply not realised. This state of affairs is – populist claim – primarily due to socially alienated elites, especially political and intellectual, and state institutions, especially

[2] It is worth recalling, following the literature on the subject, that the word 'populism' is used in different historical and social contexts to denote disparate phenomena. According to Pierre Rosenvallon, this is related to three relatively independent histories of populism: a movement of activists of the Narodnichestvo in Russia, The People's Party in America, literary populism in France, then it is the history of populist movements and regimes in France, Latin America, and finally a global history of contemporary populism (Rosenvallon, 2021, p. 6-9, 59-103). However, Margaret Canovan uses a classification according to which the seven types she distinguishes can be divided into two intrinsically divergent groups of populisms: agrarian and political. She mentions the following agrarian populisms: farmers' radicalism, peasant movements, intellectual agrarian socialism. In turn, political ones include: populist dictatorship, populist democracy, reactionary populism, politicians' populism (Canovan, 1981, p. 3-16). In turn, Roger Eatwell and Matthew Goodwin propose to use the term 'national populism' to designate the tendencies inherent in the contemporary Western political space (Eatwell, Goodwin, 2018, p. 62-70). Following Canovan's classification, this article focuses attention on issues related to political populism in the context of the crisis of Western liberal democracies.

those that are bureaucratic, the other culprits are often found among the strangers – migrants or foraign capital. Hence populists, as the proper representatives of the people and, at the same time, the proper sovereign in democratic regimes, feel morally entitled and obliged to act to restore or implement such conditions in which democracy will be truly for the people and through the people. In other words, they are responding to the crisis of democracy, which they believe is the real cause of the political and social crisis in their countries. They believe that it is only by repairing democracy that political and social life in their communities can be put on the right track.

In turn, critics of such a way of understanding the democratic, political and social reality and the crisis of democracy seem to first of all recognize this populist way of thinking as naive, misleading, and emotionally polarizing and particularistic. Moreover, they consider the self-identification of populists with the people – a sovereign deprived of its proper place in democracies – as a usurpation that distorts the fundamental ideas of democracy. A democracy in which citizens realize the values of freedom, equality and solidarity primarily by recognizing and respecting the procedures and structures for making, implementing and controlling decisions that enable peaceful mediation and coexistence in a politically and socially diverse country. From this point of view, belief in the populist promise of democratic fulfilment is a false belief that needs to be cured by public education, especially school education. For it is there, at school, that we are subjected to social formation, including intellectual and civic formation, and thanks to the social control (handled by science representatives) over the knowledge passed on at school, its graduates will get a proper image of democracy and society, their ideals and functioning. A similar role of knowledge providers and educators in the Enlightenment can be played by other institutions of socialization, including, in particular, the media and other centers of creating public opinion.

This is how education can be understood as an antidote and opposed to populism. Except the populist movements themselves use education for their own purposes. However, in both of these approaches ('liberal democrats' and 'populists'), education is above all a tool, an instrument essentially devoid of other intrinsic properties. Hence, both 'sides' can credibly accuse each other of propaganda and of reducing education to it, and education – they claim – should be subordinated to and serve the truth and what is practical and useful in life. The ambivalence here would be that both 'sides' can simultaneously associate hope with education and be disappointed by it.

**The sovereign power of the people and the promise of a renewal of democracy in an era of organized distrust**

Let us try to look at the relationship between democracy and populism from a different point of view. My intention is to articulate, as a consequence, a different understanding of the possible relationship between education and populism (see Włodarczyk, 2022, p. 151-180). Therefore, with this in mind, I will refer here to selected findings by two researchers, Margaret Canovan and Pierre Rosanvallon.

M. Canovan assumes that political populisms should be considered an immanent component of modern democracies. The source of the legitimacy of democracy is indeed related to the sovereignty of the people (*demos* or *populus*), despite all the ambiguity and complexity accompanying this idea (Canovan, 2005, p. 10-39, 91-121). Hence, as M. Canovan claims, referring to the idea of overcoming the crisis of people's rule by populist organizations, parties, social movements and their leaders can be understood as a demand for the renewal of democracy (Antoszewski, 2016, p. 47-90; Canovan, 2005, p. 65-9). This crisis can be made credible, according to M. Canovan, due to the irremovable paradox accompanying democratic regimes and practice. As she explains:

> The paradox is this: democracy is the most inclusive and 'popular' form of politics, taking politics to ordinary people, giving them political rights and access to multiple channels of influence. For that very reason this is by far the most complex form of politics, so bafflingly tangled and opaque that the vast majority of its supposed participants can form no clear picture to help them make sense of it (Canovan, 2002, p. 28)[3].

Thus, political populism can be considered to be one of the possible collective responses to this state of affairs, in a sense an inalienable component of democracy. This component may take various forms and be characterized by its different intensity, but, more importantly, it cannot be eliminated. It is perhaps worth recalling in this context Pierre-André Taguieff's remarks on the recognisability of populism. For it seems that it is not

[3] P. Rosenvallon seems to take a similar view, noting in his introduction to the work: "The progress of democracy, which I write about in this book and in my other books, can only be made by further complicating the system: its institutions, procedures, modes of expression of society and its representation. Conversely, the forces that seek to simplify democracy, ostensibly for its fulfillment, in fact seek to destroy it. They are the basis of populist tendencies and postulates in the world" (2019, p. 10).

every populism that is socially and politically perceived as such, but above all those that reach a certain unspecified degree of intensity, visibility and support (Taguieff, 1995, p. 9-43).

Moreover, the issues of populism as an immanent component of democracy and the power of the people are linked by M. Canovan to political myth and, more specifically, as has already been somewhat mentioned, to the promise of democratic renewal. According to her, it is "the story of how the people have been robbed of their rightful sovereignty, but we rise up and regain it" (Canovan, 2005, p. 127); this has been the principal component of populist politics of the past two centuries.

> Inherent in modern democracy, in tension with its pragmatic face, is faith in secular redemption: the promise of a better world through action by the sovereign people. […] When too great a gap opens up between haloed democracy and the grubby business of politics, populists tend to move on to the vacant territory, promising in place of the dirty world of party manoeuvring the shining ideal of democracy renewed (Canovan, 1999, p. 11).

Focusing attention on this aspect of populism, one can say that it is not a political programme or a way of solving political and social problems that unites or characterises populisms, but precisely the belief in the value of sovereign power of the people, the realisation of which is assumed by democracy.

This relationship between the perception of democracy as a value, protest politics and populism can also be considered in the perspective of P. Rosanvallon's concept of counter-democracy. It is true that P. Rosanvallon sees populism as a form of a pathology of democracy: "It is a perverse inversion of the ideals and procedures of democracy" (2008, p. 265), nevertheless, on a different level of the functioning of democracy and populism, analysed by P. Rosanvallon, their closer interrelationships emerge. They can be seen clearly when one focuses on what the French historian and philosopher calls counter-democracy[4]. P. Rosanvallon here has in mind here a democracy of dispersed intermediate powers, a type of clearly manifested distrust of democracy in Western societies. In his view, in the post-totalitarian era, counter-democracy has acquired a historically shaped, sufficiently organised form to distinguish it analytically as a separate phenomenon and to appreciate

[4] The details of the components, historical development and functioning of counter-democracy are analyzed by P. Rosanvallon in the cited work (2008, p. 1-249).

its significance for the development of Western democracies. According to P. Rosanvallon, the essence of counter-democracy is "to make sure that elected officials keep their promises and to find ways of maintaining pressure on the government to serve the common good" (2008, p. 8). The political form he distinguishes, which is not so much the opposite of democracy as one form of democracy opposed to another, institutionalised. Nevertheless, this historically formed and sufficiently organised form of distrust of democracy can oscillate and take a pathological form, such as for example populism; in other words, part of counter-democracy "becomes a compulsive and permanent stigmatization of the ruling authorities, to the point where these authorities are seen as radically alien enemy powers" (2008, p. 268). Moreover, as P. Rosanvallon writes, populists catalyse social anger; "they warn of decadence and pose as guardians of purity, saviors of the nation from political extremes, and prophets of an apocalypse from which they will emerge victorious" (2008, p. 271). As the judge-people they only wish to deal with "the justice of repression, punishment, and stigmatization" (2008, p. 272), aimed against a broad category of 'undesirables' and 'parasites'.

It is worth supplementing P. Rosanvallon's perception of populism with his findings on the transformations of modern democracies, which, according to him, account for the dynamics of populism's social and political significance. According to the French historian and philosopher, it is currently difficult for us to see the true reasons for the current disillusionment with the state of democracy or democracy itself, because we have not clearly analyzed the paradigm shift, the global transformation of democracy, which, according to him, consists in the growing influence of the executive branch (Rosanvallon, 2018, p. 5-6). As he states,

> We are today so accustomed to taking for granted the supremacy of governing in relation to representation that the dramatic shift of power from the legislature to the executive that has taken place over the last two centuries seems scarcely to be of any interest. Looking at the matter with the eye of a historian, however, one cannot help but see that it amounts to a complete reversal of perspective by comparison with the founding vision of modern democracy, particularly in the form given it by the American and the French Revolutions (Rosanvallon, 2018, p. 6).

Without going into the details of these transformations, which P. Rosanvallon analyzes and discusses at length in his book while offering his interpretation of the theory of governance, he considers the two essential

components of this founding vision to be that "Our regimes are democratic in the sense that power comes from the ballot box at the end of an open competition, and that we live in a legally constituted state that recognizes and protects individual liberties" (2018, p. 1). By contrast, today, according to P. Rosenvallon, citizens of contemporary democracies are not primarily concerned with the relationship between representatives and those who are represented and the interaction between the institutions inherent in the political system. It is more about the relationship between governors and those who are governed, the concrete actions of governments, the day-to-day management of public affairs, decision-making and issuing orders. In other words, the attention of citizens is polarized by the spectrum of evaluating the agency of the executive power, at the ends of which we can place bad and good governance. This applies in particular to counter-democracy, including what P. Rosanvallon takes as its pathological aspect, namely populism[5].

What is worth emphasizing once again in the context of the findings of M. Canovan and P. Rosanvallon regarding political populism as an immanent component of modern democracy, the promise of its renewal, the increase in the importance of the executive, is the ease or fluidity with which some part of the counter-democracy can degenerate into populism when it radicalizes, rather than controls, its populist potential. The question is, does this transformation proceed in only one direction? Can political populism transform just as smoothly into a fundamentally "acceptable" form of counter-democracy necessary for modern democracies?

**Counter-education as a nonrepressive critical pedagogy and the populist potential of education**

In the opinion of Ilan Gu-Ze'ev, which he included in the introduction to the work published in 2005, *Critical Theory and Critical Pedagogy Today*, "it is quite ambitious even to articulate the essential elements to the various and conflicting pedagogies that propagate themselves under the banner of 'Critical Pedagogy'" (2005, p. 7)[6]. It is certainly worth remembering this

[5] One could venture to say that it is precisely this clear focus of populism on the executive power, together with manifestations of xenophobia, that seems to be important for critics associating populism with authoritarianism or fascism. On the differences and similarities between populism and fascism (Eatwell, Goodwin, 2018, p. 50-62).

[6] The impressive collection of texts gathered by I. Gur-Ze'ev, prepared, among others, by Michael Peters, Dauglas Kellner, Peter McLaren, Michael W. Apple, Elisabeth E. Heilman, Gert Biesta, Nicholas C. Burbleas, Jan Masscheleian, Andreas Gruschka and many others, was created as a result of a series of meetings in Oslo, Miami and Madrid organized between

difficulty, which seems to say a lot about the general condition of the critical theory of education observed and diagnosed by him at that time. However, given the characteristics of his proposed concept of counter-education as "alternative critical education" (Gur-Ze'ev, 1998a, p. 463), it is also worth noting the accusations formulated by I. Gur-Ze'ev against various contemporary variants of critical pedagogy. Among other things, he noted that it usually failed to meet the challenges of emancipatory pedagogy and, as a result, was becoming part and parcel of normalizing education (Gur-Ze'ev, 2005, p. 12; see also Gur-Ze'ev, 1998a, p. 463-486), as well as that it abandoned or even disregarded even the standard topics that was regularly dealt with in the framework of environmental education and ecological ethics (Gur-Ze'ev, 2005, p. 22). What is especially important to him, "In their rush to become politically active and relevant in the field of education the Critical Pedagogy thinkers overlooked the essential instincts, ideals, and telos of Critical Theory [of Frankfurt School – R.W.] and Critical Pedagogy, at its best moments, committed itself to 'realize'" (Gur-Ze'ev, 2005, p. 13)[7]. Here he pointed primarily to the move away from negative utopia and to lost connection to Love of Life (Gur-Ze'ev, 2005, p. 14, 19)[8]. In the context of the widespread hopes associated with the critical theory of education, his assessment of the care for sticking to its own essential assumptions sounded equally disturbing:

> Committed to its various positive Utopias in the fields of feminist, multi-cultural, race, class, post-colonial, and queer struggles, the different versions of Critical Pedagogy have more than once become dogmatic, ethnocentrist, and violent. Concurrently, they have become increasingly popular in ever widening academic circles, and decreasingly relevant to victims it is committed to emancipate (Gur-Ze'ev, 2005, p. 12-13, see p. 10).

2002 and 2004 as part of the International Critical Pedagogy Workshop (see Gur-Ze'ev, 2005, p. 34).

[7] It should be emphasized that for I. Gur-Ze'ev's philosophy of education, the Critical Theory of Frankfurt School in its versions developed primarily by Max Horkheimer and Theodor W. Adorno is a constant point of reference.

[8] According to I. Gur-Ze'ev, "Critical Pedagogy thinkers forgot that mature Critical Theory was utopian, yet its Utopia was a *Negative Utopia* - not a *Positive Utopia*" (2005, p. 13), and "the erotic telos of Critical Pedagogy insists on poetic, religiously anti-dogmatic, worthy Life as a manifestation of Love, not of fear or of heated 'critique'" (2005, p. 10). See Gur-Ze'ev, 1998b, p. 119-155; Gur-Ze'ev, 2003, p. 41-65.

Perhaps we are dealing here with a controversial generalization, but it is not insignificant how the variant of critical education developed by I. Gur-Ze'ev responds to the weaknesses of critical pedagogy that he points out. It seems that this is how we can read counter-education, one of the concepts fundamental to his proposal, which he defines as follows:

> Within counter-education no room exists for a positive utopia, and it does not promise collective emancipation under present circumstances; rather counter-education suggests possibilities for identifying, criticizing, and resisting violent practices of normalization, control, and reproduction practices in a system that uses human beings as its agents and victims. Counter-education opens possibilities for refusing to abandon human potential to become other than directed by the system and the realm of self-evidence. It enables a chance -which is to be struggled for again and again – to challenge normalizing education in all its versions, including critical pedagogy (Gur-Ze'ev, 1998a, p. 463).

The ascetic ideal of critical education proposed by I. Gur-Ze'ev recommends consistent distrust not only of implemented systemic solutions to the organization of social life, but also of any promise to achieve its partial fulfilment, which he identifies as positive utopias. The desired result of this distrust is not withdrawal, escapism, but engagement and activism, which are fulfilled in resistance to overt and covert forms of violence and emancipation understood as the ever-repeated act of identifying, criticizing and overcoming them. I. Gur-Ze'ev reflects this practice of constantly repeated refusal with the figure of a nomad, a figure who is in constant motion and accepts his homelessness, that is, his aspirations are not dictated by the desire to return or reach a place of home, to possess it. They are determined by and are manifestations of the Love of Life as capable of revealing and experiencing in no other way than in the dialogue of the counter-educator with the world, the Other, including the student, on the path of seeking and making present the good (Gur-Ze'ev, 2003, p. 41-65; Gur-Ze'ev, Masschelein and Blacke, 2001, p. 99-101). Furthermore, love, as the opposite of violence, according to Gur-Ze'ev contradicts "fear, self-forgetfulness, greed and conquest" (2005, p. 24). Love is contrary to the appropriation of the otherness of the Other, which I. Gur-Ze'ev understands according to the thought of Emmanuel Levinas, and to which the appropriation is also led by normalizing education. Thus, for a nomad understood in this way, "a wanderer, an eternal-improviser", the proper condition is "Homelessness without the promise of an emancipatory 'home-returning' project […]" (Gur-Ze'ev, 2005, p. 29). This condition of

homelessness is clarified by I. Gur-Ze'ev using the figure of the diaspora to denote the original and inalienable foreignness of man as a foreigner not so much deprived of his own territory, but aware of the conventionality of being at home. In this context, it is worth quoting one more quote, in which I. Gur-Ze'ev characterizes his philosophy of contestation and, at the same time, the dangers facing critical pedagogy itself:

> Counter-education from the sources of Diasporic Philosophy counters collectivism, combats dogmatism, and opposes all other 'homes'. It refuses any plea or call for recycling, defending or enhancing the present order of things and its realms of self-evidence. Normalizing processes cannot but end up in collectives that surrender themselves to the destruction of the otherness of the Other as a concrete from of 'salvation'. Diasporic existence is anti-collectivist-orientedand anti-dogmatic. [...] The moment such counter-education is self-content and domesticated it will immediately transform itself into nothing but an old-new collective and an old-new form of normalizing education (2005, p. 32, 33).

In the era of mass education and the democratic promise made in the West to every citizen – including the common man, of universal equality, freedom and solidarity, counter-education is, as I. Gur-Ze'ev himself admits, an elitist emancipatory aspiration (2003, p. 58-59, 62; 1998a, p. 486). This is not a matter of historical or cultural boundaries or identification with a particular pedagogy; for example, Socrates' educational practice, contrasting it with the normalizing or even pragmatically and instrumentally oriented critical pedagogy of the sophists, is read by I. Gur-Ze'ev as a paradigm for counter-education (2003, p. 58)[9]. Therefore, we can risk saying that I. Gur-Ze'ev's concept of nonrepressive emancipatory education is not the only one that represents this paradigm. Nevertheless, in I. Gur-Ze'ev's view, counter-education, for which criticism is not a tool but part of a certain way of being, remains demanding and sophisticated. His objections to contemporary variants of critical pedagogy may indicate that he recognizes, as P. Rosanvallon did in the case of the counter-democracy, certain important

[9] "The Socratic educational endeavor is the diametrical opposite of normalizing education. It is worthy of the name counter-education [...] As counter-education the Socratic project is committed to transcend any realm of self-evidence within whose horizons it is imprisoned, without, on the one hand, claiming to have the truth, and without, on the other, abandoning the commitment to reflection and transcendence" (Gur-Ze'ev, 2003, p. 44).

limits, beyond which organized distrust of education oscillates toward its flawed or even pathological forms. However, it seems that this crossing of boundaries is here the rule rather than the exception. Yet it is critical pedagogy – as a position built on an awareness of the historical and social, including political conditions of education and its own assumptions, and as an approach oriented towards identifying and resisting diverse forms of systemic violence and other social threats, as well as deepening democracy – that first deserves to be the one from which to expect a legitimate and trustworthy antidote to the excesses of populism. However, if I. Gur-Ze'ev is right, only counter-education is a safe antidote, regardless of the type of threat. But is counter-education a promise of a renewal of education and democracy that meets the hopes of those who contest?

**Democracy, education and a lesson in populism**

Referring to I. Gur-Ze'ev's notion of counter-education, I propose to focus attention on a reading of it that resonates with the perspective proposed by P. Rosanvallon: as that which contributes to the politics of protest and simultaneously somewhat deepens democracy. In this perspective, counter-education is not the reverse of education; it retains the significance of its form opposing another form, which it distrusts.

It can be said that this distrust was already evident at earlier stages of the evolution of Western democracies in the form of a critique of the traditional school or a number of advanced educational activities and initiatives undertaken within the new education movement, for example, reform pedagogy in Germany or progressivism in the United States. If one follows P. Rosanvallon's findings, one may venture to argue that also in education the post-totalitarian era brings about a significant change in the quality and consolidation of the form of social control. The fundamental issue here is the growing number and activity of various types of entities interested in the state and quality of education and at the same time characterised by distrust of its dominant form, their consolidation and, consequently, a regionally perceptible increase in their importance. In this simplified and incomplete characterisation, I would like to draw attention to another characteristic accompanying this distrust of the socially dominant form of education. Counter-education, just like all alternative education, can also be understood as a movement or action to recover what has been lost in 'traditional', normalizing education. Again by analogy, this time with reference to M. Canovan, we can speak of the 'promise of renewal of education'. However,

it should be noted once again that, according to I. Gur-Ze'ev, such a promise cannot be fulfilled other than as a negative utopia.

The promise of educational renewal provides in modern liberal democracies a thread of understanding between the various nominally egalitarian subjects of education under conditions where so much depends on it, its quality and access to it, and no area of ordinary people's daily lives can do without it. It seems understandable that the intense search for educational opportunity in late modernity may be accompanied by a conservative, progressive or other narrative of how the school community, or more broadly the collective participating in formal and informal education, has been robbed by elites and institutions of its rightful, attendant sovereignty, but will rise up and reclaim it. For a truly democratic education should first of all take into account the well-understood good of ordinary students. This story, interestingly, can also be found in various variants of critical pedagogy.

However, it should be noted that Rosanvallon does not equate counter-democracy with populism. Their relationship is of a different kind. A similar approach can be taken to the phenomenon of counter-education. In many cases, this distrust of education becomes radicalised and takes the form of unbridled and permanent criticism of the educational system, extreme condemnation, protest, contestation and rejection of school. In this sense, it can be assumed, a given part of a more broadly understood counter-education than I. Gur-Ze'ev wants to see it[10] radicalises itself by intensifying, rather than controlling, its populist potential. Of particular importance in the context of the issue of populism are those cases in which the anger of parents, their radical criticism of formal education and the accompanying promise of a possible renewal of education led to significant changes in their children's educational careers. For example, a decision to include their children in home education (home schooling), or to choose or set up a school for them,

[10] I. Gur-Ze'ev himself sometimes seems to understand counter-education more broadly, for example, when he writes: "Counter-education, as a negative to institutionalised education, is committed to dialogue, negation and transcendence, and against normalisation. Therefore it answers to the challenge of a prevailing educational practice which serves and represents the current order of things. Counter-education reacts against the closure of possibilities enacted by the prevailing educational formation, in its formal and informal practices, in schools and also in social interaction and within culture at large. Counter-education seeks to defend and empower the reflective potentials of the subject against the self-evidence of the order of capitalism, against those practices of normalisation which secure and develop the present order and present critique, resistance and hope for essential change as irrational" (Gur-Ze'ev, Masschelein and Blacke, 2001, p. 101).

the way of functioning of which would be devoid of the weaknesses of the dominant model of formal education and would implement the ideas of these parents about what the school should be like. The issue of educational populism can be shed some light on those cases in which the competence of parents and school and home schooling organisers was not sufficient to meet the decisions and intentions made, with the consequence that the initiative collapses in a relatively short time. As well as those cases where the disproportion and asymmetry between competences and undertaken educational tasks did not lead to the end of the project, it continues despite this. It also happens that the initiative, contrary to its assumptions, evolves towards the criticised and contested model of education. Many positive scenarios could be evoked here, but those selected and referred to here seem to foreshadow a better insight into how a given part of a more broadly understood counter-education than I. Gur-Ze'ev wants to it radicalises itself by intensifying, rather than controlling, its populist potential. The point is not to put an equal sign between alternative education and educational populism. Or rather, that distrust of normalizing education, the belief that education should be democratic, and the quest to fulfil the promise of a renewal of education underlie both successful educational experiments and failures that have much in common with fully developed political populisms. Perhaps what in education inspires hope and motivates to change the educational world is at the same time what itself has populist potential.

Therefore, according to the proposed reading, the relationship between education and populism can be considered complex. As a consequence, this gives rise to problematising the view that education is an antidote to populism. Perhaps ascetic counter-education as understood by I. Gur-Ze'ev could resist populism, but any other education or counter-education, including critical education, seems to have something of a populist quality about it. Moreover, the possibility of opposing populism not so much to knowledge as to education exists insofar as that these phenomena could be separated. However, if we see the political space and the educational space as mutually contingent and interrelated, and at the same time populism as permeating both the political sphere and the educational sphere, seeing education in general as an antidote to populism may itself be a populist postulate. In the eyes of populists and liberal democrats or simply populist opponents, this instrumental understanding of education can make both parties feel simultaneously disappointed it and hopeful about it. They can accuse their opponents of propaganda, and at the same time count on the enlightening power of appropriate informal, school, public, and media education.

Naturally, the problematisation itself of the view that education would be the antidote to populism and the resultant findings need to be further developed. In the name of their announcement, I would like to refer once again to M. Canovan, who unlike many other scholars is able to see the brighter side of populism. In her view, the saving promise of democracy need not be entirely illusory:

> it really is the case that people who can manage to believe in the possibility of collective action and to unite behind it can exercise more power than if they give up and concentrate on their private affairs. […] Unrealistic visions may be a condition of real achievements as well as being a recipe for disappointment. Democracy, it seems, is obliged to face in two opposite directions at the same time (1999, p. 13).

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# To not nurture a war – education against violence (Girard - Patočka)

**Abstract:** The author is primarily interested in violence in the form of joining Girard's persecution crowd. Thus, the text concerns violence not in the general sense as the use of force to break resistance, nor symbolic violence in the sense of Pierre Bourdieu, but in the sense of human disposition to retaliate and persecution - in other words, violence is analyzed here in terms similar to what Erich Fromm called malignant aggression - the tendency to destroy and gain unlimited control over other people and the world.
In the text, the author radicalizes the question about the pedagogical context of violence, treating the tendency to hasty curricular and organizational changes (which often occur after events of escalating violence in schools), as well as the utilitarian search for effective preventive evidence-based measures, as illusions and part of the problem we face with violence. He recognizes that pedagogical reflection must go much deeper. He seeks knowledge about the sources of violence and the cultural formations that foster it in the works of the French anthropologist René Girard and the Czech philosopher Jan Patočka. The ideas of mimetic rivalry and the 20th century as war can give us insight into the phenomenon of violence and suggest the direction of educational transformation.
The author conducts the analysis in several steps. After a critical introduction to the contemporary reaction of education to violence, he first outlines Girard's concept of the mimetic mechanism, then emphasizes three ideas present in it (with references to the nowadays): violence as an anthropological feature embedded in the human condition, unawareness of one's own violence and unanimity of the persecuting crowd. In the end, these three

accents become the basis for the postulate of existential reorientation of education, based on Patočka's concept of forces of the day and the night.

**Keywords:** violence, education, mimetic rivalry, the solidarity of the shaken, war, achievement society, forces of the day.

**Introduction**

Occasional excesses of extreme violence[1] at school are followed by debates about the weakness of teachers' preparation to deal with conflicts and difficult situations (e.g. Witkowski, 2009). In the face of such a diagnosis, teachers, students, and the public often expect quick and simple solutions. What conclusions have we drawn? What can we do to prevent this from happening again? What "works" in the face of violence?

One of the theses of this text is the claim that such posing of the matter and such questions – or rather the way of thinking from which they arise – are part of the problem and not only do not help but even distance us from constructive solutions. What if we don't understand the sources of violence deeply enough? What if the aggressive *Zeitgeist* structure eludes us? So maybe our prescriptions for violence are just an escape from thinking? Maybe we are frantically looking for no real solutions, but a convenient alibi so as not to touch anything in our ideas and habits regarding education? Maybe we are trying to maintain a sense of reacting to the scandal of violence, but in such a way that nothing changes at school and in the world around it?

In this context, I am asking French anthropologist René Girard and Czech phenomenologist Jan Patočka about violence. The concept of mimetic rivalry and the idea of the twentieth century as war can give us insights into the phenomenon of violence and suggest a direction of educational transformation that we usually do not think about when aggression at school appears in our field of vision. Someone may think that deep changes in thinking about education and far-reaching social transformations are unrealistic, so it's a waste of time for anthropological and philosophical intellectual expeditions. The scale and difficulty of transformations, which emerge from Girard and Patočka's reflections, may indeed be discouraging, but are they unrealistic?

[1] Violence is a very broad concept. In this text, I will not talk about violence in the general sense as the use of force to break resistance, nor about symbolic violence in the sense given to this term by Pierre Bourdieu, but about the human disposition to retaliate and persecution, i.e. violence in a similar sense to what Erich Fromm called malignant aggression – the tendency to destroy and gain unlimited control (Fromm, 1973: xvi).

Certainly, such a reflection is closer to reality than being stuck in the illusion that something simple will "work" here, omitting the deep – existential and structural – sources of violence and the long-term effort to disarm the war mode of thinking. Nothing is simple in education, you have to talk about it with the most excellent minds. And the "what works" discourse – as Gert Biesta (2013: 119-120) has already shown – by focusing on facts rather than values, has difficulty grasping that education is always defined by goals and ideas about what is good education and good human life. One can try to frame education in terms of *strong* causal links between input and output, but this is a misguided strategy – it means forgetting that in education the links are *weak* – they are established by interpretations, not causation.

What is at stake in these considerations is precisely the interpretation of the problematic question: how could we not keep and cherish violence, not nurture a war?

**The element of violence**

Girard (1979: 14-27) argues that modern human does not understand violence, that is, he is not aware of the fragility of the social order, of the danger of the spread of revenge, and of the respect that archaic societies have for violence. Violence is something unpredictable, like an uncontrollable element: fire, storm, earthquake, flood, or plague. Any reaction scheme becomes impossible:

> The slightest outbreak of violence can bring about a catastrophic escalation. Though we may tend to lose sight of this fact in our own daily lives, we are intellectually aware of its validity, and are often reminded that there is something infectious about the spectacle of violence. Indeed, at times it is impossible to stay immune from the infection. Where violence is concerned, intolerance can prove as fatal an attitude as tolerance, for when it breaks out it can happen that those who oppose its progress do more to assure its triumph than those who endorse it. There is no universal rule for quelling violence, no principle of guaranteed effectiveness. At times all the remedies, harsh as well as gentle, seem efficacious; at other times, every measure seems to heighten the fever it is striving to abate (Girard, 1979: 30-31).

The sources of human violence lie in the mimetic mechanism. What is the basis of cultural transmission – *mimesis* – is also the fuel of conflicts and the spiral of retaliation. Desire – a similar motif is also known from Lacanian psychoanalysis (cf. Stępniewska-Gębik, 2004: 116) – is always the desire of the

Other. That is, desire arises from the imitation of a pattern - a person desires what the other desires or what someone else possesses. If the subject and the model are not separated by an appropriate social distance (difference), imitation easily and often imperceptibly turns into rivalry (the so-called relationship between the doubles). In the spiral of retaliation, explains Girard (2006: 61-63), the combatants become similar to each other, the object of desire disappears, becoming only a pretext in the fight for dominating the opponent, and the crisis often spreads unpredictably upon the environment. In this situation – in the shadow of the threat of community destruction – people tend to unite against the chosen (often accidental) victim. Directing violence at someone relatively indifferent and weak, who can be "sacrificed" without the risk of retaliation (thereby without the risk of rekindling the conflict or exacerbating it) relieves tension and restores harmony for a while:

> No one in the community has an enemy other than the victim, so once this person is hunter, expelled, and destroyed, the crowd finds itself emptied of hostility and without an enemy. Only one enemy was left, one who has been eliminated. Provisionally, at least, this community no longer experiences either hatred or resentment toward anyone or anything; it feels *purified* of all its tensions, of all its divisions, of everything fragmenting it. (Girard, 2001: 36).

I do not sympathize with the scientistic claims of Girard, who presented his concept of the mimetic mechanism and the scapegoat as an irresistible, final, only possible explanation, what some commentators even interpreted as spiritual robbery, an unjustified despotic generalization (cf. Domenach, 1983: 316-317). One does not have to agree with Girard on everything or accept his frame of interpretation of his theory, to recognize that he does have something important and inspiring to say. Well, I think he says three things that are crucial to our attempts to understand malignant aggression: first, violence is within us; secondly, we have a strong tendency not to see it; thirdly, for this reason, we join the persecuting crowd every step of the way, increasing the sum of the sufferings in the world.

**The war within us**

Girard convincingly showed that violence is not so much a biological instinct or a contingent attribute of unfortunate social circumstances as an archaic power related to the ambivalence of human desires. In this sense, it is part of the human condition, it is, so to speak, an anthropological constant that must be constantly kept in mind, which cannot be underestimated

(also in education). We must not think that we can get rid of it definitively by reorganizing social relations, but neither should we treat it as an innate individual property outside the environmental context.

Violence is inherent in our condition, but it is also strengthened today by the overgrowth of the calculating reason. Patočka's thought will be helpful here. According to the Czech philosopher (Patočka, 1996: 123-132), the wars of the 20th century and the military thinking related to them are the fruit of a new working society – that is: discipline, production, and planned organization – aimed at releasing more and more energy resources. Our concentration on the tasks of everyday life and the related mobilization – which the Czech phenomenologist calls *forces of the day* – can send millions of people to the front, turn peace into a dormant state of war, and approach death only statistically. The will for technical control over everyday life is the point of view of a constantly renewed conflict. One might say that war incurably haunts the calculating intellect. Tadeusz Sławek (2018: 174) writes: "War is the thinking that haunts within the mind ruined by the creations and discipline of a calculating, technological reason". In this perspective, violence is not what appears as an irrational primordial force disrupting our well-ordered world, but rather it is a perverse spectral effect of the hegemony of one-dimensional desire and the unjust social order built upon it. Thus, violence cannot be weakened without first weakening the technocratic *status quo*. Ľubica Učník (2011: 190) sums up the intuition of the Czech philosopher: „For Patočka, the existential crisis of today's society and the perpetual wars disguised as peace are two sides of the same problem. They are the outcome of the transformation of nature into a standing-reserve of energy for humans to use as they see fit".

The violence of technocracy is not only manifested in the negativity of war. The positivity of modern terror is aptly – although in my view a slightly too dualistic – described by Byung-Chul Han (cf. 2018: vii-ix). Violence has not disappeared from modern Western society, which can be called the achievement society. It only shifts from visible and negative forms to hidden and positive ones. More than lynched victims, manifestations of revenge, torture, terrorism, armed confrontations, or hate speech – although Han should have made it clearer that these are still with us – we are dealing with an overabundance of positivity – overproduction, overcommunication, hyperactivity, a flood of data. The violence of positivity does not take away anything directly, but it saturates and exhausts - in effect, so to speak, it takes away everything. The modern subject with the injunction of success lives in

the perspective of depression and infarction. He fights not so much with an external enemy as with himself. There is no place for weakness in his world.

Fragility and uncertainty are obstacles to effective action, which is the only thing that matters to the calculating reason. From here, however, it is only a step toward negative violence. Who is a dictator for himself is easily a dictator for others. Tomasz Stawiszyński writes about it:

> Disagreement with our own weakness and blindness by the ideals of efficiency, activity, and optimism lead not only to a lack of tolerance for our own helplessness – but also close us to the helplessness of others. They destroy empathy. They turn us into always smiling, always productive, and always ready to act, but at the same time fundamentally lonely cyborgs which react to every manifestation of imperfection, inertia, contingency, weakness, or danger – that is, lack of control by and large – with fear-lined rationalization (Stawiszyński, 2021: 154).

**The persecutory unconscious**

Girard emphasizes (2001: 126) that the sacrificial mechanism – defusing community tensions through violence centered on the scapegoat – is only truly effective when the attitude of *all-against-one* goes unnoticed by the participants. We wouldn't bear to know our own violence.

We have a permanent tendency to impose our existential limitations (of desire, thinking, feeling, imagination, lifestyle) on others, ignore the effects of competition, and locate ourselves on the side of those who are harmed, not those who harm. Persecutors are always others, our hostile words and actions are, after all, valid and justified – they are only reactions to someone else's misconduct. Human constantly externalizes evil – he projects violence onto deity, fate, and other people, or – reversing the vector – an instinct. This is how we run away from responsibility. The source of violence is always Something, some Other. We avoid mirrors unless they are enchanted mirrors that respond the way we want. Girard (1979: 253) writes: „To pontificate on the subject of monsters is in effect to take them seriously, to enter into their game; it is to be duped by their appearance instead of recognizing the human being who lurks behind the monstrous form".

The phenomenon of not noticing violent situations, blindness on the one hand to one's own and others' fragility (finitude, vulnerability), and on the other hand to deceitful rationalizations of one's tendencies to malignant aggression (to destroying others by word and deed, taking control over others, forcing submission, imposing one's limitations, joining a symbolic or physical lynching) is a formidable challenge to education, the more so

that rightness, values, ideals, social expectations, success, order, efficient organization, progress, service, the necessity of adaptation, etc. may be the manifestations of rationalization concealing violence here. This challenge requires the initiation of advanced reflexivity and the tender nurturing of human sensitivity, not the search for simple prescriptions or transparent response algorithms. There is nothing simple under the pedagogical sun. Especially since the traps of persecutory unconsciousness lie in wait for the actors of the educational activity. Also, a critical disposition – when we are already aware of violence and decide to fight it – can lead us astray: „Instead of criticizing ourselves, we use our knowledge in bad faith, turning it against others. Indeed, we practice a hunt for scapegoats to the second dgree, a hunt for hunters of scapegoats. Our society's obligatory compassion authorizes new forms of cruelty" (Girard, 2001: 158).

**Persecutory (digital) crowd**

Group unanimity is important in persecution. Girard (e.g. 1979: 100) showed that breaking someone from the persecutory circle weakens or even destroys the sacrificial mechanism. If someone from within the community does not join the violence, the war machine jams - it becomes possible to slow down the momentum of aggression and to emerge of fractions. Thus, the discharge of internal tension at the victim's expense is hindered or thwarted. Without a common front against the Other, the mimetic rivalry is not interrupted.

This is one of Girard's most important discoveries, striking at our myth of social harmony. Unanimity is dangerous. The French anthropologist invokes the Talmudic principle in this context: „If everyone is in agreement to condemn someone accused, release him for he must be innocent" (Girard, 2001: 118).

Unanimity is rarely the carrier of truth, most often it is a manifestation of hidden tyranny. As Ryszard Koziołek (2017: 519) writes: "The desire for one (i.e. my language) is always an invocation of violence, and it is not only a problem of academic humanities but a common, dark energy permeating social reality." It has become a common modern practice – most often, of course, unaware of one's own violence – to join the persecuting crowd on the Internet. As Han says (cf. 2015: 42-43), the digital world is poor in otherness and offers no resistance – in virtual spaces, the narcissistic subject meets primarily himself. Therefore, he can freely vent his anger at everything that exceeds his own limits. Girard (cf. 2006: 86) – not referring to the Internet – emphasized that disappointed desires derive comfort from experiencing the

scandal together, from the fact that many people share our agitation. Just post. Social media works like an echo chamber – it allows you to receive instant gratification. Digital reality has therefore become an ideal environment for the development of mimetic violence:

> Because the disposition to violence, the shadow, the dark side, is one of the most insidious blind spots in our inner landscape. This is extremely important, especially in the era of social media, which closes us in information bubbles and trains us to permanently formulate binary judgments: like – don't like, yes – no, guilty – innocent. Waves of indignation sweeping through the digital world, permanent antagonisms, emotions cranked up to unbelievable registers, treating dissent as a crime, attacking anyone who breaks the chorus proclaiming a given orthodoxy in unison – these are all phenomena that we observe daily and that we are participants every day (Stawiszyński, 2021: 290-291).

**Ending – education of the shaken**

Violence now appears to us as a deep anthropological mechanism related to the mimetic and ambivalent nature of human desires, largely it is not accessed to consciousness and is projected by us outside, ubiquitous, everyday, reinforced by the technocratic culture of calculating reason (forces of the day, and thinking as war), by the compulsion success in an achievement society (desensitizing people to human fragility) and by the comforting support of the digital crowd (in a tense-relieving unanimous lynching).

In the face of such complex phenomena, no hastily drawn pedagogical conclusions, techniques of influence based on scientific evidence, or superficial organizational changes in education or teacher training will help, especially since they are part of the problem. It is, after all, a component of those rushed forces of the day that perpetuate and feed the state of war. If education is to attempt to realistically oppose violence, it cannot fuel it, it cannot act as a daytime force, and it must go into night mode.

Patočka sees a counterbalance to the culture of apparent peace, to warlike thinking and the evil infinity of everyday life in the solidarity of those who have doubted the day. We need the *solidarity of the shaken* – people who can understand what life and death are all about, and who can oppose the possessiveness of the technocratic society of power:

> The solidarity of the shaken can say "no" to the measures of mobilization which make the state of war permanent. It will not offer positive programs but will speak, like Socrates' *daimonion,* in warnings and prohibitions. It can and must create a spiritual authority, become a spiritual power that could drive the warring world to some restraint, rendering some acts and measures impossible. […] Humankind will not attain peace by devoting and surrendering itself to the criteria of everydayness and of its promises. All who betray this solidarity must realize that they are sustaining war and are the parasites on the sidelines who live off the blood of others (Patočka, 1996: 135).

Commenting on the famous thought of the Czech philosopher, Sławek (2021: 113) says that the modern school, surrounded by techno-bureaucracy, has ceased to deal with what is serious and important: "It has become a puppet theater distracting the student's attention from 'what life and death are all about'".

In other words, the only hope lies in an existential reorientation of education. What is used to mobilize to meet the challenges of the present day cannot simply be abandoned but must be seriously weakened and placed on the margins of educational activities. And what gives insight into the fragile human condition must be moved to the pedagogical center, not as a positive program of a brave new world (a humanistic plan for realizing genuine human nature), but as a subtle and sometimes difficult conversation about what is human and non-human or humane and non-humane in the world. In the terms of Michael Oakeshott (2001: 15-16), much more space needs to be devoted to *the adventures in human self-understandings*, with the proviso that the underlying culture cannot be understood as a coherent doctrine or a ready-made set of teachings about human life, but rather as an embroiled and confusing conversational encounter requiring initiation.

A real response to violence requires a far-reaching transformation of the pedagogical imagination. The education of the day should be replaced by the education of the night, and the education of the mobilized should be substituted by the education of the shaken. As part of such a shaken education, at least four doubts are important (which we just can't imagine so far). Firstly, if violence is born of the mimetic mechanism (imitation of the desires of the Other), we must start to doubt our desires and test them at the angle of – in our context – life (possibly) without violence. This means – according to the well-known formula of Biesta (2017: 16) – the question of whether what is *desired* is *desirable* as well. The discourse that defines education as a service activity to meet the needs of its clients is deeply misleading, as it obscures

the essential purpose of education, which is the Socratic problematization and transformation of needs and desires, and which is not to support but to interrupt human development in its conventional forms.

Secondly, if violence is born in the escalating relationship of the doubles (rivals who become similar to each other), one must doubt competition and the achievement-subject – one needs to weaken rivalry and weaken the focus on economic success in the field of education. Resigning from testing, parameterization, and ranking (which are convenient for bureaucracy but also lead students away from important existential questions) would be only the first step here. While it is inconceivable in the neoliberal order of late capitalism to renounce narcissistic self-imposition as a role model, we also have other stories in the cultural resources. Girard (2010: 117-118) refers to the paradigmatic role of the Gospel story about Jesus of Nazareth: „He does not present himself as a warrior. On the contrary, he claimed membership in the Jewish prophetic tradition, which aims to *demonetize* violence. It is thus *because Christ deprives them of scapegoats* that the Powers and Principalities will be destroyed". Education that weakens competition would be based on cooperation and the positive dimension of *mimesis*, combining the arousing of desires with the withdrawal relationship: „Imitating Christ thus means thwarting all rivalry […]" (Girard, 2010: 123).

Thirdly, if violence is an element that is generally unconscious and projected outside, one must doubt one's identity narratives and subject them to examination. The vigilance of critical theory and the lesson of psychoanalysis, which yet grew out of the loss of confidence in self-commentaries, appear to be indispensable components of pedagogical thinking. Education must be interested in mute voices, afterimages, and underground life. In reflection and pedagogical practice, instead of individual or collective self--promotion, humility must be rehabilitated. Humility, on the other hand, as Paul Standish (cf. 1992: 21-22) explains, is far from protective timidity in the face of obstacles. It only means respecting the uncertainty of our situation and recognizing the provisional nature of our control over reality. In humility, we can read the call to leadership or take up difficult work (hubris, in turn, can be hiding in the shadows as a mask of self-centered safe play with the world). The point is that there are achievements that bring us suffering (violence) and we could do without them. The point is not that people (students) need to have lower aspirations, but that they have a realistic concept of their place in the world and proper respect for others. Humility means believing that life can be open to what is important, that – let us add after Biesta (cf. 2017:

16) – it can be conducted in an adult way (taking difference seriously) and not in an infantile way (closed in a narcissistic bubble).

Fourthly, if lynching – today extremely popular in the digital version (also not uncommon in school corridors) – requires tight ranks, then one must doubt unanimity, harmony, loyalty, and conformism in education. Education must be sensitive to these manifestations of closing ranks, building a front, and mobilizing. He can warn against them by practicing a conversation – not one that is about persuading the other party and getting his way, but one in which we can learn something from the interlocutors – even if they are completely different from us; and by generating and valuing creative resistance (instead of stigmatizing and overcoming it as insubordination). Resistance matters. Breaking the chorus of the unanimous crowd can weaken or even destroy the persecution, or at least preserve the memory of the violence and the victim. Girard gives a historical example:

But on the third day of the Passion the scattered disciples re-group again about Jesus, who they believe is risen from the dead. […] A protesting minority appears and resolutely rises up against the unanimity of the persecuting crowd. The latter becomes no more than a majority, numerically overwhelming, of course, but incapable from now on of totally imposing its conception of what has happened, its mythical representation of the Crucifixion. (Girard, 2001: 188)

You can be – this is an important educational message today – the single who will say *no* to the forces of the day, who will take violence for real and start thinking seriously of what life and death are all about; more: you can be the one who will not join the persecutory crowd; the one who will save (the memory of) the fragile.

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# Power and violence in Ignatian education

**Abstract:** Since 1548, Ignatian education has been offered in thousands of educational institutions run by the Society of Jesus. The aim of the article is to identify manifestations of power and violence in this education. The author uses the historical method, analyzing the documents produced by the Jesuits before their suppression in 1773, when a relatively uniform system of teaching and upbringing was in force in their institutions around the world. The author notes that Ignatian education was inspired by the spirituality and experiences of the founder of the Order, Ignatius of Loyola was as a self-demanding man, determined and at the same time sensitive and open. He created a thriving, highly hierarchical institution with a global reach, but able to flexibly adapt to local conditions. Despite their laudable aims, Jesuit schools offering Ignatian education have been marked by symbolic, structural and physical violence, and most Jesuits have sided with those of power and importance for centuries. It was only in the 20th century that they took a more decisive stand on the side of those most in need.

**Keywords:** Power, Ignatian education, Jesuit schools, Violence at School.

## Introduction

The Society of Jesus was approved in 1540 by the papal bull entitled *Regimini militantis Ecclesiae* (To the Government of the Church Militant), which already in its wording contains the dimension of power and violence. The Jesuits are still the largest religious order in the world and form an organization dealing in a special way with education. They currently run 2,521 schools of various types and 189 universities and colleges (Jesuit Global

Network of Schools; see ICAJE Reports 2022). Today, the education offered in these institutions is more and more often called Ignatian education (not Jesuit education), because this term refers to the figure of Ignatius of Loyola, his educational experience and the principles formulated by him. In addition, in the educational institutions currently run by the order, the education of students is primarily taken care of by non-Jesuits, who constitute 98% of faculty and staff.

This article attempts to discover practices of power within the education proposed by this religious association, understood as the ability to control or direct the people (students), and violence, understood as a form of exercising this power.

In the search for traces of power and violence in Ignatian education, I use historical research, examining the primary documents produced by Ignatius of Loyola and the Old Society of Jesus before its suppression in 1773, because only until then the education offered by the order was relatively uniform around the world and was carried out essentially according to the school act of 1599 called *Ratio studiorum*. After the restoration of the order in 1814, its education took many new forms, depending primarily on the educational regulations in individual countries where the Jesuits operated.

Despite the vast literature on Ignatian education, I have not come across studies dealing directly with the subject of power and violence, although in many works these matters are raised on the margins of the main considerations. An example may be an excellent book by Silvia Mostaccio (2014) who shows the relationship between obedience to authority and obedience to one's conscience within the Jesuit thought in the 16th and 17th centuries.

It should be mentioned that Michel Foucault devoted several paragraphs to Jesuit education in his well-known work entitled *Discipline and Punish* (1978, pp. 146-147). He concentrated on discipline in Jesuit colleges during a period he called the Great Confinement (1600-1750). He stated that this discipline took the form of a day-long watch over all students (panopticism), institutionalized forms of denunciation, physical punishment, transformed into a "technology of the body" that was able to influence students' souls. In the present article, I use some of the analyzes proposed by Foucault.

**Concepts of power and violence**

Power is a concept that has various connotations. It has been viewed by Hobbes, Durkheim, Simmel, Follett, and other conservative social philosophers as a positive phenomenon. Liberals such as Marx, Mosca, Mills, and Dahrendorf have seen power as negative. In 20th century, various attempts

have been made to decompose the concept of power, and numerous classifications and typologies have been proposed (Mudiappasamy Devadoss, Muth, 1984, p. 380). I do not intend to join this discussion. I accept a general definition of power as the ability of an individual, group, or institution to influence or exercise control over other people and achieve their goals despite possible opposition or resistance. At the same time, the collective dimension of power, which Hannah Arendt pointed out, is important for my considerations about power in Ignatian education. She states: "Power corresponds to the human ability not just to act but to act in concert. Power is never the property of an individual; it belongs to a group and it remains in existence only so long as the group keeps together. When we say of somebody that he is >in power< we actually refer to his being empowered by a certain number of people to act in their name" (Arendt 1972, p. 143; see Jones 2010, p. 20). For centuries, the Jesuit order was extremely compact in terms of ideology and organization, bonded by obedience, therefore all its actions, including those exercising power, and probably also the use of violence, should be seen not as results of the decisions of individuals, but of the whole group.

The above mentioned "definition" of power corresponds very closely with the description of upbringing (education) formulated by Florian Znaniecki. He understands education as: "some activities, fulfilled by some people with the intention of calling, inhibiting or modifying, immediately or in the future, certain activities of other people [...] In other words, education is a activity seeking to influence human behavior" (Znaniecki, 2001, p. 3). In this sense, education would be nothing but a form of exercising power over representatives of the younger generation to transform them according to the ideas of the older generation. It can be assumed that this is how Jesuits have understood education for centuries. Their goal was to raise young people entrusted to them into well-educated and pious individuals, capable of transforming the whole society.

And what is violence? It is difficult to define it as an isolated and independent concept because it is used in many different contexts. Arend states that „violence [...] is distinguished by its instrumental character. Phenomenologically, it is close to strength, since the implements of violence, like all other tools, are designed and used for the purpose of multiplying natural strength, until in the last stage of their development they can substitute for it (Arendt, 1972, p. 145). Interestingly, Arendt does not understand violence as a manifestation of power or dominance, which is orienting to force people to do certain behaviors or to stop them from some behavior. Paul Ricoeur emphasizes that for Arendt violence is a manifestation of the consumption

of power, a sign of its weakness: "Rule by sheer violence comes into play where power is being lost" (Arendt, 1972, p. 152). The relationship between power and violence can be laconically expressed: if no power, then violence (Jones, 2010, p. 23).

Violence seems to be an indelible part of human history. However, it is necessary to distinguish between unjustified and justified violence. At this point, it is worth recalling the definition of the state according to Max Weber: "a relationship of rule (Herrschaft) by human beings over human beings, and one that rests on the legitimate use of violence (that is, violence that is held to be legitimate)" (Weber, 1994, p. 311; see Jones, 2010, p. 20). Examples of justified use of violence can be found in the activities of state institutions: army, police, courts that use violence to prevent behavior considered criminal or to punish these behavior. Also in education, violence cannot be avoided when it seems to be the only possible means to protect children from some harm or the only method of maintaining the order necessary to perform the school's tasks. At the same time, distinguishing justified and unjustified violence can be conceptually easy, but there are few situations in which this distinction can be done without any doubt. In any case, even if violence is an inalienable component of life, it should be seen only as a bad necessity (Kolakowski, 2008, p. 77).

**Ignatius of Loyola – a powerful leader**

Ignatian education is undoubtedly rooted in the educational experiences and spirituality of Ignatius of Loyola (1491-1556). He came from a proud and influential noble Basque family. He was raised as a future "leader". The term then meant someone who gave orders to others, who had the desire to be "worth more" (*valer mas*), to demonstrate that he was stronger, more powerful, richer and more important than others (Garcia Mateo, 1991, p. 27).

In his youth, Ignatius continued the knight-soldier traditions of his family, including those less glorious ones such as participating in duels and engaging in numerous love affairs. In May 1521, he was among the defenders of the fortress of Pamplona besieged by the Spaniards (Loyola, 1997, n. 1). When all his companions wanted to surrender in exchange for their lives, Ignatius convinced them to defend themselves to the end. The fortress was only surrendered when a cannonball shattered Loyola's leg.

As a result of many weeks of treatment, it turned out that "he was left with one bone above his knee mounted on top of the other. Thus the leg was left shorter and the bone at that point protruded so much as to be something ugly" (Loyola, 1997, n. 4). Ignatius then ordered surgeons to cut off this

bone, naturally without the use of anesthetics. The image of Loyola, who submits himself to "this torture" at his own request, has deeply embedded itself in the minds of the Jesuits. His courageous decision to undergo surgery was undoubtedly a manifestation of his inner strength and determination, which he showed throughout his life, also later as the superior general of the order. Before making any decision, he thought and prayed for a long time, but then acted quickly and decisively, and nothing could distract him from the goal once set.

During the long convalescence after the Battle of Pamplona, Ignatius experienced a religious conversion and decided to replace the service of the earthly rulers with the service of the "King eternal", in order to conquer with him "all the land of unbelievers" (Loyola, 2017, n. 93). It was his reaction to the sense of insecurity that arose in the society of early modern Europe, affected by fanaticism and religious wars, political hatred and questioning of all authority, a deep moral decline in which Catholics lost entire territories to Protestants. The order founded by Ignatius was to compensate for these losses by gaining new followers and new lands in mission countries.

In his Spiritual Exercises, with the help of which Ignatius formed candidates for his order and other people significant in society and the Church, he assured several times that in this service of "King eternal" one should be prepared for hardships and suffering, that violence was needed "against […one's] own sensuality and against […] carnal and worldly love", while "bearing all injuries and all abuse and all poverty of spirit, and actual poverty" (Loyola, 2017, n. 94). This was a new kind of power: instead of being stronger, richer and more important than others, the retreatant was to become more connected to the humiliated, powerless and poor Christ.

Loyola remained a man of great contrasts, reflecting the spirit of the 16th century in which he grew up. To him governance could mean either cordiality or harsh repudiation. He often surprised people with his reaction to affairs: sometimes he insisted strongly on obedience, sometimes he was mild and gentle. Well known was his steadfastness or, rather, stubbornness (Friedrich, 2014, p. 134). His Spiritual Journal reveals him as a man of good calculation, a demanding superior, a strict ascetic and at the same time a contemplative, recalling that during his mystical experiences he cried seventy-five times (Loyola, 1958). Loyola combined strictness, adherence to rules, respect for authority with simultaneous flexibility to new challenges, forbearance and delicacy. This tension between exercising power and being gentle spilled over to the order he founded, even becoming his hallmark.

Initially, neither Ignatius nor his companions intended to engage in education, but to devote themselves to "helping souls", i.e. charity and pastoral work. They soon discovered, however, that the privileged way of this "helping souls" would be to educate the youth. Moreover, they came to the conclusion that through good education based on the values of the Gospel and Renaissance humanism, it would be possible to raise the standard of living of entire societies (Ribadeneira, 1965, p. 475). At the same time, the Jesuits were convinced that they were to educate the boys entrusted to them to be future leaders of the Church, state and society, for the benefit of all citizens (Polanco, 1965, p. 419). The position of leaders was easier to achieve in the future for students from the wealthier classes, which is why the Jesuits kept a special preference for them. In this sense, they sided with powerful and influential members of society.

Ignatian education was carried out in hundreds of colleges, seminaries and various types of boarding schools run by Jesuits. These were hierarchically organized institutions with great power of the rector, who could not, however, fulfill his own whims, but had to consult his advisers on more important matters and was subordinate to the superior general of the order (The Constitutions of the SJ, n. [326]). The latter received annual information on the rector's activities through official, confidential letters written by appointed Jesuits. The structure of multi-level dependencies ensured the smooth functioning of the entire institution. In colleges, the responsibility for the education and upbringing rested in the hands of the members of Society of Jesus, lay people were entrusted with only some functions. The educational program was structured, clear and well known to students and their parents. All this created the image of a powerful institution, effectively influencing its pupils.

**The school curriculum as a tool of symbolic violence**

In trying to indicate manifestations of power and violence in the Jesuit school system where Ignatian education was offered, I follow the article by Conrad Hughes (2020) who explores the relationship between violence and education. He does this by referring to some of the literature in critical pedagogy that investigates how contemporary schools are violent in modes that are symbolic (non-physical), structural, and physical.

I know that applying contemporary analysis to earlier educational trends is a risky operation. However, I am inspired by Foucault, who places the former Jesuit education in his account of the successful historical metamorphoses of the school. This education could be seen as one of the stages on

the way from "harsh and relatively inflexible to mild and ostensibly gentler practices; and, perhaps most importantly, a shift from negative to positive conceptions and practices of discipline" (Deacon, 2006, p. 179).

Following Bourdieu (1988), Hughes notes there is already some form of violence in the curriculum offered by individual schools. This violence is not a deliberate action by the school authorities, rather an unconscious reinforcement of the status quo that is seen as the "norm" by the students. I have no doubt, that every curriculum contains a form of ideological domination and indoctrination, i.e. it imposes on force specific beliefs and norms to children, which are largely intellectually vulnerable beings. However, any initiation in culture is an indoctrination, so it cannot be completely avoided. Maybe we should distinguish between indoctrination in good principles, beliefs and norms and indoctrination in bad ones. Only the latter would be called violence in the strict sense. Although the distinction between the positive and negative content of indoctrination will always be historically and culturally conditioned, it seems that we can carefully accept indoctrination aimed at obtaining attitude of respect and tolerance towards others and we should definitely reject the one that propagates various forms of enslaving other people.

In the case of Jesuit education, the curriculum was included in the *Ratio studiorum*, which was in force in all Jesuit schools (and universities) around the world. It provided almost exclusively linguistic education (learning to speak Latin correctly and beautifully), and omitted real knowledge (natural sciences). Jesuit schools for a long time dealt with unrealistic issues and used the method of unreflective, purely memorized learning of the material. The aim was to form a pious and eloquent erudite (Bednarski, 2003). This was done through formal and grammatical education, contact with moralizing ancient humanistic and philosophical literature, supplemented with elements of real knowledge in the field of mathematics and natural science, which, however, served only to prepare the speaker.

Did such a curriculum hurt students or mislead them or gave them a distorted picture of the world? Certainly not directly, because most of students came from the nobility, and the latter did not expect a practical education that would give them, for example, the opportunity to become a teacher or start a career as a petty official. The Jesuit school was supposed to equip its students with skills such as composing and delivering a speech from memory in Latin, writing a private and official letter, and taking part in conversations and discussions. All this was to facilitate moving around in the noble world, which was dominant in all areas of social life.

The Jesuit school fulfilled these tasks well, although it used some forms of didactic violence, such as strictly defined material to be mastered in each class, daily checking of tasks, a highly structured schedule of the day, semester and year, promoting strong competition between students, the institution of secret informers among students (Nadal, 1965a, n. [20]), a demanding system of assessment and punishment up to expulsion from school. In total, the Jesuits did not hesitate use a certain violence in the implementation of their curriculum. They justified their methods of upbringing and education by pointing to a clearly marked, specific purpose of their activities - raising students on pious and well-educated individuals (*viri pii et docti*). This does not mean that the Jesuits doubted the ethical correctness of their methods. On the contrary, they were convinced of their effectiveness and benefits for students. They set goals that in their opinion were good and tried to achieve them by methods that they considered optimal. In this sense, their symbolic violence was well deliberated, which distinguishes it from that described by Bourdieu, who pointed out that the imposition of the norms of the group possessing greater power on the other group is often unconsciously agreed upon by both parties. Students of Jesuit schools had no doubts who governed their school and what was required of them.

**Structural violence at schools**

Hughes, following Foucault's thought (1978), notes that the traditional layout of schools was based on the architectural map of the prisons. They served the function of herding and controlling large numbers of people. Jesuit colleges that educated hundreds and sometimes thousands of students also had these characteristics. The buildings were spacious, with wide corridors and large classrooms that could accommodate up to several dozen students. In the classroom, ten students sat in long, parallel desks. On the edge of the desk sat a student called a decurion, who questioned his classmates on the assigned memory quota, noted down the lack of tasks and possible absences, and then reported it to the teacher (Nadal, 1965b, p. 199). Foucault notices that the "decury" was an unit of the Roman army. "It was this unit that the Jesuits took up in the scenography of their schools, thus reintroducing a military model" (1978, p. 315 ).

In the four corners of the room sat syndics, whose task was to ensure order in the classroom and report shortcomings to the Jesuit teacher. The class was visited at least twice a month by the school principal, who controlled the implementation of the program by the teacher and the progress of the students (*Ratio studiorum*, Rules for the Prefect of Lower Studies,

n. 6). In the corridors, the prefect of the courtyard kept discipline. Generally, students remained throughout their stay at school under the watchful eye of the Jesuits or their assistants, among whom there were (at least in the 16th century) secret informers (Nadal, 1965a, p. 22).

When the students lived in boarding schools, prefects and their assistants from among the Jesuits watched over the order in them (Bednarski, 2003). On the other hand, in private boarding houses, students had tutors employed by their parents, who were often very demanding of their pupils and did not avoid flogging them.

All in all, students were supervised and controlled at all times, which was supposed to contribute to maintaining order in the school, and at the same time to teach them immaculate behavior in line with social expectations. The latter goal was achieved with difficulty, as evidenced by numerous violent brawls caused in cities by students of Jesuit schools, clashes and conflicts with students from other schools, with Protestants, Jews, townspeople, and even physical attacks on the Jesuits themselves. In the case of Polish Jesuit colleges, this low effectiveness of continuous monitoring of students was probably due to their Sarmatian habits. Most of them belonged to the nobility, which valued freedom and the belief that all nobles were equal, had their honor and could not be subjugated.

**Social exclusion**

Since Jesuit colleges were free of charge before the suppression, they were generally open to boys from all social strata, from rich and poor families, from different religions and nationalities. Especially in the 16th century, these schools actually gathered young people who were socially very diverse (mostly sons from bourgeois families), then gradually there were more and more representatives of the nobility and magnates in these institutions, although all the time they also educated individuals from outside this dominant group.

Essentially, all students were to be treated equally by the Jesuits. The *Ratio studiorum* states that upon admission to the school, the principal "should exclude no one on the grounds that he is poor or not of noble blood" (Rules for the Prefect of Lower Studies, n. 9). Moreover, it was emphatically repeated that teachers and professors "should not look down on no one, attending to the education of poor students just as to that of the rich" (Rules Common to Professors of the Lower Classes, n. 50 and Common Rules for Professors of the Higher Faculties, n. 20).

On the other hand, the school principal was clearly instructed that when assigning desks to students at the beginning of the school year: "he

should assign the better (*commodiora*) seats to those of noble families" (Rules for the Prefect of Lower Studies , n. 29). Although such a solution may seem grossly unfair today, perhaps the Jesuits in their programmatic egalitarianism could not go so far as to seat a wealthy magnate in the same school desk next to a poor nobleman, a modest burgher or (completely improbable!) a peasant. It was enough that all students had to be in the same class, do the same homework, sing the same songs, take part in the same theatrical performances.

The ostentatiously worse treatment of poorer students could have taken place, since the Polish provincial Stefan Sczaniecki reminded teachers of the lower grades in 1715 that "poor students must not be used for work in the college (unless they are adequately paid), much less for private classes" (Sczaniecki, 2001, p. 59).

There is an interesting account by Pietro Antonio Adami (1661–1722), who spent five years in the Jesuit high school in Bologna in the 1670s (Fabrini, 1946). He writes that teachers warned pleb students to keep their contacts with nobles to a minimum, especially in such matters as borrowing or accepting money or exchanging books. If someone broke this rule, they risked expulsion from school (Grendler, 2016, p. 38). The author of the manuscript summarizes: "students from the nobility had priority in everything and over all students" (Fabrini, 1946, p. 25). It can be assumed that once again admirable principles had to give way to practical life pragmatics.

Jesuit schools were open to students from various religious denominations, especially Protestants. In the case of Polish Jesuit colleges in the 16th century, many of them had numerous students of dissenters. Jesuit teachers approached these students with a large dose of tolerance, which was probably due to the desire to convert them to Catholicism, as well as to win over their influential parents. In the 17th century, after the victory of the Counter-Reformation in Poland, openness towards dissenters began to decline. A drastic example of a change in the atmosphere was the public burning of Calvinist books in the school yard in 1611 by students of the Jesuit gymnasium in Kamieniec Podolski (Załęski, 1905, vol. 4, pp. 114–115).

The number of students of dissenters in colleges was decreasing for various reasons, but probably also because they risked being damaged emotionally and psychologically not just by student-led violence but also by acts of exclusion by the school community. This may seem like a distinctly different form of violence, violence against the "religious other". However, there is no confirmation that it was stimulated by the Jesuits themselves, whose main goal was to convert Protestants to Catholicism, not to antagonize them.

**Physical violence**

The students at the Jesuit schools had to face also less sophisticated forms of violence — shouting and even physical violence. In 1715, the Polish provincial Stefan Sczaniecki warned teachers of Jesuit schools not to shout too loudly when admonishing students, and to avoid too harsh and offensive epithets, especially such as: "you thief, you pig, you stupid, etc." (Sczaniecki, 2001, p. 56). The author was well acquainted with the difficult situation in Polish Jesuit schools at the beginning of the 18th century and he wanted to reform them. It can therefore be assumed that the examples of verbal violence against students that he included in his manual were not his invention, but he took them from school practice.

What casts the greatest shadow over Jesuit schools is primarily physical violence. The first Jesuits, under the influence of Renaissance (Erasmus, Vives) and ancient (Quintilian) humanists, were convinced that a school teacher should above all be kind and gentle towards his pupils and "as far as possible he ought to proceed in a spirit of leniency and to maintain peace and charity with all" (The Constitutions of the SJ, n. [489]). At the same time, in the colleges they established from 1548, the Jesuits used, albeit reluctantly at first, physical punishment of students, because at that time these were generally considered an indispensable educational measure, especially in relation to younger boys. When in 1557, in the first college in the world, in Messina, the Jesuits introduced an experiment consisting in the complete abandonment of physical punishment, the parents of the students strongly opposed it, so the old discipline had to be restored in order to "keep the children in fear" (Tacchi Venturi, 1951, p. 356). The Jesuit college in Messina was a kind of model for all their subsequent colleges, as was the Sturm gymnasium in Strasbourg for the Protestant schools. If the Jesuits had insisted on not using physical punishment of students, they would probably be the only school in the world free of physical violence and could set a completely new trend in European education. Apparently, however, it was too early for this, and pragmatism prevailed in the Ignatian education. The Jesuits wanted to please the students' parents and not to expose themselves to the University of Catania, which wanted to close their college at all costs for fear of competition (Grendler, 2002, p. 122n).

Physical punishment in Jesuit schools has therefore been used for centuries, however, it was controlled, part of a closed system with its own rituals, nomenclature and spiritual references. According to Ignatius, the Jesuits could never inflict punishments personally, as this would diminish the respect of the pupils towards them and undermine their trust. Loyola

therefore proposed that colleges employ a paid non-Jesuit disciplinarian (*corrector*) to inflict punishments ordered by the teacher and keep the boys in fear (Loyola, 1905, p. 668; The Constitutions of the SJ, n. [397]).

In the first Jesuit schools, physical punishment could only be applied to students of the younger grades, while in the case of older students, mild persuasion was to be enough, and when it was ineffective, the delinquents were removed from the school. Also with regard to the younger students, physical punishment (in the form of the number of strokes ordered by the teacher) was an exceptional and final educational measure when other means of persuasion had failed. The provisions of the *Ratio studiorum* formulated the principle that the teacher "should not be quick to punish nor overly eager about finding things out. Rather he should look the other way when he can do so without harm to anyone" (Rules Common to Professors of the Lower Classes, n. 40). The teacher could not, however, not react to obvious violations of the school order, which he considered essential for high academic performance. This type of behavior found acceptance and even recognition in the eyes of parents who used to say: "Jesuit Fathers beat well, but they teach even better" (Rolnik, 2022, p. 183).

It is difficult to say unequivocally how Jesuit schools fared against other schools in terms of the use of physical violence. Robert Schwickerath writes that the use of the rod in Jesuit schools "was by no means so frequent as in nearly all other schools. […] Compared to what was done in the great public school of England and in the gymnasia on the European continent, the practice of the Jesuit colleges was exceedingly mild" (1904, 617). In turn, some Polish diaries from the 18th century show that strict discipline prevailed in local Jesuit colleges, in stark contrast to the principles from the beginning of the order (Rolnik, 2022 ). It is clearly described by the well-known Polish writer and politician Józef Wybicki, who until 1762 was a student of the Jesuit college in Stare Szkoty on the outskirts of Gdańsk: "The [students] were really beaten every day: I always heard a groan; the requests of the students and the hardness of the teachers were the usual picture of the school… It was real hell" (Wybicki, 1927, p. 11). The author paints a grim picture of one of his Jesuit teachers in the oldest [rhetoric] class, Jan Działowski, an "insolent tyrant" who "indulged in our class the wildness that was typical in the infima [youngest class]. This Jesuit liked to beat students and came to us with a cat o' nine tails" (Wybicki, 1927, p. 13).

If we recall the thought of Arendt, stating that violence appears where there is a lack of real power, we can assume that the Jesuit mentioned in the diary (and many of his companions) reached for physical violence because he

lost confidence in his power contained in the mission of teaching entrusted to him by the order, he lost his faith in his own extensive education, and in humanistic educational methods proposed by Ignatius of Loyola. Doubt in this power pushed him to violence. Unfortunately, we cannot rule out the distorted psyche, which made him find pleasure in breaking children.

On this occasion, it should be noted that the use of corporal punishment was a typical educational method in Catholic schools (as well as in almost all others) at least until the mid-1960s (until the Second Vatican Council), when it slowly began to be phased out due to changes in the perception of students and the discovery of their dignity. In the case of the USA, it was only in 2011 that church authorities prohibited the use of physical punishment in St. Augustine High School in New Orleans. It was probably the last Catholic school in the country to resort to physical punishment. Interestingly, the decision of the Bishop of New Orleans to waive penalties met with strong resistance and protests from the school board, parents, graduates, and even students who pointed to the benefits of this educational method (Cabaniss, 2011).

In the use of various forms of power and violence, the Jesuits were inscribed in the spirit of the era and succumbed to the then interpretation of the Bible, which expressed the belief in the positive educational effects of beating the pupils. They forgot not only the guidelines from the beginning of their order, but also the attitude that Jesus had towards children, the one whose name they proudly included in the name of their Society. Undoubtedly, Jesus used violence when he "made a whip cut of cords" and chased the merchants from the temple (John 2: 15) or when he verbally attacked the Pharisees calling them: "blind fools", "whitewashed tombs", "snakes", " brood of vipers "(Matthew 23). He had no indulgence for people with power and influence, but he was good and sensitive to children. Many Jesuits have lacked this attitude for centuries.

**Conclusion**

The Jesuits, who often meditated on serving the "King eternal" in humility, stood in their vast majority (although not all!), for centuries on the side of those in power, on the side of influential people: they were with kings and rulers as their confessors, advisers and astronomers, they were with the Chinese emperor as his court mathematicians, they were with the popes as their theologians, they were with the magnates and nobles as educators of their sons in hundreds of colleges scattered around the world.

It seems that only after the Second Vatican Council did the Jesuits significantly shift the main emphasis of their mission to the "preferential option for the poor", for the powerless. They decided to combine the proclamation of faith with the promotion of social justice (Arrupe, 1973). They created the Jesuit Refugees Service, opened hundreds of the "Fe y Alegria" schools for underprivileged children in the third world. It even seems that Ignatian education is today more creative and dynamic in countries where formal education is a form of empowerment, an instrument of emancipation and social promotion, where the first need of a child is not so much to be treated as a partner, but "to have a notebook and a pencil", to get a diploma that will become a ticket to a better life. Such education is often associated with high demands, imposing a certain style of thinking, acting and behaving on students. Even if this imposition is a manifestation of power and symbolic or structural violence, it often seems inevitable for students from disadvantaged backgrounds with little cultural capital.

In western colleges and high schools for students from wealthy families, the Jesuit put more emphasis on shaping people who are distinguished not only by intellectual competence, but also by conscience and compassion (Ignatian Pedagogy, 1993), according to the recommendation of one of Ignatius of Loyola's successors in the office of general of the order - Pedro Arrupe, who stated that Jesuits should educate "men and women for others and with others" (1973).

It is easy to say that we want an education and a world without any form of power and violence. However, no one has so far formulated a reasonable proposal on how to organize such an education and such a world. If we wanted to condemn all power and violence without distinction, we would have to question life itself. Of course, one should strive for a world in which violence will be directed only against slavery, crime, aggression, and not against the children (Kolakowski, 2008). However, it would be too simplistic to understand the typical Ignatian tension between exercising power and being gentle in such a way that one must only apply violence to some people and only gentleness to others. Rather, each person deserves to be treated with love, which Ignatius of Loyola called *caritas discreta*, which could be translated as prudent love, not devoid of realism.

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# Hermeneutics and comparative pedagogy. Language as material and powerful tool for assigning meanings, understanding and transforming information

**Abstract:** Language and the processes of understanding meaning of the concepts we use are of particular interest to scholars of comparative pedagogy, intercultural pedagogy and other fields dealing with intercultural communication processes. It is also evident that the methodology of comparative pedagogy must include considering the process of understanding. For it is not possible to describe the solutions used in education without understanding the processes that had led to a certain state of affairs. The article discusses the issue of understanding the meanings of concepts as a necessary methodological procedure of comparative pedagogy. It provides examples of theoretical perspectives on the importance of language as a tool we use to communicate, store and transform information. The article also shows the link between culture and the vocabulary and pragmatics of language as well as the extra-linguistic possibilities of understanding meanings.

**Keywords**: comparative pedagogy, pedagogical hermeneutics, methodology of comparative pedagogy, understanding scientific concepts.

Comparative international studies are not and have never been a mere description of external factors that influence the shape, structure and functioning of various elements of social life, even though this is how comparative pedagogical studies are usually perceived, especially in the Polish tradition. Comparison is part of every scientist's mindset regardless of their discipline.

Also, it is easy to see the pressures in science that result in comparisons through which individual communities position themselves in relation to others: social well-being, demographic indicators, social phenomena, economic and military development, rule of law and education standards, democracy index, etc. In all these and other countless categories, dedicated institutions, but also ordinary citizens, are constantly comparing their societies with others, wondering what to emulate and what to avoid.

Besides comparison, an important factor in the development of societies is their interdependence and dependence on other societies. It seems clear, therefore, that any theory of social change (and building them is the purpose of comparative research) must consider the interactive dimension of the social world. Unfortunately, comparative pedagogy has not fully mastered this task. Like other social disciplines and sub-disciplines, it has experienced a theoretical pluralism, extending the theoretical consensus established in the 1980s based on the principles of liberalism, realism and Marxism to include new paradigms: critical theory, constructivism, feminism, poststructuralism, postmodernism, postcolonialism, environmentalism and others. Some scholars involved in international studies in a broad sense stressed the importance of structural realism for the methodological foundations of this research area. For instance, Kenneth N. Waltz believed that constructivism is not a theory at all and, in fact, it is difficult to say what constructivism specifically explains (Waltz, 2004, p. 5). Waltz describes it as an optimistic view of the world that claims that people and states, rather than pursuing their own interests, can and do act for the benefit of others. This is just an example of the ongoing disputes.

The existence of multiple disciplines continues to suggest that different features of the external require different ways of exploring it. It also leads us to believe that the world of science has been permanently divided and the boundaries marking the divisions are reflected in the ways in which we see and describe them. "The disciplines and fields of research that have been constructed," Galganek writes, "seem to demonstrate so obviously the existence of a strict agreement between what we say and what we think we see, that many researchers have begun to treat this illusion or what they themselves have invented as a justification for their research" (Gałganek, 2019, p. 13). As Hans-Georg Gadamer argued, it is important to be methodical, but truth in humanities is not provided by a method. The essence of truth is not determined by the primacy of method, but by the process of cognition from the perspective of a historically conditioned human being (Gadamer, 1990, p. 493). A hallmark of the humanities, as Bogusław Milerski writes, is "(...)

both a distance towards *a priori* principles and a particular attitude towards method - scientific exploration requires method, but being methodical does not guarantee that one would understand the reality of the *humanum*. Indeed, humanistic and hermeneutic learning must be open to events that elude the method, in which a reality authenticated in truth is revealed in the medium of language." (Milerski, 2011, p. 29).

The thesis that is revealed from the above is that language is an important issue concerning the distinctiveness and thus identity of scientific disciplines. How has pedagogy, including comparative pedagogy, handled the linguistic turn of the 20th century? This linguistic turn in philosophy and social theory was introduced to the discipline of pedagogy by philosophers such as John S. Austin, Jacques Derrida, Michel Foucault, Jürgen Habermas, Ludwig Wittgenstein.

Scholars of international relations, reflecting on the function of language, have brought into comparative pedagogy such concepts as: "binary oppositions", "discursive practices", "communicative action", "speech acts", etc. Language was beginning to be seen as the primary tool for representing the world. It was believed that the more accurately we represented the world and what was taking place in it, the better we could capture the changes that comparative pedagogy, in its utilitarian function, was intended to bring to social systems, including above all to the education system.

Language is the primary tool by which we communicate as well as store and transform information. It is also the most important tool for transmitting cultural heritage from generation to generation. Without language, culture as we know it could not exist. Culture is strongly linked to the vocabulary and pragmatics of a language, however, the words we use are merely a part of the communication process. Our behaviour, gestures, facial expressions, tone and other characteristics of voice, touch and visual attention are also extremely important parts of the communication process. Words and non-verbal communication, as well as non-behavioural elements (the structure of the environment in which we function, our clothing, use of space and time, conversational style) are carriers of meaning in the process of interpersonal and, more broadly, intercultural communication. Words thus represent only a small part of the variety of events and behaviours that make up communication. It is therefore not surprising that language is of particular interest to comparative pedagogy, intercultural pedagogy and other research fields concerned with intercultural communication processes.

Apart from linguistic competence and communicative competence, intercultural competence is increasingly referred to as one of the main goals

of language teaching. This is because it has been realised that reducing knowledge of a foreign language to formal structures alone does not guarantee successful communication at the interface of two (or more) cultures. William Howell (Howell, 1982, pp. 29-33) identified four levels of intercultural competence: (a) unconscious incompetence - when we misinterpret another's behaviour and are not aware of it; (b) conscious incompetence - when we know that we are misinterpreting another's behaviour but do nothing about it; (c) conscious competence - when we are constantly thinking about our communication and trying to achieve greater effectiveness and precision of speech; (d) unconscious competence - when we have developed our communication skills to such a high degree that we no longer need to think about what we say and how we say it.

In pedagogy it is often emphasised that the desirable outcome of intercultural education is level-four proficiency and fluency. And yet, someone who functions at this level can easily forget the need for self-awareness, for reflection and for gaining knowledge, for learning to read the Other not according to one's own pattern, but according to the intentions and needs of the interlocutor. Knowledge, reflexivity and the ability to interact can therefore be seen as the three prerequisites of effective intercultural communication. Stella Ting-Toomey and Atsuko Kurogi (Ting-Toomey, Kurogi, 1998) recognise that the effectiveness of intercultural communication is determined by equality of both parties, unbiased mutual listening, not blaming anyone and appreciating the feelings and needs of others. Konrad Lorenz in *Behind the Mirror: A Search for a Natural History of Human Knowledge* (Lorenz, 1977) argues that language as an external system of signs extends and functionally changes the structure of cognitive representations. The discussion on the cognitive function of language has offered two answers to the above issue, namely that language greatly expands the cognitive capacities of human beings, being a specific tool of cognition and a way of organising information and, the opposite view, that language is only a tool of communication and expression of already conceptually organised pre-linguistic cognition.

Science is what we can discover using the scientific method: the truth or at least an approximation of the truth. In logic and mathematics there is an unspoken rule that as few words as possible should be used to represent the world. Hence, it should come as no surprise that analytic philosophy and philosophy of science have their origins in a positivist understanding of reality. In the twentieth century, especially in the 1930s-1960s, as Jan Woleński writes, the philosophy of science was dominated by a formal orientation (reconstructionism) derived from logical empiricism. It recommended that

scientific output (theories, laws, hypotheses, statements about experimental results, explanations, predictions, as well as linguistic means of encoding scientific statements) be examined using formal and logical methods (Wolenski, 2014). It assumed the existence of a strict criterion that would allow to distinguish science from non-science. And so, according to the proponents of the formal methodological orientation, science always manifests itself in the same way, regardless of the historical period, and the main object of scientific research is scientific output not scientific activity, in other words, it is the context of justification and not the context of discovery that is important.

According to the reconstructionists, it is possible to create a principle that would define science (in the sense of empirical science, formal sciences such as logic and mathematics were not included) and at the same time contrast it with non-science, i.e. pseudo-science. The early logical empiricists put forward the criterion of verifiability (a statement is scientific if it is empirically verifiable), others, like Karl Popper, advocated for falsifiability (a statement is scientific if it is empirically falsifiable), others still, like Rudolf Carnap, proposed expressibility through definability and/or reducibility in empirical language (a statement is scientific if it can be expressed in empirical language, with the particular aim of defining theoretical constructs in such a way that they make empirical sense).

The methodology of reconstructionism was a-pragmatic, oriented towards output (products) rather than activity, and was supposed to be modelled on metamathematics. Pragmatic methodology (i.e. the study of scientific activities) was not relevant to understanding the nature of science. Reconstructionism argued that, in most cases, activities are accessible through their products, so it is the latter that are more important. We should note however that a variety of pathways can lead to scientific discovery, including irrational ones. Thus, it is the reasoning (justification) that is important in science, as it can be subject to logical standardisation. Consequently, the context of justification is always subject to logical analysis, whereas the context of discovery only in certain cases.

Recent decades have seen a characteristic shift in emphasis regarding the role of science, including that of its custodians, i.e. researchers. Science must be accessible, easy to understand and, above all, in many ways useful. As John A. Bargh writes in his book *Social psychology and unconscious: The automaticity of higher mental processes* (Bargh, 2002), evidence is piling up that we do not control our judgements and behaviour as much as we think we do. We tend not to realise that unconscious or automatic forms of mental and behavioural processes occur without our intention or consent,

even though they affect us in important ways on a daily basis. Automatic processing affects our likes and dislikes of almost everything, as well as our perceptions of other people. So if a lot of our choices are made unconsciously or controlled by our prior experiences unintentionally, are we able to make objective judgements in any area of science? Are the choices we make really our autonomous choices? Are the processes by which we identify research goals really dictated only by our cognitive curiosity and absolutely free? Or are they perhaps determined by our individual perceptions, as well as by our prior often unconscious life scripts? Perhaps when we make various choices, whether it is in our personal or academic lives, we automatically generate preferences or aversions towards objects and events? After all, no stimuli in the human environment are completely neutral.

Depending on the currently prevailing culture, the principle of optimum research generally determines the degree of relevance of such scientific activity factors characteristic of the social sciences, but also linguistics and humanities, as form, significance, referential meaning, structure and context. Although these categories seemingly belong to linguistics and can be found in numerous publications in this field, they are also relevant to the social sciences, including the subjec-matter of this book, i.e. scientific comparison. By treating language as a system of signs, serving as part of a wider cognitive system to organise, process, accumulate and transfer information, we can recognise that the meaning attributed to an expression in a particular speech act is the product of a number of information processes and functions performed by cognitive representations. Indeed, we should distinguish between the universal meaning an expression has as part of the linguistic system, the meaning conferred by the language user, the result of the acquisition of a particular language, and the meaning of a particular utterance caught up in a specific context. The difference will become clear when we refer to the information processes determining the different stages of constituting a language system.

Language is, first and foremost, a socially created sign system, that is, a permanent structure of representation, linked to conceptual and sensory cognition. At the level of social language, through the processes of exchanging information, individual cognitive representation systems (conceptual and sensory) of individual members of a linguistic community are integrated into the socially produced system of linguistic representation. The integration of the conceptual structure of an individual with the social structure of a language takes place in the process of language acquisition. Once acquired by an individual, language not only serves to link mental

representations to a system of external signs, thus enabling the expression and communication of knowledge, but also actively influences the organisation and interpretation of information acquired in the individual's momentary experience. The language used in science is a representation of the knowledge and experience as well as competence of the researcher acquired during the process of language acquisition (structures and lexis). It does affect the transmission of content and fundamentally determines the intersubjective communicability.

It is quite different in the phenomenological theory, which in essence boils down to orienting everyday life towards the perspective of its participant. The phenomenological theory focuses on the interpretation of subjective experience and personal understanding. The phenomenological tradition is all about interpretation, so it does not assume any intersubjective verifiability. Individual perspectives become particularly important, for nothing is more relevant to communication than one's own direct experience. The trouble with interpersonal communication, however, is that no two people have the same life experiences, and since we are unable to experience the experiences of others, we tend to miss them when we talk to them. So can two people move past superficial impressions and make real contact on a deeper level? Carl Rogers described three conditions for change in an individual's relationship with others. These are confidence in their congruence, unconditional positive regard and empathic understanding (Rogers, 2002, p. 43).

Martin Buber reached similar conclusions and claimed that authenticity in human relationships can be achieved through dialogue, i.e. a process in which the parties engage with the intention of understanding another person's situation. "I possess nothing but the everyday out of which I am never taken," Buber said (Buber, 1954, p. 43). But at the same time, he added: "The extended lines of relations meet in the eternal Thou" (Buber, 1954, p. 43). Thus, if the I-Thou relationship consists of two parallel lines, then the point of intersection is in infinity. Buber's "pre-words" I-Thou and I-It are an attempt to explain the ways in which humans are in the world and interact with other humans. I-It denotes the possession of an object, taking the form of everyday experience, and always meaning: I possess (I perceive, I think, I feel) something. Whereas I-Thou marks a relationship. Each finite Thou, according to the dialectic of relation, can transform itself, if necessary, into an It, and each It can reveal a Thou. Encounter with Thou always brings about a kind of transformation of I, it is , as it were, between I and Thou. The phenomenological approach makes it possible to understand that the authenticity

of the relationship with another person is contained in the imperative to treat them as subjects. If I see another person as It, I preclude any understanding (dialogue) between us. Critical theory, the scientific achievement of the so-called Frankfurt School, whose representatives were Max Horkheimer, Theodor Adorno and Herbert Marcuse, was originally created to critically analyse the views of Karl Marx, but it also presented views on the essence of civilisational change, denouncing emerging inequalities and the crooked mirrors of the meanings in the language of politics. In its assessment of social change, the Frankfurt School was infused with pessimism. Its representatives wrote about civic indifference and called for emancipation, transformation and more conscious participation in the life of society. For them, language analysis became a symbol of social oppression. They called for the use of words representing the positions of marginalised groups. Marcuse claimed: "The avenues of entrance are closed to the meaning of words and ideas other than the established one-established by the publicity of the powers that be, and verified in their practices" (Marcuse, 1976, p. 310–311)". Adorno recognized the role of media: "[...]as communities were increasingly subjected to the power of mass communication, the preformation of minds increased to such an extent that there was hardly any room left for people themselves to become aware of this state of affairs" (Adorno, 1986, p. 45).

The influence of the Frankfurt School on scientific thinking about the critical function of language is still evident today. Its representatives wrote much less about what they actually supported. Their texts, filled with appeals for liberation, transformation and more social awareness, generally do not reveal the way to achieve these goals. But, even though they did not address the subject directly, their reflections found and continue to have a place in pedagogical reflections on the nature of intercultural communication. The moral responsibility and social solidarity advocated by the proponents of critical theory are in fact reflected in the practice of intercultural dialogue, i.e. in thoughtful social action and attempts to challenge some illusions societies have, e.g. the illusion of already being inclusive used by some in the world of politics, the economy or education to hide their particular interests under the guise of the common good.

Thus, intercultural communication becomes a tool to effectively deal with social illusion. Finally, we should also mention the socio-cultural tradition derived from the premise that people who talk to each other create and reproduce a culture. Most of us assume that words reflect reality. But is this really the case? Or perhaps it is the other way around and it is words that shape our vision of reality.

Sapir and Whorf, for example, argued that it is the structure of a culture's language that determines people's thoughts and actions, and therefore it is not the vocabulary of the language that reflects cultural differences, but it is the language we use, its possibilities and limitations that shape our perception (Whorf, 1982, p. 285). When we teach children to speak, not only do we indicate what exists by giving that thing a name, but we also awaken in them the desire to search for that which is not directly visible and experienced, which has no referent. William Gudykunst pointed out the importance of the cultural code for understanding the meanings of spoken or read words (Gudykunst, 1988, pp.125-127). We can agree with his thesis that culture plays an extremely important role in decoding signals in communication, whereby the cultural rules of such decoding are closely linked to the emotions and value judgements that make up our self-understanding.

Many manifestations of the world's existence go unnoticed by some people precisely because they cannot say anything about them. Therefore, it is the process of communication that creates reality or transforms it. Two people having a conversation co-create their own social worlds. The inability to name a state, an element of reality or a phenomenon or the different names used to refer to them can create communicative collisions. Language that remains in the collision zone of people not understanding each other fails to create a space of mediation. It does not favour a sensible and understanding encounter. And often the cruelty of spoken words, the bitterness of indifference, the ruthlessness of resentment are emphasised in speech as acutely as in silence. From a perception of reality that is closed in one's own ego, it is no longer possible to move to a communal "we". People as monads, forming quasi-dialogue relationships, do not see each other and are unwilling or unable to listen.

In a book entitled "Practical Criticism. A Study of Literary Judgment" Ivor A. Richards was one of the first to present a systematic description of the ways in which words function. They are, according to him, arbitrary symbols that mean nothing in themselves. Words take on the colours of the environment (context) in which they occur. Richards warned against the trap of "singular meaning" (cf. Richards, 1930), i.e. the belief that it is possible to precisely define the meaning of the words we use. In his view, meanings are not found in words, but in ourselves. We can only properly understand a word when we give it meaning (or grasp its). Otherwise, it remains to us an empty sound. Ambiguity and thus also misunderstandings in communication are, according to Richards, an inevitability of language. For words,

even spoken in the same language, can mean completely different things to different people.

In summary, comparative pedagogy is a multi-faceted, contextualised analysis not only of education systems, as this sub-discipline was traditionally perceived, but also of paradigms, philosophical and political discourses in education and its history as well as of socio-cultural phenomena. It expounds the segments of reality that are of interest to the researcher, analyses discourses and questions of meaning. Comparative analyses make it possible to describe not only "What is?" but also "Why it is the way it is?", to understand the entanglements of education in social, cultural, economic and political dependencies embedded in the logic of past events. Given the above, we should consider hermeneutics as the art of understanding reality to be an indispensable part of the methodological foundations of comparative pedagogy. Hermeneutics provides us with ample evidence of how language is an essential medium of meaning. This unique nature of understanding compared to other categories of cognition is closely related to the linguistic context, but also to the extra-linguistic context, in the sense that the understanding of reality does not result solely from the structure and condition of the human mind, but from their belonging to the world of culture and their ability to find their way in this world in a way that is not only rational but above all understanding (interpretative and meaning-giving).

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STUDIA Z TEORII
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# Pedagogical hermeneutics at the time of political transition in Poland

**Abstract:** The author analyzed the scientific dissertations of Polish scholars for whom hermeneutics as a direction of contemporary philosophy, including the method of researching ideas, theoretical premises of education and upbringing, contributed to the development of contemporary pedagogical thought and methodological self-awareness. The qualitative research paradigm requires researchers to be competent in understanding and interpreting the phenomena they are interested in. The aim of this article is therefore to make educators aware of the need to see in the analyzed dissertations from the period of the totalitarian state the use of hidden hermeneutics by scientists as a result of the existing political censorship. The freedom to conduct scientific research, regained in Poland after 1989, contributed to the dynamic development of general pedagogy, the theory of education and comparative studies of pedagogical thought. At the same time, the author warns against escaping from the freedom of a part of the scientific community as a result of subordinating the political correctness to the interpretation of the theories studied or the results of empirical research.

**Keywords:** freedom of science, hidden hermeneutics, fundamentalism, political correctness, humanities, multi-paradigm of pedagogy.

*It would be a poor hermeuticist who thought he could have, or had to have, the last word* (Gadamer, 1975, p. 581).

**Introduction**

It is not possible to reconstruct the state of knowledge about hermeneutic pedagogy in the 21st century in Poland without relating its development to the political conditions that interfered with the freedom of scientific research. Without it, there can be no talk of hermeneutics either as a theory of interpretation and understanding of a spoken or written text, i.e. as a kind of research methodology in humanities, which, in contrast to natural sciences and their scientistic model of research, allows, as a result of conducted inquiries, to understand ideas and to explain them. Hermeneutics is not only the art of interpreting a text, but also an epistemology of interpretation, a methodology, an expression of scientific approach in humanities. As Stefan Wołoszyn wrote:

> Knowledge about education consists of both pedagogical views expressed in philosophical reflection on the phenomena of upbringing that are universal in human life, and the results of empirical research into the reality of education. The former - philosophical reflection - is almost eternal and constantly alive; the latter - empirical research - is just over a hundred years old. The philosophy of upbringing is sometimes inspired by the practice of upbringing as a source of formulated views, but to a higher degree it draws inspiration from more general views of man, his essence and the meaning of his life (...) Both the philosophy of upbringing in the sense indicated and scientific pedagogy together form a historically conditioned picture of educational science (Wołoszyn, 1998, p. 9).

**The hidden dimension of hermeneutic inquiry in general pedagogy and theory of socialist education**

The issue addressed in the title of this article arose in the early 1990s, after science had been liberated from political censorship and it was finally possible to undertake research into ideas, currents, theories and discourses on upbringing and education that had hitherto been forbidden in socialist countries, but had been developing in western European, democratic countries. For over four decades, they had been viewed as bourgeois, i.e. construed as dehumanising the essence of upbringing and education in the interwar period of emerging capitalism. Andrzej Rutkowski wrote quite directly about the scientific community taking over in Poland after 1948, which (also due

to his involvement) became subservient to the ruling party policies, that its task was to "(…) actually demonstrate, on a few examples, the factual errors in many of the views expressed in these works and, consequently (if correlations are actually established) the reactionary nature of their class function. (…) In the argument against bourgeois pedagogy, the point is to strike at the part which constitutes its most important component. And this seems to be precisely moral education. It is in it [moral education] that the typical features of bourgeois pedagogy, seen as a whole, and what we describe as its class character, are most fully expressed" (1959, p. 294).

Hermeneutics could not appear in the human sciences, including pedagogy, neither as a research method nor as one of its currents. Any analysis inquiring into the sense, the meanings, the essence of educational or didactic processes could not be described as hermeneutic, because this would have violated the only legitimate method of research of Marxist dialectics, according to which any thesis incompatible with socialist ideology was to be treated as unscientific, because it went beyond objectively verifiable phenomena (cf. Kotłowski, 1957; Muszyński, 1985). In a totalitarian society dominated by the aspiration to unify social and educational structures, the theory of education was to legitimise the ultimate and indisputable ideology of political interactions as pedagogy while rejecting all alternatives that could only undermine it and disrupt the educational process. It thus encouraged the entrenchment in isolation from other educational currents, while suppressing the capacity for self-criticism and socio-cultural change.

If this was done, the method used for the study of pedagogical thought was not clarified, instead the authors would go straight to outline the characteristics of only selected sources of knowledge, (Wołoszyn, 1968) in order to give it a new meaning. For example, at the beginning of her dissertation on the process of upbringing and its outcomes, Romana Miller indicated that she intended to describe and clarify the meaning of upbringing by replacing its previous meaning with the phrase "the process of upbringing". "Therefore, the problem of upbringing, viewed as the problem of a series of changes, becomes more complex and seemingly more difficult, but I believe that it is more in line with the achievements of modern science" (Miller, 1966, p. 7). Fifteen years later, in another dissertation, the author confirmed the validity of her previous position on the processual nature of upbringing by deepening it with an analysis of theories emphasising the links between social development and individual development as a result of the changes taking place between three processes: socialisation, upbringing and psychotherapy (Miller, 1981). In this dissertation she also failed to provide a method for

her theoretical research. This was pointed out and properly recognised by Małgorzata Malicka when in her review of the book she wrote:

> *Out of all the possible ways of practising pedagogy, two are the most common: one with a practitioner's orientation, which treats education primarily as a skill, as a set of rules of conduct or as a kind of targeted technology for interpersonal relations, and the other, which brings to the fore a theoretical reflection, based on the broadest possible knowledge of the human being. Romana Miller's latest book is undoubtedly a manifestation of the latter approach* (1986, p. 183).

In the totalitarian regime, pedagogues were explicitly denied the right to undertake discussions, analyses, conduct disputes of a meta-theoretical, cultural nature, because the unquestionable and only acceptable Marxist-Leninist ideology was compulsory. Heliodor Muszyński, a Marxist-oriented pedagogue of those times, subordinated the methodology of educational sciences to the ideology of the one-party state, contributing to its academic depreciation and humanistic self-destruction. Even during the martial law of the 1980s, when addressing the dispute over the methodological status of education sciences over several decades, he stressed that a pedagogy which in its theoretical analyses draws on philosophy and its methods of enquiry leads to a crisis, as it reduces the discipline to a speculative science, thus preventing it from gaining autonomy. He wrote: "This was evident both in the issues addressed and in the methods used to address them. Pedagogy was dominated by considerations around general questions of the essence, meaning, tasks, ideals and possibilities of education. Education sciences practised in this way had no bearing on the reality of education: they neither studied it nor intervened in its processes. Thus, they weren't subject to any verification" (Muszyński, 1982, p. 1).

Consequently, in this difficult time for Polish science, representatives of general pedagogy or theory of education whose research was strictly hermeneutic did not refer to it as such, but instead used terms such as philosophical reflection or textual analysis. I recall a conversation I had with my master Karol Kotłowski, professor at the University of Lodz, pupil of the eminent philosopher of upbringing, comparatist and general pedagogue Sergiusz Hessen (1931; 1937; 1938; 1939), who had 50 pages of his dissertation on the hermeneutic analysis of the essence of patriotic upbringing removed by the censorship. The book had not been intended as a textbook or methodological guide for educators, since "the theoretical considerations contained in it are only intended to introduce the reader to this difficult and responsible area

of moral education and to enable him to create his own methods adapted to his individuality and the conditions in which he educates" (Kotłowski, 1974, p. 14).

Similarly, in another dissertation on the philosophy of values in relation to the tasks of pedagogy, Kotłowski analysed how, over time, the concept of freedom and values crystallized in non-Marxist and Marxist philosophies, but also in the pedagogy of culture in relation to human rights, to avoid cementing the readers' already held beliefs. "The mind, when analysing an idea, unfortunately has to break it down into its constituent parts and, in Bergson's words, "kill it". The educator should do the opposite: to merge what the theorist has dismembered and, as it were, bring it back to life in the souls of his pupils" (Kotłowski, 1968, p. 207*).* The hermeneutic method of inquiry was expected to encourage addressing issues that are essential to pedagogy, so that through the analysis of ideas the essence of pedagogical regularities could be explored. The fact that this type of inquiry is not clear to practitioners of upbringing and education was not so much the fault of the author, but, as Kotłowski wrote, "(…) of the subject-matter under study itself, which is very complex, and it is not always possible to write clearly about vague things, and sometimes, under such conditions, some inaccuracies or even errors in reasoning cannot be avoided. But I believe that even the fear of the latter eventuality should not deter anyone from trying to tackle difficult issues, since error is often a great midwife to the birth of truth" (Kotłowski, 1964, pp. 6-7).

Polish pedagogues of the totalitarian socialist era used hermeneutics as a way to analyse and arrive at a humanistic understanding of the key conceptual categories of this discipline and education theories developed based on them. The belief, proposed by some, the they were to fulfil a servile function towards the government reg**i**me gained support in the publications of the Committee of Pedagogical Sciences of the Polish Academy of Sciences, the best example of which is the collection of texts and then separate volumes devoted to the critique of bourgeois pedagogy (Suchodolski, ed. 1959). The generation of teachers trained in the inter-war period or in clandestine during the Nazi occupation were educated on their work. When exploring the essence of self-education, following K. Kotłowski, I defined the research method as a philosophical and pedagogical reflection. As an organising criterion, I identified three types of situations where we can speak of self-education in social relations, that is self-education with heteronomous sources of its inspiration and intrapersonal activities understood as a kind of "intra-action", self-feedback towards perfectionism and perfectiorism (Śliwerski, 2010a).

Pedagogy, which grew out of philosophy with is history of its disintegration and atomisation, became not only an ungrateful and possessive child of this *corpus philosophicum*, but also a barren, shallow product of a technical and scientific civilisation, surrendering itself utterly to the statist and occupying politics of a totalitarian, one-party regime. Fundamentalism in the humanities, and in pedagogy in particular, became dangerous because its proponents declared certain assertions and principles to be the only truth. And as confrontational and directed against others such statements often were, they did not allow scholars from other scientific schools to respond. They denied the opponents the right to their own generalisations of knowledge or theories, did not allow new research perspectives, and thus hindered the development of pedagogy as a humanistic science. At the same time, this type of possessive attitudes led to a dogmatisation of the main assumptions of the rejected stream, proclaiming the superiority of their own.

**Breakthrough in the Pedagogy of "Border"**

After Poland reclaimed its political sovereignty, domestic pedagogical thought was enriched by a number of scholarly works whose authors focused on their own distinctive reading of the works of their chosen classic of education sciences. This was because it was necessary to deny the banality of the thesis about the end of philosophy, which was first condemned during the communist period by positivists, doctrinaire Marxists, who however offered content for the education or upbringing of young generations that was questionable and often contrary to national tradition and culture instead. The fracture that emerged in 1989, the radical separation of the Polish humanities from the monistic, ideologically degenerated socialist pedagogy, was to prove to be a lasting achievement of the times of socio-political, cultural and scientific transition. With the political turn-around of the early 1990s, Polish pedagogy reoriented itself towards the values of pluralism and democracy, towards an open society, towards differences, multiplicity and strangeness, towards respect for individual freedom and democracy.

The year 1989 unlocked the space of freedom to practise research and disseminate its results, which was so important for this discourse. The space of scientific freedom so important for the development of humanistic pedagogy was created. Its significance was stressed by Zbigniew Kwieciński when he wrote:

> Great hardship awaits pedagogy in the face of the challenges of social and cultural change. There are many paths we have to re-embark on. Close the door behind us and start working from scratch. Resume interrupted and forgotten discourses, make up for lost time, explain, bring to mind our marginalised achievements, create a preference for general pedagogy, for the philosophy of education, open ourselves to basic theories of man, society and culture, to global problems, pave the way to the world for scientific youth and the way towards us for texts and knowledge from the world, be closer to new practice, to courageous innovators and creators of good educational practice. It is necessary to help silence the pedagogy that had been instrumentally adapted to the misguided previous system (Kwieciński, 1990, p. 9).

At the time, the controversy over theoretical and applied research was independent of political and systemic divisions. What pedagogy needed was to generate synthetic approaches to develop theories of education that went beyond the boundaries and limitations of partial paradigms. By delving into the languages offered by such different varieties of them as philosophical and normative pedagogy, humanistic pedagogy, personal and existential pedagogy, social and personalist pedagogy, Gestalt pedagogy or postmodern pedagogy, it was possible to notice in them not only a richness of meanings, but also to realise, as it were, the "reversibility" of educational reality, these multiple worlds that are subject to permanent reconstruction. How very aptly Paul Ricoeur spoke of the need for research in the history of thought and scientific disciplines to inquire into the meanings of key phenomena as a result of their continuous interpretation. Any text of this kind is updated by the reception of its successive readers. "We never start from nothing, we are always, as I like to say, indebted. But this heritage is entrusted to us so that we develop it. That is, tradition is not a dead deposit, but a resource to be creatively developed" (Ricoeur, 1993, p. 23).

Individual schools, doctrines, orientations or currents of education theory are described and interpreted by scholars in such a diverse manner that their value is dictated not only by the principle of clear presentation, but also by the inevitably related arbitrariness of the selection and organisation of content, the selection of theories, their description and evaluation. Suddenly, there was an opportunity to convince not only academics and teachers that a deep reflection on the essence of the education or upbringing process, on their axiological, anthropological and ontological *rationale* could morally strengthen their current educational effort and their level of rationality, of pedagogical self-awareness. According to Andrea Folkierska (1990a, p. 110),

from the philosophical perspective "(...) upbringing, understood as the acquisition of personal identity, forces us to look at pedagogy in a different way. Here pedagogy is not so much the science of upbringing as the **thinking of upbringing**". She was therefore right to plead for an education that is disobedient to what is presented as necessary and only true.

In her view (...) "a pedagogy that programs human behaviour, aspirations, attitudes, etc., must remain powerless towards the possibility of controlling human existence; but for this reason it is also in its power to realise how real upbringing happens. And it happens in education in the broadest sense of the term, teaching; the kind of teaching that makes it possible to experience knowledge in its real sense (...) requiring a detachment and critical reflection, but not the naivety of obedience to everything that these forms of objectivity carry in their immediate, empirical phenomenality. Real education opens up rather than blocks the effort to think. By bringing to light the conditions under which any knowledge is possible, it makes it problematic and non-necessary" (ibid., p. 110-111).

The time of Polish transformation has ushered in a return to freedom of scientific research, including the dissemination of the results of those studies that were censored or refused publication during the communist period.

> *"The time of transformation was at the same time becoming a prompt of the "universality of 'border'", of "political opposition" - and its challenges for education", a time of the search for the meanings of freedom and its limits in different varieties of thinking - modernist and postmodernist. The present time, the time of controversy around pedagogy and education is still about uncovering discourses that are absent "here" but present "out there". Importantly, it is about building democracy "here" - and it is a task - as it turns out - that is neither easy nor straightforward, always complex. Especially when we become aware of the different ways of understanding the idea, the "different practices of democratic thinking"" (Rodziewicz, 1996, p. 3).*

The rejection of pedagogy as a discipline in Poland was an offshoot of thinking about it in terms of the ideological discipline of the communist period, that is a "science" deprived not only of autonomy but also subject to political manipulation or pressure. "In this situation, and with the style of critical pedagogy reaching Poland, it was relatively easy to marginalise pedagogy in public life and in academic discussions, or even altrove (here and there) to proclaim the decline or even death of pedagogy" (Nowak, 2010, p. 9). The reorientation of pedagogical research towards an interdisciplinary,

multi-paradigmatic approach, which is open to differences but at the same time makes use of already established and internationally recognised research methodologies in social sciences and humanities allowed pedagogy not only to catch up with their development, but also to regain the name of an integral science (Śliwerski, 2009).

In his analysis of the condition of Polish pedagogy, Józef Górniewicz stated (2011, p. 3):

> "It seems that pedagogues do not have much confidence in their methodological competence and thus in the organisation and effectiveness of their empirical research process, constantly looking for validation not only from their own community, but also from outside, from representatives of other social disciplines, for confirmation that what they are researching and how they are researching falls within the scientific standard set by eminent representatives of basic sciences in the humanities. They often follow in the footsteps of other scientific disciplines by imitating both the research problem and the method of gathering knowledge about a given fragment of reality."

Pedagogical research should be interdisciplinary, since it allows it to break free

> "(...) *from the monopoly of a single aspect of knowledge about education dominating over others, be it philosophical or otherwise (...). The pedagogue should strive for a scientific understanding of educational activity and, at the same time, be open to the world of ideas (philosophy of education) and to positions derived from the perspectives of other sciences interested in the knowledge of education, such as educational psychology, the sociology of education, the politics of education, etc.* (...)" (Nowak, 2008, pp. 86-87).

It no longer makes any sense to undertake separatist work on constructing pedagogical research methodologies or constructing any theoretical narratives, as the phenomena or regularities they are concerned with require knowledge from different fields and disciplines. The educational processes under study are determined by natural, social and humanistic variables, and therefore pedagogy, as one of the many human sciences, has an integrative character in the social sciences and humanities, which study ideas, thoughts, doctrines or their main currents.

Thanks to the publications of, i.a., Krystyna Ablewicz (1994), Czesław Dziemidowicz and Wojciech Muzyka (1991); Andrea Folkierska (1990a;1990b; 2005a; 2005b), Jarosław Gara (2009), Janusz Gnitecki (1999; 2006a; 2006b; 2007), Rafał Godoń (1994; 2012), Józef Górniewicz (1997), Jolanta Kruk (1998); Robert Kwaśnica (1987), Krzysztof Maliszewski (2021), Ewa Marynowicz-Hetka (2019), Zbyszko Melosik (1995), Bogusław Milerski (2011; 2016), Urszula Morszczyńska (2009), Marian Nowak (1993; 2008), Katarzyna Olbrycht (2000), Paweł Piotrowski (2019), Andrzej Ryk (2011), Mieczysław Sawicki (1996), Paulina Sosnowska (2009); Dariusz Stępkowski (2010), Bogusław Śliwerski (2007; 2009a, 2009b; 2010a; 2010b; 2012; 2020), Danuta Wajsprych (2001), Wierciński (2015, 2019a, 2019b), Lech Witkowski (2009), Stefan Wołoszyn (1998), Alina Wróbel (2014), Hanna Zielińska-Kostyło (2005), which appeared after 1989, it was possible to convince the academic community, but also teachers and educators, that hermeneutic reflection on the essence of the educational process, on its axiological, anthropological and ontological foundations, can morally strengthen their current educational efforts and, at the same time, introduce Polish research into the current of worldwide debates on the meanings and senses of such key conceptual categories in pedagogy.

**Hermeneutic comparison of currents in pedagogical thought**

The humanist pedagogue reflects of an abstract and conceptual subject-matter, on the procedure for proposing theses and arguing for their validity, and the self-awareness of one's actions, i.e. the awareness of a multiplicity of potential solutions that equally claim universality and thus claim the rank of the best theory of upbringing or education. Paradigmatic philosophising cannot lead to definitive solutions, even though such a temptation may arise in the process, because the philosopher would then become a functionary of humanity or a missionary discovering hidden truth. Instead, they should assume the status, as Stefan Morawski puts it, of a "notorious parasite", a maximally self-critical researcher, a thinker discovering the uncertainty, the constant insufficiency of what they formulate, and aware that explaining the world and interpreting it are one of many. They thus experience the dramatic self-knowledge of multiple truths, while at the same time realising that, being, as it were, condemned to the ecumenism of a paradigmatic multiplicity, they cannot defend any of them (Morawski, 1999).

Thus, when pedagogues attempt to create a possible common matrix for multiple paradigms, without the ideological compulsion to distinguish or to indicate the necessity to make an unambiguous choice of which one

is the best, the most important, the most effective, the most appropriate, the truest, etc., this undoubtedly means coming to terms with the fact that Polish society, as well as the humanities reflecting its state of mind, is socially and ideologically diverse, and therefore science should express this axio-normative multiplicity, speak a multitude of languages, use tools to understand thought in a mixture of theories, trends, currents, directions, doctrines, ideologies and worldviews, defending the differences and thus broadening and deepening them, or eliminating them in favour of a return to uniformity. We turn our attention towards a thing that resounds with a multitude of voices, aspects, a multiplicity of messages and their interpretations. "Modern humanities, in many of its fields, emphasised the importance of ambiguity and ambivalence, without respect for which it is impossible to get to the heart of thought processes, of value judgements, of the way we react to another, etc." (ibid., p. 322).

The classification of thought currents in pedagogy, just like in philosophy, psychology, sociology or linguistics, stems from the need to capture the diversity of thought and ways of substantiating it into some kind of structure (hierarchical - vertical or non-hierarchical - horizontal), so that they can provide a kind of mental communication with the world, illuminate the situation of axio-normative differentiation in the science of education, highlight the sense of scientific achievements, evoke wonder or consolidate a sense of the rightness of the choices made. "In a word: the ability to see unity in multiplicity must be complemented by the art of seeing diversity in what from a certain point of view is identical" (Miś, 2006, p. 8).

By reconstructing a certain approach or pedagogical trend after some time, we in a way create it anew, because we inscribe in it a contemporary point of view, which may, after all, take into account some part of the past cognitive perspective, but at the same time re-evaluates it through a new interpretation. In the face of different research methodologies, complementary, contradictory or dialoguing with each other, the historical continuity of learning is at the same time connected to its historical discontinuity. Individual schools, doctrines, orientations or currents of education are described and interpreted by scholars in such a diverse manner that their value is dictated not only by the principle of clear presentation, but also by the inevitably related arbitrariness of the selection and organisation of content, the selection of theories, their description and evaluation. After all, attempts initiated in the 19th century to unify education sciences did fail.

Pedagogy, much like the rest of the humanities or social sciences, is a discipline with multiple paradigms, with one paradigm dominating at any

given time. A breakthrough in a given discipline occurs when the currently dominant paradigm gives way to another paradigm that has hitherto existed on the sidelines, in more or less overt opposition or on the periphery of learning. It is through one of the many different assumptions, or models of pedagogical rationality, that pedagogical reality can be described, explained, interpreted, understood and designed and pedagogical theory constructed. How can we describe or reconstruct pedagogical paradigms?

How many paradigms are there? Should they be considered from the perspective of only two aspects, the sociological and the epistemological one? "The sociological sense of a paradigm is expressed in the structure of scientific activity adopted by the scientific community. The epistemological sense of a scientific paradigm, on the other hand, consists of accepting the assumptions of a particular methodological orientation (e.g. in empirical pedagogy this would be: inductionism, hypothetism, essentialism or methodological anarchism)" (Gnitecki, 2007, p. 105). Should we reduce pedagogical paradigms to the classification in social sciences, in which there is a division into four types of paradigms: 1-2) subjectivism vs. objectivism or 3-4) gradual regulation vs. radical change, since they overlook the traditions of scientific development in European culture in the period of modernity and postmodernity and in anthropological issues and in the sphere of their interpretation and valuation do not take into account the facts given and tasked? Which criteria should be used when choosing a scientific paradigm in pedagogy? Janusz Gnitecki proposes (ibid., p. 106): anarchistic, sociological, elitist (expert) and demarcative criteria.

A hermeneutic critique of educational theory would involve understanding it as "the art of explaining". The role of the researcher of the essence of education in the hermeneutic perspective is to reflect on the pre-understandings of pedagogical thinking in order to detect the real (hidden) sense of knowledge, making it [the knowledge] both problematic and non-necessary. Such an approach has a spiral structure and its aim is to come closer to understanding, achieving each time a pre-understanding that is closer to what has been given to understand. It is therefore necessary to capture these pre-understandings, pre-judgements, preconceptions, tacit assumptions, our hidden, deep knowledge, in order to "grasp something as something" when faced with a text. The word "as" implies that it is still possible to change the context. The meaning of pedagogical phenomena is never unambiguous, but changes as the horizon of understanding of the pedagogues themselves changes. The aim of the reconstruction is to unmask this "tacit knowledge", the mystifications and illusions that theories of education bring with them.

"The historical horizon is the horizon in which a given work was created. It is what makes thought bear the traces of its historical conditioning, of which it is unaware. It is expressed in the fact that thought is governed by certain prejudices, certain convictions, which are "responsible" for the fact that we understand something in one way and not another. It is the historical horizon that is "responsible", as it were, for the fact that the author of a work has not thought everything through to the end, that what may be highly problematic for us today functions in his work as an indisputable obviousness" (Folkierska, 2005b, p. 14).

**Conclusion**

Fundamentalism in the humanities, and in pedagogy in particular, is dangerous when its proponents, declaring their assertions and rules as the only true or correct ones, while being confrontational themselves, do not see the need to allow other schools of thought to speak, and expect their theses to apply to all, regardless whether they accept them or not. They thus deny others the right to their own generalisations of knowledge or theories, do not admit new research perspectives and thus hinder the development of science. At the same time, this type of possessive attitudes leads to the dogmatisation of the main assumptions of a given trend, proclaiming their uniqueness.

> "This leads to a rigidity of one's own views, a rejection of the achievements of other people in science, which for a time shuts off the possibility of researching new problems, locks up the research questions in the categories used by a given scientist or team. It is not allowed to go beyond the "vicious" circle of analytical categories, which have, after all, been revised many times. As much as such an attitude is understandable at the outset of a school's existence, at its finish it turns into dogmatism and fundamentalism. This fundamentalism was asserted at the beginning of the road by the founder, and at the end of the road it is done by epigones" (Surmaczyński, 2002, p. 135).

This is because fundamentalism and dogmatism are often linked to epigonism, in the sense that representatives of a given theory see any criticism of the theory as tactless, an attack on its "sanctity", and so they radically oppose it. The state of fracture, the radical separation of the Polish humanities from the monistic, ideologically degenerated socialist pedagogy will prove to be a lasting achievement of the times of socio-political transition. Some hope that little will change in educational science, because once the right-wing formation comes to power, the authorities will not let this sphere of

influence, which legitimises human attitudes, orientates towards a certain world of values, serves statist indoctrination or socio-political grooming using the structures and processes of compulsory education, out of their control. Perhaps it will be necessary to disclose to the public the knowledge gained in the privacy of individual scientific exploration, as a result of the international contacts established over the years with scientists from countries free of various regimes or totalitarianisms.

It is not without significance for the hermeneutic research of pedagogical thought what position and role the scientist will take towards it: whether the one that applies to natural, experimental sciences of the *sophia* type, i.e. completely eliminating from the research the subjective factors, such as their personality, worldview, life attitude, political commitment, faith, likes and dislikes, etc., and applying to their investigations reliable, objective and therefore meta-theoretical or meta-paradigmatic criteria of insight and evaluation of specific content and related pedagogical practices. Or the one that is characteristic of the humanities (*phronesis*), in which it is not fully possible to "neutralise" or completely separate subjective factors in the process of learning, as they also become a presentable component of the research.

Pedagogy does not have, nor can it have, a meta-criterion that would allow a dispassionate or presupposition-free examination of thoughts, ideas or theories about education and upbringing. There is no single yardstick that would release the researcher from the possible (or necessary?) involvement of their own subjectivity in this process. We do not have theoretical constructs in place that would allow the scholar to analyse some or all paradigms in a completely impersonal manner, "(…) from the position of an utterly empty, abstract subject who merely "objectively" reports on what he reads, having put his own historically defined perspective of their understanding aside. (…) even such an eminent historian of philosophy as Władysław Tatarkiewicz, who had such a great feel for the diverse worlds of human thought that he studied, was unable to avoid a number of biases in the presentation of the views of certain authors" (Dybel, 2004, p. 126).

In my research on the critical reception of child-centred education (Śliwerski, 2007) or the return of the conservative ideology of upbringing in Poland (Śliwerski, 2021), I demonstrated what Paweł Dybel very aptly describes as epistemological hypocrisy, and which expresses itself in a glaringly unreliable, biased, prejudiced manifestation of discourse, with a strong aversion to certain ideas and their interpretations, under the guise of scholarly objectivity, which in fact is a confirmation of the critic's dogmatic stance. The

wheel of history has come full circle, since we are once again dealing with intellectual colonialism, which manifests itself in the fact "interpretive rape" is being committed on texts. It consists of reinterpreting their fundamental meanings, symbols or metaphors for the purposes of the ideological culture war in Poland (2005-2007 and 2015 - 2023).

Such an approach involves some pedagogues in a political, world-view struggle rather than in the search for truth (Nalaskowski). It then avoids answering the question of how far a scholar's personal involvement in the public domain, such as his/her political activity or his/her prominent position in institutions or public authorities, affect his/her way of reading, interpreting and evaluating the analysed pedagogical thought, since it is included in the contemporary context of socio-political, as well as cultural and educational events.

Since, as Stefan Wołoszyn argued, contemporary philosophical critical thought develops in the hermeneutic approach, so in order for pedagogues think education in the experience of its essence, of being in it, of understanding it, then also the subjective identity of each person involved in this process will be "(…) acquired in the "effort of being" in the world, in the constant "return to oneself" by assimilating what is "foreign", incomprehensible, obscure. This is the 'essence' of the educating experience. Real upbringing "happens" in an "opening" and critical variety of education and teaching in the broad sense, rather than in their presenting (transmitting) variety that blocks any own efforts to think" (Wołoszyn, 1998, p. 135). One would hope that a much-needed hermeneutic reflection on the "pre-judgements" of pedagogical thinking would prevent the former political censorship from being replaced by self-censorship in pedagogical research as a matter of political correctness.

In view of the moral and world-view conflict that has been growing in Polish society for several years now, pedagogues should once again challenge politicians about the overall sense of upbringing and education of the young generations. Perhaps avoiding another "(…) dogmatism in holding on to what one considers to be right also lies in the fact that an orientation towards the good is not the same as the so-called a priori accepted moral principles to which one clings regardless of the situation in which one finds oneself. On the contrary, it is the specific situation which demands of each of us an individual response to the question: what is the right thing for me to do in this particular case. This reflection is particularly evident in situations of moral conflict, in which appealing to preconceived principles by no means resolves the conflict" (Folkierska, 2005a, p. 49).

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# Half-education as a hermeneutic challenge for religious education in schools

**Abstract:** School is not a place of neutral education. The theory and practice of "school life" are conditioned not only by pedagogical, cultural and legal concepts, but also by the forms of social consciousness and ideological interests of various social groups. The idea of half-education or *Halbbildung* was formulated by Th.W. Adorno. It describes a distorted education, organized around dominant ideological interests, including utilitarian and instrumental thinking. In this article, the concept of *Halbbildung* is applied to school religious education in Poland. Not only does this concept reflect the hermeneutic dimension of critical theory but also underpins the hermeneutics of educational practice. The analyses presented use data on students' participation in religious education lessons and the results of original research on the rationality of school education. Such a critical approach is an impulse to reflect on the essence of religious education at school, especially in light of the idea to make religion a compulsory school subject. The obligatory status of religious education as part of the curriculum of in public schools poses a challenge to the pedagogical discourse in Poland and in other countries that have made or are considering such a decision and in such a scope. From a theoretical perspective, this is a challenge in terms of pedagogical hermeneutics.

**Keywords**: theory of education, pedagogic hermeneutics, half-education, Halbbildung, religious education.

## 1. Introduction

The conservative political discourse in Poland is calling for religious education to be made a compulsory school subject. There is talk of a subject block that would consist of religious education and ethics. In fact, such proposals had already been formulated in 2005-2007 and are now being revived. This article is an attempt at a positive reception of such an approach, while at the same time emphasising the need for a critical revision of the very concept of religious education at school. I will focus on one issue only, and analyse religious education through the lens of half-education (*Halbbildung*). The concept of half-education does not refer to some preliminary stage of education, but to a distorted understanding of its essence. It derives directly from the critical tradition and involves a hermeneutic revision of the theory and practice of religious education at school.

The term *Halbbildung* was forged by Th.W. Adorno on the basis of the critical theory. One of the aims of critical theory is to interpret social practices through the lens of critique of ideology. In critical theory, such interpretation is usually carried out from the perspective of the "emancipatory and communicative interest". In the case of education, the analysis is based on the "interest of general, liberal education" (allgemeine Bildung).

School education can refer to the acquisition of various skills. It includes qualifications understood in terms of certified competences. In this sense, education pursues utilitarian and measurable objectives. However, education cannot be reduced to its praxeological aspects. This statement also applies to university education (Nowakowska-Siuta, 2018, 233-267). The essential markers of general education are: emancipation, self-determination and responsibility, as well as the acquisition of communicative, ethical and hermeneutic skills in the spirit of building and understanding a pluralistic community as common good. Reducing education to utilitarian issues or to arbitrarily selected subject areas results in its distortion, i.e. it is a form of *Halbbildung*.

In this sense, *Halbbildung* is the opposite of general education. It is from this perspective that we can verify educational theories and practices. Such verification will entail critical hermeneutics as a theory of interpretation (understanding), and not only in terms of reading/assigning meanings to cultural texts, but also to social actions and school practices.

I started writing this article on 11 September, the day we remember the savage attack on the World Trade Centre in New York. Undoubtedly, the motivations behind this attack had been political, social, cultural and historical. However, it was religious factors that were very quickly used to

explain it, as they have been for many other conflicts as well. Religion had not been the direct cause of these tragic events. Instead, it had served as a demagogical instrument used to achieve political ends. While it is certainly inadequate to invoke the memory of the World Trade Center attack in the context of reflections on religious education in Poland, it does illustrate, if in an exaggerated way, the fact that religious education can serve instrumental purposes. In this sense, religion can be dangerous! On the other hand, religious education is also capable of exposing such instrumental purposes by asking about the reasons for the existence of community, man and education. From this perspective, religious education can be an essential part of modern school education.

What supports the instrumentalisation of religion however, is a utilitarian public awareness or utilitarian tendencies in thinking about schooling. This is confirmed both by the principles of educational policy and by our research, some of which I will recount later in this article. From a theoretical perspective, the dangers of utilitarianism and instrumental reasoning are exposed by the concept of half-education. Moreover, not only does it criticise the dominance of utilitarianism, but also a kind of thinking about education that absolutizes one of its dimensions.

## 2. The term *Halbbildung*

The concept of *Halbbildung* was formulated by Th.W. Adorno. The framework for its interpretation is provided by the critical theory of the Frankfurt School. The origins of critical theory are linked to the Institute for Social Research in Frankfurt am Main. The institute was founded in 1923 and brought together left-leaning representatives of various scientific disciplines. In 1930, M. Horkheimer took over the directorship of the institute and became its face. After the Nazis took power in Germany in 1933, the institute was disbanded. It was reactivated at Columbia University in New York. When the Second World War ended, the conditions were right for the institute to be reconstituted in Germany. In 1951, the Institute for Social Research was reopened in Frankfurt am Main. In the years to follow, Adorno returned to Germany as an advocate of Holocaust remembrance and a critic of absolute reason who exposed authoritarian positions and the ideological premises of cultural and social change.

At the 1959 congress of sociologists, Adorno gave a lecture entitled "Theorie der Halbbildung", which was subsequently published in his "Gesammelte Schriften" (Adorno, 1959). Adorno's theory of education is linked to the theory of rationality and the ideology of social and cultural change. In

this article, rather than report on the historical analyses of cultural processes proposed by Adorno and Horkheimer in many monographs. I will focus exclusively on issues important for critical pedagogical reflection. Adorno's motto was the much-quoted statement: "What is half understood and half lived is not the initial stage of education, but its mortal enemy: the content of education that enters the consciousness without being incorporated into the continuation of something holistic turns into a hostile and toxic substance" (Adorno, 1959, 111-112).

One of the most important characteristics of critical theory is its rejection of the notion of a transcendental ego in favour of linking subject and object of cognition within a single life process (Horkheimer 2011, 217). A key element is the category of social consciousness, which cannot be reduced to the sum of individual consciousnesses. Social consciousness is a reality in itself. It is marked not only by the historicity (*Geschichtlichkeit*) of the experienced world, but also expresses the ideological interests of specific social groups (ideology as a form of social consciousness).

The classics of critical theory revisited K. Marx's thesis: social existence determines social consciousness. In this sense, the different living conditions of different social groups translate into the ideological interests preferred by these groups regarding the organisation of social life. These interests are often unconscious. As such, however, they are reflected in social and cultural theories and practices, including those of education. For this reason, Horkheimer's and Adorno's analyses include a philosophical-cultural context: They study philosophical ideas in their relation to cultural transformations and the shape of the social consciousness of specific social groups in a specific historical period. This type of argumentation is also characteristic of the reflections on the concept of *Halbbildung*. I will leave them out of this article, and instead begin my analysis of *Halbbildung* with the notions of reason and rationality.

In Germany and Poland, Horkheimer's work was published under the similar titles: "Zur Kritik der instrumentellen Vernunft" and "Krytyka instrumentalnego rozumu". However, the English-language title was different: "Eclipse of Reason". And indeed, instrumental reason is not just reason used technically to achieve utilitarian ends. According to Horkheimer, but also to Adorno, the concept of instrumental reason refers to a specific use of reason and is not limited to technical and utilitarian issues. It includes idealistic thinking as well. Any of these types of thinking be a manifestation of reason in an eclipse.

Reason implies different types of rationality, different logics underlying the understanding of reality. I define rationality as follows: Rationality is the latent logic that makes the world comprehensible to us so that we can decipher its meaning. Adorno and Horkheimer, in various works, emphasised two types of reason and consequently two types of rationality: the objective type and the subjective type. The following generation of scholars representing the critical theory formulated an additional typology of rationality. For the purposes of this article, I will leave it aside.

Objective reason and rationality tend to locate the logic of reality in an immanent or transcendent principle of reality. The realm of objective understanding of reality are myths, religion and idealism. Whereas subjective reason and rationality emphasise the praxeological aspects. Positive experience and effective action become their realm. The critique did not aim to annihilate objective or subjective reason. The critique focused on: (1) absolutizing of a particular type of reason and rationality and (2) losing a holistic cognitive perspective and the ability to comprehensively explain *raison d'être* of reality. It is the absolutisation of a type of reason or the avoidance of fundamental questions that gives such a reason its instrumental character. Instrumental reason is half-reason. By analogy to the concept of *Halbbildung*, we can refer to it as *Halbvernunft* (a concept introduced by the author of this article). Instrumental reason, reason in an eclipse, is not a part of comprehensive reason or its preliminary stage. Instrumental reason is a complete distortion and caricature of reason as such.

An important role in the shaping of modern civilisation was played by the Age of Enlightenment. In "Dialectic of Enlightenment", a treatise written jointly by Horkheimer and Adorno, the authors analysed the intellectual and cultural patterns underlying modernism and modern culture. The work begins with the following characterisation: "Enlightenment, understood in the widest sense as the advance of thought, has always aimed at liberating human beings from fear and installing them as masters. Yet the wholly enlightened earth is radiant with triumphant calamity. Enlightenment's program was the disenchantment of the world. It wanted to dispel mythos, to overthrow fantasy with knowledge. (...) Knowledge, which is power knows no limits, either in its enslavement of creation or in its deference to worldly masters. Just as it serves all the purposes of the bourgeois economy both in factories and on the battlefield, it is at the disposal of entrepreneurs regardless of their origins. Kings control technology no more directly then do merchants: it is as democratic as the economic system with which it evolved" (Horkheimer & Adorno 1994, 19-20; citation from the English version of the monograph).

The culture of the Enlightenment, on the one hand, promoted a free and non-dogmatic exploration of the world, while, on the other hand, it started to see reason as an instrument for achieving specific ends. Utilitarian reason and utilitarian rationality turned into egalitarian reason and egalitarian rationality. The Enlightenment made a fundamental contribution to the formation of modern knowledge, modern societies and economies. Yet the Enlightenment also contained within it a destructive potential. "Knowledge, in which, for Bacon, 'the sovereignty of man' unquestionably lay hidden, can now devote itself to dissolving that power. But in face of this possibility enlightenment, in the service of the present, is turning itself into an outright deception of the masses" (Horkheimer & Adorno 1994, 59; citation from the English version of the monograph).

Adorno later repeated the same diagnosis in his "Negative Dialectics". A rational analysis must not be limited to the question about the method of cognition or the method of achieving an end. Reason must explore, according to the classical approach, the *ratio* behind the existence of a given reality (Adorno 1986, 64-65). If reason does not capture the foundations, the *raison d'ètre* for the existence of a given reality, it becomes a "non-reason". This is what half reason or *Halbvernunft* is.

Half-reason leads to neutralisation of thought. "Thought, stripped down to knowledge, is neutralised, harnessed merely to qualifying its practitioner for specific labour markets and heightening the commodity value of the personality. In this way the self-reflection of the mind, which counteracts paranoia, is disabled" (Horkheimer & Adorno 1994, 220; citation from the English version of the monograph). From a pedagogical perspective, neutralisation leads to the formation of "self-without-self awareness" (Adorno 1959, 115; vide Gruschka 2004, 157).

The neutralisation of thinking corresponds to technocratic tendencies in culture and education. It destroys the ability to critically reflect on reality and opens societies to the expansion of superstition and totalitarian ideologies. The neutralisation of thinking also corresponds to the neutralisation of religion (Adorno 2010, 278-282).

The above considerations also apply to education. For the consequence of *Halbbildung* is the neutralisation of thinking, the neutralisation of the "self" and the neutralisation of the human spirit. *Halbbildung* does not refer to some initial stage of education. The term characterises an education that: 1) ignores questions about the *raison d'ètre* of reality and 2) absolutises only one chosen dominant, e.g. objectivism and idealism or subjectivism and utilitarianism. From a historical perspective, the idea of education (*Bildung*)

was developed in a polarised way: one pole was marked by the cultural goods recognised by a given social group as the cultural canon, while on the other side were the challenges of world experience and the praxeology of action.

According to Adorno, the marks of Halbbildung are: 1) focus on mastering cultural, social and economic techniques and on the accumulation of knowledge and its utilitarian character, 2) absolutisation of objectivity and focus on setting cultural canons without critical reflection on the criteria for their selection. Adorno's aim, therefore, is not to correct the methods or content of education. The essence of his programme is a new thinking about education as such and a total change in social consciousness (Adorno 1959, 93). „The anachronism of today is to insist on education in a situation where society has taken away the basis of education. Education, however, has no other means of survival than a critical reflection on half-education [Halbbildung], which it has now inevitably become" (Adorno 1959, 121).

Therefore, Adorno's *Halbbildung* is not a new concept of education. It does not offer a definition of general or humanistic education. Instead it offers a critique of contemporary pedagogical discourse and pedagogical practices. At the same time, it invites each individual to maturity, subjectivity and freedom (Adorno 1971). In this sense, it is relevant to the analysis of any form of education, and thus also to religious education. Religious education is an ambiguous concept. It refers to different theological and denominational traditions, religious backgrounds and areas of educational activity.

**3. Religious education in Poland: general information**

Poland is a state with a high level of religiosity. It is also a state with a high level of religious homogeneity. The population of Poland is 38.41 million (Statistics Poland 2020, 208). Averaging the various statistics, it can be concluded that approximately 90% of the population identifies with the Catholic Church to some degree. In 2022, the percentage of those practising regularly (once a week and more often) was 42%. For the rest of those declaring adherence to a religious tradition, religious identity is not necessarily tied to participation in worship and acceptance of dogma. It often has a family and cultural character. Survey results indicate a slow but consistent decline in religious belief and practice (CBOS 2022b, 1-3).

There are approximately 180 churches and religious associations registered in Poland. The largest of these work on the basis of acts on the relationship between the state and a particular church, adopted by the Polish Parliament, the others on the basis of registration with the Ministry of Internal Affairs. All minorities account for less than 2% of Poland's population.

For example, Protestant churches have a combined total of around 140,000 adherents, the largest of these, the Lutheran Church - 61,000. The largest minority church is the Orthodox Church, with 507,000 adherents (Statistics Poland 2020, 198-199). Recently, the number of Orthodox believers has increased significantly. This is linked to a very large immigration from Ukraine. While data on migration is known, data on the religious affiliation of migrants is not officially collected. There is a growing phenomenon of secularisation in Poland. According to one major social research centre, in 2022 13% of Poles declared themselves as non-believers (CBOS 2022b, 4). In the age group of 18-24 year olds, non-belief was declared by almost 25% of respondents (CBOS 2022b, 6).

During the communist period, religious education in schools was first repressed and, from 1961, completely abolished. From then it could only be taught in local parishes. The political transformation in Poland, which took place in 1989, resulted in the inclusion of religion in the school system. Religious education was reintroduced into schools from 1 September 1990. In subsequent years, legal regulations in this regard were refined, their essence, however, remained the same. Religious education is organised in the Polish school system as 2 hours of additional lessons per week. They have a denominational character but are not obligatory. Students are enrolled in religion lessons at school only if their parents or, in secondary schools, their parents or the students themselves have expressed such a desire. In Poland, a pupil may opt for religion lessons, or, alternatively, for ethics lessons, or neither for religion lessons nor for ethics lessons. On the school certificate, he or she receives a grade under the heading "religion/ethics" without specifying the name of a particular confessional tradition. If the student does not attend religion or ethics lessons, a dash (-) appears under the heading "religion/ethics". The grade of religion or lack of participation does not affect progress to the next grade.

With regard to religious education at school, Polish educational law is liberal towards religious minorities. If religion teachers meet the formal, curricular and qualification requirements, religious education of religious minorities can be conducted "physically" in the school building, but also in so-called out-of-school catechetical posts operating at parishes of minority churches. Religious education classes conducted in out-of-school catechetical posts are regarded as part of the school system. Such religion lessons are attended by pupils from different schools in the region. The religion teacher is employed by a particular school designated by the educational authorities, performs all additional duties for this school, but the actual teaching takes

place in the aforementioned out-of-school catechetical post. He or she keeps full records of the classes and gives grades. These grades are then recognised by all schools where students receive their overall education.

There is a discussion in Poland at the moment to transform religious education from an optional subject into an obligatory subject block: religion/ethics. To reiterate: today, a pupil can choose to attend religion lessons or, alternatively, ethics lessons. He or she can also choose not to enrol in any of these classes. This does not affect his or her educational journey. The state authorities are seeking to change this in favour of a compulsory choice: religion or ethics.

For many years, it has been reported that more than 90 percent of students participate in religious education at school. In 2020, the Institute of Statistics of the Catholic Church in Poland released data about a participation level of 88%. However, these data came from a survey carried out in 2015 and referred to all types of schools (ISKK 2020, 46). In 2022, the Institute of Statistics of the Catholic Church in Poland provided new data for school year 2021/2022. According to these data, 82.4% of students attended religious education at school. These data come from the sources of the internal church unit - the Catholic Education Committee of the Polish Episcopate Conference (ISKK 2022, 31). In primary schools, religious education is closely linked to the sacramental procedure. For this reason, participation in religion lessons in primary schools is significantly higher than in secondary schools and raises the overall average. According to a survey carried out in 2014 on a representative sample of secondary school students, 80.3% of them were enrolled in religion lessons. Of this group, approximately 75% declared actual participation in more than 50% of the classes (Milerski & Karwowski 2021, 8).

In recent years, education departments, especially in large cities, have increasingly verified students' participation in religious education lessons. They have observed a significant decline in this respect. This has mainly applied to secondary schools. In Łódź, for example, in 2021, for the first time the percentage of pupils attending religious lessons in all types of schools dropped below 50% (sic!). According to data from the Centre for Public Opinion Research "CBOS" regarding secondary schools, in 2010, 93% of pupils participated in religious education lessons, in 2017 it was 70%, and in 2021 it was 54%. This means that, in Poland, nearly half of secondary school students - general and vocational schools - no longer attend religious education lessons at school. In 2021, the survey was conducted in 80 randomly selected secondary schools on a representative group of final-year students (N=1531). The reasons for this are, of course, varied. Of the students surveyed,

only 29% said that religion lessons at school are an interesting subject (CBOS 2022a, 5).

In the European context, such a situation is not unique. On the contrary, in the case of religious education as an additional subject - as it is nowadays - such data should not lead to pessimism, but to reflection on the changes in contemporary consciousness and questions about how to teach such classes under conditions of increasing secularisation (Franck & Thalén 2021). The multiplicity of theoretical concepts in the didactics of religion makes it one of the most original subject didactics (Grümme & Lenhard & Pirner 2012).

## 4. Confessional religious education in school as a compulsory subject: contexts

Religious education in Poland is provided separately for different denominations. Currently, there is a proposal to make confessional religious education a compulsory subject. In the European context, such a status for religious education is not unusual. The subject block religion/ethics (alternative names may be used for ethics) is compulsory in, for example, Austria and Germany. In other countries, such as the Netherlands, the profile of religious education depends on the local education authority or even the educational association running the local school. In Sweden, religious education is compulsory, except that its emphasis lies more on religious studies, while care of the spiritual dimension rests with local faith community and its educational work. The most comprehensive analysis of this issue can be found in the 6 volumes of "Religious Education at Schools in Europe" (2015-2020) published jointly by the faculties of Catholic and Protestant theology at the University of Vienna, and in an abridged version in the work "Religious Education in Europe. Situation and current trends in schools" (2007). Here we are not concerned with a broader comparative description, but only with a statement of fact concerning the presence of religion as a school subject. The compulsory character of religious education at school is connected with the necessity to consider this subject as a part of general education serving not only the particular interests of one religion, but also building a community of citizens in terms of the common good. This means that religious education at school carries out tasks related to a particular denominational tradition and, at the same time, its stewards must recognise their own obligations towards school and education as a common good, and thus also towards the Other.

Confessional tasks relate to the formation of religious identity, the development of religious spirituality, the transmission of knowledge in the

area of doctrine, worship and ethos and the creation of positive attitudes in this area. It should be emphasised that, as a rule, every church and, more broadly, every religion are by definition exclusive, otherwise religion would not be religion. In this sense, religious education pursues the particular interests of its own denominational tradition. Nevertheless, as a subject of school education and especially as a compulsory subject, religious education must not focus exclusively on particularistic denominational issues, but must take into account a broad spectrum of questions and define itself as part of general education. The above statement needs to be developed.

Firstly, it is not a matter of a purely formal expansion of the catalogue of content, which will each time be evaluated from the perspective of the axiology of the respective denomination only. There is no escape from the normativity of religion, as well as from the normativity of culture. However, it is about recognising the right to speak of on behalf of what is different, attempting to understand other positions and forming a culture of dialogue.

Secondly, it is not a matter of a purely formal declaration concerning the understanding of religion as an element of general education. Religion is an element of general education if it is part of a universe of education that seeks human maturity, freedom and, at the same time, a sense of community and responsibility for community life understood as the common good.

The above-mentioned issues have marked contemporary discourse in pedagogy, both Catholic (Boschki 2008, Marek 2014, 2022) and Protestant (Domsgen 2019, Schweitzer 2006).

Religious education in a public (state) school necessarily involves the principle of worldview neutrality in a democratic and pluralistic state. In this section I do not intend to analyse in detail the problem of state impartiality and the separation of state and church (Zielinski 2020). My aim is only to point out the fundamental problem faced by Western democracies. Worldview neutrality of the state is based on three assumptions: 1) The state recognises the plurality of citizens' worldviews and does not interfere with their beliefs. Doctrine, worship, organisational structure are an internal matter for religious associations and their members. 2) The state sets legal boundaries for the functioning of individuals and communities within their different worldviews. The legal system and its enforcement are guarantees of social order and peaceful coexistence of citizens. 3) The state can influence the formation of dialogical social attitudes, civic identity and the understanding of social reality in terms of the common good. It can use the school system for this purpose.

The above statements are ideal constructs. The very notions of state, law, school system, religion, worldview neutrality are such constructs. And as we know from the theory of knowledge developed by M. Weber, an ideal type is a rationalisation, created by the researcher, which makes a given reality comprehensible. Therefore, ideal types explain the world, but they are not themselves its actualisation.

These statements also raise fundamental questions about religions that are closed and promote exclusivist and fundamentalist thinking. After all, how can social order be ensured in a situation in which a denomination is part of the social order and at the same time, by definition, undermines the sense of existence of other denominations, aiming at overt social conflict? For this reason, in some European countries where religion is a compulsory school subject, there is a demand for the inclusion of other religions, such as the religion of Islam, as a compulsory subject, similarly to Catholic, Protestant, Orthodox or Judaic religious education. Moreover, there are additional forms of teaching, which are not only viewed as the transmission of religious knowledge in the broadest sense, but also as a mutual encounter and common experience (Jackson 1997).

Religion taught exclusively in places of worship and sometimes additionally funded by external institutions escapes any control by school authorities. Such teaching tends to focus exclusively on the particular interests of a particular religion and to overlook a dialogical approach (Milerski & Zieliński 2022). Religious education within the school system should therefore not be perceived as the privilege of a church or a few churches, but as an opportunity for society to shape the understanding of the common good and to develop an individual identity rooted in one's own tradition and at the same time ready to encounter otherness.

The understanding of religious education is conditioned by: 1) the theological and denominational context - religious education must not be disconnected from the theological identity of a particular religious tradition, 2) the theoretical context - there are many theoretical approaches in the pedagogy of religion, 3) the constitutional and political context, and the legal solutions adopted in a particular country, 4) the social and cultural context of a particular country or region. In this article I do not deal with theories of religious education. From the perspective of the idea of *Halbbildung*, I will analyse selected practical trends concerning religious education organised within the school system in Poland.

In Poland - as already described - religious education was introduced into the school system in 1990, a decision that came as a form of reaction

following the years of communist rule. In practice, it meant that traditional parish catechesis was simply transferred to schools, together with the existing practices and all the stereotypical perceptions. This applied not only to the Catholic Church, but also to minority churches. For example, in the progressive Lutheran Church to this day, religious education textbooks carry the title „Podręcznik do nauczania kościelnego – religii ewangelickiej" (en. Handbook for church teaching of the evangelical religion).

For Catholic religious education, Vatican documents are binding, especially the "General Directory for Catechesis" (Polish edition 1998, original 1997) and the "Directory for Catechesis" (Polish edition 2020, original 2020). The first Directory emphasised the distinction between two profiles of education: parish catechesis and religious education in school. The second Directory was written from the perspective of the church's mission of evangelisation (Zellma 2021). In educational terms, the Directory emphasises the particularistic religious interest of the church as a response to the "signs of the time". This approach is not only translated into the curriculum documents for "particular churches", but also into the practice of religious education in schools. The curricula in Poland contain the whole spectrum of topics, not only theological, but also ethical, social and cultural. However, they are delivered in line with the dominant evangelistic focus. Religious particularism comes to the fore, rather than the interest of general education and the ethos of the common good as the good of all social groups. In this view, religious education becomes a form of *Halbbildung*.

Religious education at school can be viewed from the perspective of the multidimensional concept of religion and religiosity (Wulff 1999, 192-197). Ch. Glock distinguished between five dimensions of religious commitment: ideological (doctrine), ritualistic (worship), intellectual (knowledge and cognitive search), experiential (religious experiences and emotions), consequential (behaviour, attitudes and social consequences of religious beliefs). The confessional and evangelistic view of religious education in school focuses on the ideological (doctrine) and ritualistic (worship) dimensions. Such teaching also aims at shaping religiosity in the dimensions of intellectual development, experience and behavioural consequences. The problem is that while the conservative and evangelistic understanding of religious instruction develops intellectual, experiential and behavioural competences, it also limits them to the confines of confessional orthodoxy and therefore of particular interests of the church. Such restriction is a form of *Halbbildung*.

Religious education does not take place in an ideological vacuum. Above I have demonstrated an ideological interest in the form of confessional

particularism. I will now make a connection between confessional particularism, which corresponds to the conservative view of religious education at school, and utilitarianism as a claim of the neoliberal concept of the school system. In the last two decades, the concept of qualification has gained popularity in European educational policy. It is understood as a certified competence. What is certified by its very nature must be measurable. This approach is convenient for the managers of education systems. It is not only a tool of the European Union to ensure comparable criteria for the recognition of qualifications at different levels. It also makes it possible to monitor the effectiveness of school education and to compare schools. Educational systems in many European countries have begun to implement the Recommendation of the European Parliament and the Council of the European Union of 23 April 2008 on the establishment of the European Qualifications Framework for lifelong learning, together with its modified version of 22 May 2017. In Poland, this recommendation has been implemented in the school and university system. Critics of this approach emphasise that the prominence of measurable outcomes as a criterion for assessing the effectiveness of education leads to a deformed understanding of the essence of education itself.

Religious education at school is a particular issue from the perspective of the general concept of education. In school systems in which religious education is part of the curriculum, it is often argued that it is a subject that - at least in part - goes beyond the catalogue of measurable outcomes. Indeed, an important aim of religious education consists in the pursuit of existential and hermeneutic tasks. Hence, contemporary pedagogy of religion formulates the demand for an education that should not only include qualifications, but also support the acquisition of an understanding of one's own existence and social reality. The guiding idea is represented by the slogan: School Education Between Qualification and Orientation.

The concepts of qualification and orientation become markers that define the scope of humanistic and religious education. Both of these dominants are not only defined by pedagogical discourse. From the perspective of critical theory, they are also created by different types of social consciousness. Exposing the importance of shaping qualifications grows out of adaptive, praxeological and neoliberal consciousness. Exposing the importance of forming an understanding of one's own existence and social reality, on the other hand, reflects humanistic and critical consciousness. Such a binary image is - as Z. Baumann has repeatedly written - a great simplification desired by some people confused by a pluralistic world. Such great simplifications

are also sought by some people in thinking about the meaning of education. They seek to emphasise, to absolutise one or more aspects of education. A critical stance towards this kind of thinking about education is the idea of half-hearted education - *Halbbildung*. This idea is a critique of the partitional thinking of general education.

**5. The primacy of utilitarianism and *Halbbildung*: own research**

Philosophical research and empirical research follow their own logic. It is extremely difficult to directly verify philosophical theories in an empirical way. Therefore, my only intention is to show the analogy between the Halbbildung theory and the results of my empirical research on the idea of the rationality of school education in the context of religious education.

In 2013/2014, we conducted a study on the rationality of school education from the perspective of the cognitive interests of its participants: students, parents and teachers. The project was funded by the Polish National Science Centre. It included quantitative and qualitative research. We presented the theory, methodology and findings in a separate monograph (Milerski & Karwowski 2016).

The starting point of the study was on the one hand humanistic pedagogy (*geisteswissenschaftliche Pädagogik* - Dilthey, Nohl, Weniger, Bollnow, Hessen, Nawroczynski) and hermeneutic pedagogy (Danner 1998; Rittelmeyer & Parmentier 2001; Uhle 1989), while on the other hand, critical theory (Habermas 1973; Apel 1988), critical pedagogy (Giroux & Witkowski 2010; Gruschka 2004, Krüger 1999, Kwaśnica 2007; McLaren 2015; Mollenhauer 1968; Wulf 2003) and critical pedagogy of religion (Zilleßen 1982).

The theoretical basis of the study was provided by the tetragonal concept of the rationality of schooling. The rationality of education is the latent logic that justifies assigning a certain meaning to schooling. Each rationality was understood in terms of an ideal type. The following four types of educational rationality were defined from the perspective of hermeneutic theory and critical theory:

1) praxeological and utilitarian rationality - the meaning of school education is conceived in terms of measurable effects and the formation of competences for effective action, and concrete life benefits are also important, e.g. a profession bringing high earnings, independence in life, social recognition,

2) emancipatory rationality - the meaning of education is conceived in terms of the capacity for self-determination and the utilisation of spaces

of freedom, including the critical understanding of social processes, the promotion of an ethos of freedom and mutual recognition,

3) Hermeneutic rationality - the meaning of education is understood in terms of the ability to understand one's own existential situation and the challenges of social life, this rationality refers to the understanding of the world and its conditions; comprehension is the ability to read or attribute existential meanings.

4) negational rationality - the meaning of education is construed in terms of negating schooling and seeking alternative ways of self-realisation.

For the purposes of the quantitative study, we developed a questionnaire on the rationality of schooling (Karwowski & Milerski 2021). It consisted of a test in which each rationality was represented by a separate scale. Students gave answers to the individual items in a range of values from 1 to 9. The survey was representative of the population of secondary school students in Poland (N=2810). In the 2013/2014 study, in addition to the School Education Rationality Questionnaire itself, we used a questionnaire on religious education (Milerski & Karwowski 2021).

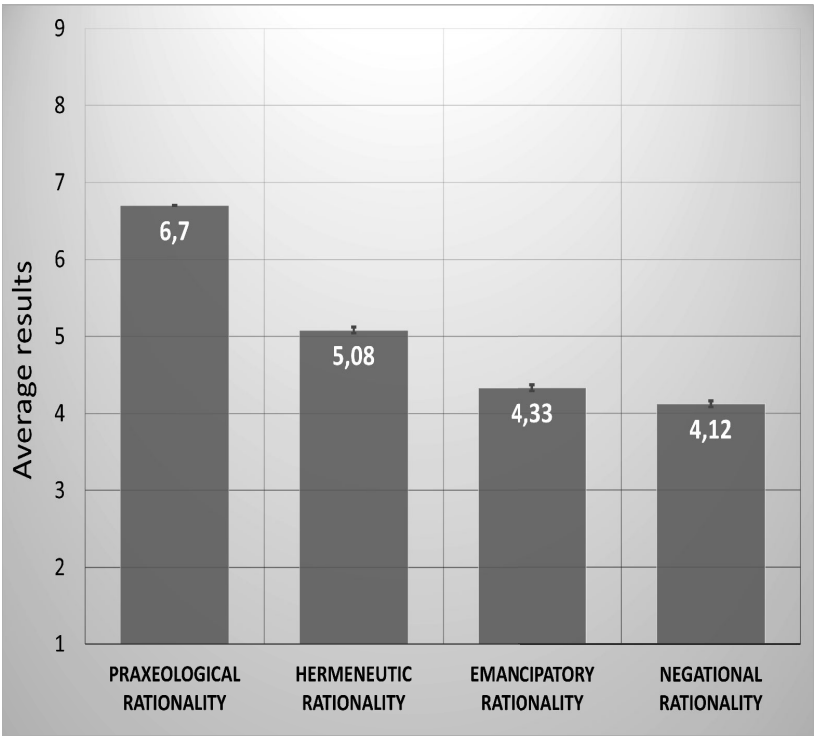


**Figure 1:** Types of educational rationality. Intensity of occurrence.

In general, it can be said that the study showed the manifestation of all types of rationality of school education. In other words, students justify the meaning of school education by referring to all types of rationality: praxeological, emancipatory, hermeneutic and negational. They therefore recognise - to a greater or lesser extent - the whole spectrum of arguments.

A significant result of the study found the dominance of praxeological rationality. On a scale of 1-9, the average for this rationality was 6.7. This means that praxeological and utilitarian arguments dominate the students' opinions (Figure 1).

In the theoretical concept, emancipatory rationality has been defined not only in relation to the expansion of freedom and self-determination, but also - as in critical theory - as a rationality that justifies commitment on the side of responsibility.

In our study, we recorded a correlation between praxeological rationality and emancipatory rationality in the areas of professional self-determination and stability in life. This is especially true for respondents who most often referred to praxeological rationality or emancipatory rationality to legitimise schooling (Figure 2).

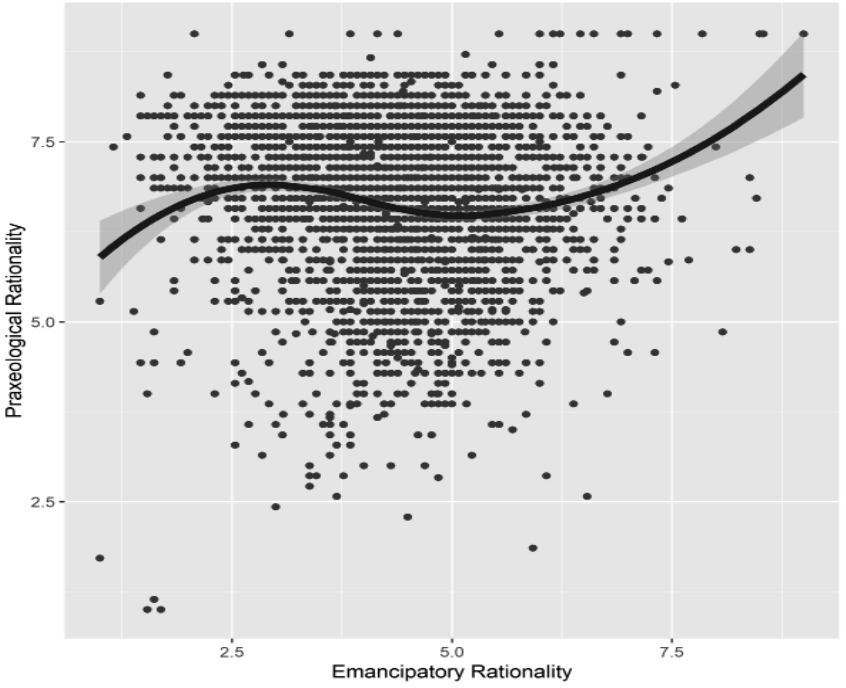


**Figure 2:** Correlation between praxeological rationality and emancipatory rationality.

It should be recalled that, according to critical theory, emancipatory rationality was contrasted with technical (praxeological, utilitarian) rationality. Leaving aside Habermas' earlier writings, in which the praxeological element was also combined with hermeneutic rationality (Habermas 1973), in contemporary pedagogy praxeological rationality is oriented towards the acquisition of measurable competences and tangible psychological, social and economic benefits. Showing the correlation between praxeological and emancipatory rationalities contradicts the noble demands of critical theory, which exposed the humanistic, social, ethical and political dimensions of emancipation. We have called this phenomenon inward looking emancipation. Praxeological rationality and emancipatory rationality have a common denominator. This denominator is utilitarian and inward looking realisation of of the practical interests of the individual.

The dominance of praxeological and utilitarian rationality distorts - according to the idea of *Halbbildung* - the sense of general education and the essence of religious education. Education in this form is not a preliminary stage or part of education, but a caricature of it.

Another element of the study of religion that should be criticised is its unambiguously apologetic, confessional and catechetical dominant focus. This was clearly demonstrated by the study. A representative group of secondary school pupils were unequivocally in favour of changing the current practice of religious education in schools. With regard to 7 issues in this regard, on each occasion the students were in favour of the necessity of change.

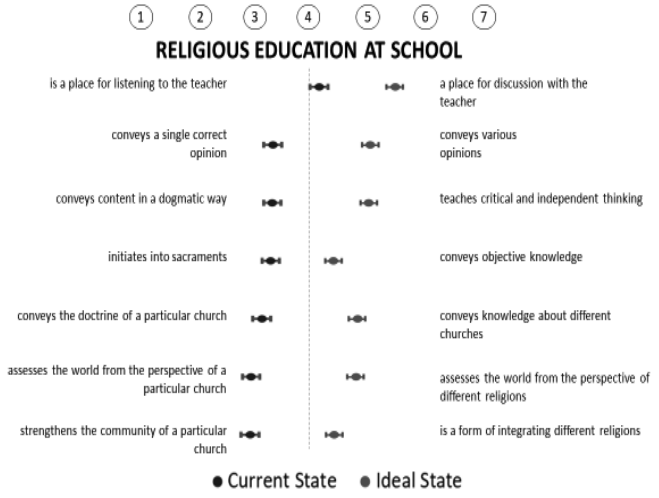


**Figure 3:** Religious education at school: current vs. desired character.

The idea of Halbbildung is a critique of the dominance of one perspective in education. In the study of religion, this concerns the dominance of the ecclesial and apologetic perspective. A revision of this dominance is advocated by the students themselves (Figure 3).

Reducing religious education to ecclesial and apologetic subjects directly results in criticism. In the context of contemporary discussion in Poland, we can conclude that without a change in current practice, the decision to make religion/ethics a compulsory subject will be opposed by pupils and parents.

## 6. Conclusion

The concept of half-education or *Halbbildung* grows out of critical theory and at the same time has a hermeneutic dimension. It addresses the essence of pedagogical discourse and the concept of general education. Religious education as part of the curriculum of school education should be confronted with the challenge posed by *Halbbildung*. This is all the more relevant if religious education/ethics were to become a compulsory subject. In this case, religious education should be recognised as part of general education and at the same time reduce its praxeological and utilitarian aspirations. Overcoming utilitarian thinking represents an opportunity for the legitimacy of religion as a subject of school education.

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# Epilog
# Living with the perplexities of our being-in-the-world with others: the paradox of *Bildung*

**Abstract**: One of the most powerful challenges of being in the world with Others is learning when to be affected by power beyond our wanting and doing. The hermeneutic experience of art highlights the power of letting things show themselves to us and provoke cathartic transformation. The message of the Gospel teaches us the need for sensitivity to divine inspiration and radical openness to Revelation. The power of philosophical thinking can humble us to wonder at the paradoxes and finitude of human wisdom. A close reading of Heraclitus in conversation with Aristotle, Heidegger, and Gadamer faces us with the power of the contradictions and "unstable equilibrium" of the cosmos in which we must ever learn to play with fire. The hermeneutics of power between art, poetry, theology, and philosophy brings into relief the transformation that is called for in the formation (Bildung) of human beings and which exposes the indivisibility and unpredictability of education and life. The groundbreaking insight of the hermeneutic dialectic of power is rediscovering the capacity to let oneself be led, let oneself learn, and let oneself be overpowered and empowered in the inspired and inspiring sway of being between other humans and the divine.

**Keywords**: Dialectic, Power, Heraclitus, Gadamer, Fire, Paradox, Hermeneutic Reading.

The international project on the dialectic of power was developed while atrocities were and are continuing to happen just across Poland's Eastern borders. Most people in Eastern Europe were brought up with the conviction that war would never happen again. More recently, the statement "Never again war" became a mere truism. September 1939 and February 2022 proved the vulnerability of peace, human freedom, and democracy through war, violence, and military aggression.

Sigmund Lipinsky, *Inter arma silent musae* (Dem Andenken Otto Greiners), 1922 (https://didoofcarthage.tumblr.com/post/629075421182541824/sigmund-lipinsky-inter-arma-silent-musae-dem)

Sigmund Lipinsky, born in 1873 in Eastern Prussia to a Polish father and a German mother, painted in 1922 a now famous canvas, *Inter arma silent Musae,* to commemorate his friend, Otto Greiner, a German painter who had to leave Rome when Italy entered the war in 1915 and died a year later in Munich. Influenced by classical authors, Lipinsky developed a strong passion for Greek myth and Homeric epic. Experiencing the tragedy of the First World War, he addressed the perennial subject of the silence of the arts during major catastrophes.

What is this silence of Musae? Artists are often unable to create in a situation of ongoing military and political violence. Lacking inspiration for their visionary creativity, they put away their pens, brushes, and other artistic devices. Sometimes, expressing personal experience in an innovative form seems morally wrong when others are fighting for their lives. However,

the concentration on dramatic experience and prolonged exposure to the inhuman cruelty of the oppressor can occasionally result in monumental works of art whose complexity can be overwhelming.

*Guernica* (1937), painted in grey, black, and white, is a powerful protest against the victimization of the powerless.

Picasso's Guernica, 1937, (https://www.museoreinasofia.es/en/collection/artwork/guernica)

Picasso gives voice to the persecuted and oppressed. Great art always listens to divine inspiration and is sensitive to the dynamics of life in our *Lebenswelt*. By accompanying people throughout history, art touches the entirety of human life, and by letting see things as they show themselves (ἀποφαίνεσθαι τὰ φαινόμενα)[1], offers a cathartic experience. In bringing powerful, existential relief and liberation, art discloses otherwise inaccessible insights and, thus, forms and transforms a human being. This capacity of letting see things as they show themselves from themselves remains the programmatic challenge for phenomenology and hermeneutics and can be truly completed (*vollzogen*) only in art.

On his way to the Crucifixion, approaching the slopes of the Mount of Olives, Jesus met a multitude of his followers, joyfully praising God for all the miracles they had seen. Dissatisfied and enraged Pharisees demanded Jesus to quiet the crowd. His response was truly remarkable: "I tell you that if these keep silent, the very stones will cry out" (Lk 19: 40): Λέγω ὑμῖν ἐὰν οὗτοι σιωπήσουσιν, οἱ λίθοι κράξουσιν. Here, the onomatopeic verb κράζω powerfully transmits the deep emotion expressed roughly and harshly. Since the reference is made to the stones, we can speak of a hoarse whisper of the

[1] "Phänomenologie sagt dann: ἀποφαίνεσθαι τὰ φαινόμενα: Das was sich zeigt, so wie es sich von ihm selbst zeigt, von ihm selbst her sehen lassen. Das ist der formale Sinn der Forschung, die sich den Namen Phänomenologie gibt." (Heidegger, 1986a, p. 34).

rocks. Thus, the vocation of the human being is to be sensitive to the voice (*Stimme*) and to be able to listen to the voice of the stones (*die Stimme der Steine*). It is that voice in which language is formed (zur Sprache kommt) as it finds its most fitting expression in the happening of a conversation (*das Ereignis des Gesprächs*).

Jesus's response to the Pharisees sheds new light on the vocation of art: To be a powerful testimony to the divine vision of the human being called to radical openness to Revelation. Jesus's coming into the world begins liberation from everything that limits, restricts, oppresses, and degrades his people. To everyone who wanted to listen to him, Jesus opened up a new divine horizon in which they could be comforted, strengthened, encouraged, healed, and fed. In the culmination of his earthly mission, he offered his people himself in his Body and Blood in the Eucharist.

Picasso understood the necessity of crying aloud for the oppressed and victimized. In his painting, the screaming of the victims is transformed into a powerful voice that addresses the conscience of every viewer of his work of art. This painting speaks in such a way that it captivates the observer and makes her an eyewitness to the atrocities that are congenially condensed in this painting.

Victor Hugo, the great French poet and novelist, extensively addressed the shifts from the battlefield to the intellectual horizon where ideas are brought into the Open. In his Histoire d'un crime (Hugo, 2009), he writes: *On résiste à l'invasion des armées; on ne résiste pas à l'invasion des idées*: One withstands the invasion of armies; one does not withstand the invasion of ideas. It is a genius intuition not to trust in the power of the army but to be dedicated to the rise of ideas that come at the right time. The right time is the opportune time, καιρὸς, the time of favor (εὐπρόσδεκτος) that is happening now: Now is the time of our salvation. In 2 Cor 6: 2, St. Paul declares: Behold, now is the accepted time; behold, now is the day of salvation, ἰδοὺ νῦν καιρὸς εὐπρόσδεκτος, ἰδοὺ νῦν ἡμέρα σωτηρίας. Now, νῦν, is this time of favor and grace (καιρὸς εὐπρόσδεκτος), which is the time of salvation (ἡμέρα σωτηρίας).

In its qualitative and life-giving nature, καιρός is the privileged time, the opportune moment for action, and, as such, is recognized by human practical wisdom (φρόνησις). By moving beyond Aristotle's distinction between πρᾶξις and ποίησις, Heidegger elaborates on φρόνησις as the practice of thinking that is indicative of Dasein in its being-in-the-world. In its relationship to Being, Dasein responds to the claim of Being by being its shepherd (*Wächter und Hirt des Seins*). Heidegger makes us aware that

φρόνησις as thinking action has its origin (ἀρχή) in a human being[2]. Thus, this thinking action is δύναμις as ἀρχή, as something from which something will be built (wo aus etwas herstellbar wird). Every action, by being oriented toward and directed to beings, points back to its origin. In that sense, the origin is always there in fulfillment (*Vollzug*). What is happening in thinking is precisely this mysterious unfolding into the fullness. It is the leading forth into the completion. What is characteristic of the event of thinking is that it happens beyond our control, even beyond our wanting and doing. Something compelling takes place, and we witness this event. The beginning reaches out to its fulfillment and calls us as witnesses to recognize the indispensability of the openness to this blessed moment of vision, καιρός (*Augenblick*). Thinking is always in movement as a gathering. By always beginning anew (ἀρχή, *Anfang*) and reaching toward fulfillment (ἔσχατον), thinking matures in its polyphonicity. We live in a time of terrible simplification. The enormous progress of science and technology contribute to the ontic description of phenomena, but ironically do not contribute much to the depth and breadth of understanding who we are. Inter arma we show our solidarity with the victims in many ways, also by reading Heraclitus, Aristotle, the Bible, Heidegger, Gadamer, Arendt, and Girard.

**Περί φύσεως: What can we learn from reading the Greeks?**

Asking what we can learn from reading the Greeks, we enter a conversation with Tradition, searching for a sound world (*eine heile Welt*). We read them because we believe we can learn something essential about our being in

[2] "The essence of action is accomplishment. To accomplish means to unfold something into the fullness of its essence, to lead it forth into this fullness—producere. Therefore only what already is can really be accomplished. But what 'is' above all is being. Thinking accomplishes the relation of being to the essence of the human being. It does not make or cause the relation. Thinking brings this relation to being solely as something handed over to thought itself from being. Such offering consists in the fact that in thinking being comes to language. Language is the house of being. In its home human beings dwell. Those who think and those who create with words are the guardians of this home. Their guardianship accomplishes the manifestation of being insofar as they bring this manifestation to language and preserve it in language through their saying. Thinking does not become action only because some effect issues from it or because it is applied. Thinking acts insofar as it thinks. Such action is presumably the simplest and at the same time the highest because it concerns the relation of being to humans. But all working or effecting lies in being and is directed toward beings. Thinking, in contrast, lets itself be claimed by being so that it can say the truth of being. Thinking accomplishes this letting. Thinking is *l'engagement par l'Être pour l'Être* [engagement by being for being]." (Heidegger, 1998, p. 239).

the world with Others. Without our engagement with Tradition, we will not understand who we are. There is something powerful in our belongingness to Tradition that calls us to see everything we experience (*das Gesage but also das Ungesagte*) in its Wirkungsgeschichte as something that constitutes the way we are in the world as *existentia hermeneutica*[3]. Searching for understanding, we experience the discovery of meaning[4]. Understanding our history requires a sense of its complexity. Therefore, we turn to Heraclitus's Περί φύσεως to learn from him anew the meaning of complexity and the richness and blessing of understanding paradoxes.

When Aristotle reads the first sentence of Heraclitus, τοῦ δὲ λόγου τοῦδ' ἐόντος ἀεὶ ἀξύνετοι γίνονται ἄνθρωποι, he is unable to hear, as Gadamer evocatively demonstrates by reading Heraclitus aloud in Greek, where this "always," ἀεὶ, belongs[5]. Does the adverb ἀεί refer as a qualifier to the preceding ἐόντος, existing, or the following ἀξύνετοι, lacking understanding? For Gadamer, Aristotle, being already more of a reader and not a true listener anymore, was probably insufficiently focused on the sound of the sentence. In Gadamer's reading aloud, we do not hear ἀεὶ distinctively, since it belongs in equal measure to both parts of the sentence[6]. Such a performance is possible only when a reader/speaker knows what is being said. A reasonable reading of the text presupposes understanding of its meaning, and understanding of the text's meaning presupposes listening to the text and allowing for its meaning to reach our hermeneutic ear. It is a dynamic of a hermeneutic circle: Understanding is necessary for a hermeneutic reading, and a hermeneutic reading is essential for disclosing the meaning of the text[7].

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[3] *Existentia hermeneutica* is *existentia interpretativa*: "*Existentia hermeneutica* is a mode of being between familiarity and strangeness. Learning to understand one's own mode of being is a lifelong task, which discloses the necessity and opportunity to grow as a human being while transgressing the boundaries created by our personal, social, and political practices and beliefs." (Wierciński, 2019, p. 17).

[4] "Everything can be taken from a man but one thing: the last of the human freedoms—to choose one's attitude in any given set of circumstances, to choose one's own way." (Frankl, 1962, p. 86).

[5] This reading is in Aristotle, *Rhetoric* III.5, 1407b11–18.

[6] Gadamer (2002) emphasizes the role of reading aloud for discovering meaning. He elaborates on the relationships between vision, sound, and sense in reading.

[7] "The hermeneutic circle has an ontological status and is paradigmatic for any understanding. It refers to the basic structure of human cognition. The temporality of understanding makes us aware of the limits of our cognition. Understanding is never a subjective act. Interpretation is an inner unfolding of meaning. When we interpret a text, we cannot fix

When a word is addressed to us, when language speaks (*die Sprache spricht*[8]), we must be able to hear it and hearken to it. We must have a hermeneutical ear to hear. However, we must never forget that the hermeneutical ear is not only the result of our work on ourselves, but also includes everything beyond our wanting and doing, making us who we truly are.

Those who speak must be able to say what they understand, and those who listen must be able to hear what is said. This is the primary purpose of education: To lead us to an understanding of our human fate. Heraclitus shows that neither war nor peace, neither hunger nor satiety ever exhausts the complexity of the world that is our *Lebenswelt*. Life is given to us so that we can understand the fragility of our existence, the constant need for development and growth, and, at the same time, so that we are convinced that no human effort will make us either immortal or immutable in our self-understanding and understanding of the world. In an instant, peace can turn into a state of crisis and war. In one moment, human wisdom can also stop war. The main point is to see, with a hermeneutic eye, unveiling the fullness of meaning inaccessible to us and yet giving our life its precious sense. It is in relation to this Fullness that we can discover the meaning of our life that otherwise is unreachable to us in our purely immanent human endeavors. Human life in its entirety, with all of its paradoxes, is incomprehensible and unattainable.

**Reading Heraclitus against Revelation**

Already before Heraclitus we were taught that "Blessed is the man that heareth me, watching daily at my gates, waiting at the posts of my doors. For whoso findeth me findeth life, and shall obtain favor of the Lord" (Proverbs 8: 34). Speaking of wisdom, the author of the collection of collections, the *Book of Proverbs*, equates finding wisdom with finding life and divine favor. Reading Heraclitus against the religious Revelation cannot be interpreted as the revelatory illumination of his enigmatic notions and viewpoints. Gadamer was always very clear that Philosophy has to remain within its own genuine limitations and open to the horizon of Transcendence as the

its meaning. Particular meanings reveal a new sense to the whole. In turn, this new disclosure changes our self-understanding." (Wierciński, 2019, p. 319).

[8] "Gerade das eigentümliche der Sprache, daß sie sich bloß um sich selbst bekümmert, weiß keiner. Darum ist sie ein so wunderbares und fruchtbares Geheimnis, daß wenn einer bloß spricht, um zu sprechen, er gerade die herrlichsten, originellsten Wahrheiten ausspricht. Will er aber von etwas Bestimmtem sprechen, so läßt ihn die launige Sprache das lächerlichste und verkehrteste Zeug sagen." (Novalis, 1978, p. 672).

necessary condition of human thinking. However, only divine Revelation can satisfactorily answer the unanswerable antinomies, provided a human being is a religious believer. Following Kant, Gadamer is convinced that only religion can ensure that morality has an unambiguous binding character for people in this world. Without God, a moral attitude and imperative would be impossible.

Thinking in mere oppositions does not embrace the whole of reality at all. If we try to face life, we have to open ourselves up to the unpredictability of what comes toward us from the future and recognize it in its unrepeatability and uniqueness. The answer to the call of the moment requires our undivided attention and radical responsibility. Understanding the fragility of the given is necessary if we want to learn to deal with life's unstable equilibrium. Heraclitus teaches us to be sensitive to the fleeting moment of grace, constantly sharpen our senses to what is there, and see it in its often rapidly and unexpectedly changing appearances. Gadamer's careful reading of Heraclitus helps to see how, paradoxically, the opposites factically belong together and build the fabric of the individual human life and, far beyond it, the fabric of the world's history[9]. Life and death, war and peace, awakening and falling asleep are mysteriously interwoven, and to understand one phenomenon, we need to keep in mind its apparent opposite. When we move forward toward understanding that everything is one, ἓν πάντα εἶνα, we need to navigate between the farthest and closest experiences. Then, nothing is so constant as change. To grasp it means to embrace the fluidity of human life with all its dangers and promises, miseries and splendors, ups and downs.

Understanding change in its constantly distinct transformation calls for a hermeneutic approach far from any simplifying determined logic. In order to grasp the meaning of human unsettledness and the unpredictability of life, we are challenged to face the new and unexpected with flexibility and adaptability in a permanently varying, dynamic, and uncertain environment. Therefore, Heraclitus can aptly call the change a pathway up and down: "τὴν μεταβολὴν ὁδὸν ἄνω κάτω."10 Here, etymology is again very illuminating: Μετα, concerning a change of, and βάλλω, I throw. Change has thus something to do with throwing and catching the pathway up and

[9] On the importance of not disambiguating the ambiguity but using paradox for developing profundity rather than dispelling it see Reames, 2013.

[10] See Diogenes Laërtius, Lives and Opinions of Eminent Philosophers, Book IX, section 8. As mentioned below, Diogenes was known as the "laughing" philosopher, while Heraclitus was known as the "obscure" (σκοτεινός) and the "weeping» (κλαυθμός).

down. It is predominantly about the capacity of receiving, of being attentive on the way, and attuned to the *Lifeworld*[11].

**The *verbum entis*: Poetry as bringing human openness into the Open**

Gadamer (2000) prefaces his Truth and Method with Rilke's poem[12]:

Catch only what you've thrown yourself, all is
mere skill and little gain;
but when you're suddenly the catcher of a ball
thrown by an eternal partner
with accurate and measured swing
towards you, to your center, in an arch
from the great bridgebuilding of God:
why catching then becomes a power—
not yours, a world's.

The poetic word masterfully captures the human openness into the Open. Every uttered word surpasses the horizon of what is present-at-hand and what has been said. There is always more to be said, and all the unsaid and said are the task for interpretation. Augustine's *De Trinitate* reminds us that the *actus signatus* is never wholly covered by the actus exercitus.13 In our attempt to externalize what needs to be said, we painfully experience the incompleteness of our endeavor. Our word is a human word, a word in the horizon of finitude, yet always pointing beyond itself toward the verbum entis[14]. Interpreting catching a ball, Weinsheimer discloses a further creative

[11] On the attunement of hearing, see Heuson (2012) and Gregoric (2007).

[12] Weber (2023) profoundly elaborates on the beginning (Anfang) by addressing Rilke, Gadamer, and Heidegger and letting them speak prophetically by bringing the beginning and the end together.

[13] See Augustine (1844-1865), especially book XV. "*Actus signatus*, what a statement says, and *actus exercitus*, the enactment (*Vollzug*) of what has been understood, constitute the dynamics of understanding. In *actus exercitus*, the expression of the inner meaning is fully realized; *actus exercitus* goes beyond what is expressed in words and also embraces the application of what has been said and understood. Meaning is not only communicated in what is said, but also in how it is expressed." (Wierciński, 2019, p. 179).

[14] "The fundamental linguality of understanding and the actualization (*Vollzug*) of the historically conditioned consciousness (*wirkunsgeschichtliches Bewusstsein*) in language require a continuous search for the primordial words in which Being is expressed; it is a search for the *verbum entis*. Language is the reflection of finiteness; it is a mirror of temporality,

horizon by referring to the dynamic of the drift. It is a beautiful enlargement of a vision,

> as if drift were different from the ball, something beyond what is made explicit, though projected by it. Drift is the trajectory an intention that goes on, beyond where the ball falls, in a still great more perfect arc, like something thrown by a divine rather than merely human being. Historical intention, or what is colloquially called drift, is not in the usual sense what the author had in mind, a not therefore subjective. It is a kind of intention that remains untematized by the speaker and unrealized in the utterance. Drift is not what one says but what one really means to say. It is the object of charitable interpretation[15].

Hermeneutic reading requires sensitivity toward conflicting interpretations that situate the interpreter between suspicion and sympathy in a permanently unstable equilibrium (Wierciński, 2003, pp. xv-xxxiv). Reminding ourselves that what we read today is a collection from different recovered collections, we have access only to certain horizons that slowly unfold the obscurity of the text. We can learn to wonder at the contradiction and groundlessness of the human experience. The opposites are one not only because of their internal tension but also because they are evidently present in one and the same object. The way up and the way down are the same, ὁδὸς ἄνω

because every language creates itself and develops more in itself, the more it reveals Being. Language is finite (*endlich*), not because it supposedly does not include all other languages at once, but simply because it is a language. Language realizes the self- revelation of Being. We speak because we have to speak. Being speaks to us. After each conversation, we remain convinced that there is still much to say. The comprehensive realization of understanding always includes that which is left unsaid and is not fully expressed. To be understood, one must take into account not only that which is expressed but also the infiniteness of that which has not been expressed. All this must somehow be rendered in one. Expressing that which has not yet been said, and that which can still be expressed, testifies to our constant search for language; and not so much within the dimension of the externalization of the inner experience, but in the dimension of the most primordial expression of Being." (Wierciński, 2019, p. 145).

[15] Discussing Gadamer's use of Rilke's poem, Joel Weinsheimer (2000, p. 409) makes a great reference to the drift, For Weinsheimer, charity is a hermeneutic *a priori*, hence, he calls for a charitable reading: "Charitable interpretation is not equally valuable with other kinds of interpretation in the manner of eclecticism; it is not morally superior to other kinds of interpretation in the manner of ethicism. For charity militant, it is the only kind of genuine interpretation—and hence not even a dialectical rapprochement among alternatives is possible."

κάτω μία καὶ ὠυτή (Fragment 60)[16] — the perspective of the traveler makes the difference. The beginning and the end of the circle are the same: ξυνὸν γὰρ ἀρχὴ καὶ πέρας ἐπὶ κύκλου περιφερείας (Fragment 103). The tension in the world, the unifying difference, and the diverse unity make the fabric of the universe. The power of the paradox helps us to grasp the meaning of the conflict, contrast, and the permanent tension in the opposites. Here, παράδοξος denotes what is truly beyond (παρά) what is known and expected (δόξα). It motivates us to see what shows itself without trying to overcome the difference and tension. Heraclitus is very vocal about the nature of conflict and war: Πόλεμος πάντων μὲν πατήρ ἐστι (Fragment 53). In stating that the war is the father of everything, he emphasizes that πόλεμος is not λόγος, but its essential condition.

The fragile equilibrium between war and peace calls for a permanent dialogue that has to be honest, respectable, and truthful. Truth, Forgiving, and Reconciliation each call for the infinite task of interpretation. And after we have done all we could do, we can humbly say: "We are unprofitable servants: we have done that which was our duty to do" (Lk 17: 10): οὕτως καὶ ὑμεῖς, ὅταν ποιήσητε πάντα τὰ διαταχθέντα ὑμῖν, λέγετε ὅτι Δοῦλοι ἀχρεῖοί ἐσμεν, ὃ ὠφείλομεν ποιῆσαι πεποιήκαμεν. The meaning of the unworthy servants, Δοῦλοι ἀχρεῖοί, comes from ἀχρεῖος, denoting unprofitable, useless, and unworthy. In other words, we are unneeded, lacking usefulness. Truly great things do not depend on our human endeavors. Necessity, χρεία, brings with the attitude of fulfilling it two notions, being useless, ἄχρηστος, and useful, εὔχρηστος. However, the reading of the Gospel seems to indicate that it is not fulfilling our duties that makes us profitable. There is the logic of life that discloses its real potentiality of being needed and helpful when we move beyond the realm of obligations and responsibility. This might be the unfolding meaning of a blissful life, *vita beata*.

Differing in the unity of war and peace is not a simple reconciliation of opposites but a coexisting of opposites, without giving birth to synthesis, but giving meaning to life in its fullness and encouraging the search for meaning that discloses itself from the course of events, like the prophets' preaching within and against Tradition. Psalm 85 (86) reminds us that righteousness and peace will kiss each other: קֶדֶק וְשָׁלוֹם נָשָׁקוּ. This figurative meaning of kissing draws our attention to the reciprocity of righteousness and peace. The Greek translation uses the verb καταφιλέω, thus emphasizing the passion of

[16] Heraclitus's fragments are drawn from the Hermann Diels and Walther Kranz edition (1960).

kissing, the tender kissing again and again. This kiss is very powerful in its metaphoric sense of fastening up. As a significant expression of a mode of attachment, it reminds us of the power of touch, the prevailing medium of understanding. The simultaneity of touching and being touched in Psalm 85 with regard to kissing each other effectively proclaims the reciprocity of justice and peace (εἰρήνη, harmony, a state of natural tranquillity) in their primordial belonging together. It is precisely in this belonging together that we recognize the power of touch in its transforming capacity of opening us to the Other. In and through this carnal experience of giving and receiving, we acknowledge our readiness to face the radical fragility and vulnerability of a human being. The indubitability of our own existence and the otherness of the Other acquires in touch its indisputable confirmation: "In touch, we are both touching and touched at the same time, but we do not for all that collapse into sameness. Difference is preserved"[17].

Heraclitus's world order is in a constant equilibrium. However, he is very conscious of the fragility of the equilibrium of the opposites in the Logos. The physical world order has no beginning and no end. Qualitative changes in the world are all regulated by a measure that can be found in the logic of the Logos. The eternally living fire is not able to add more life and movement to the world. Like a restless flame, it obeys the law of measurement insofar as it is involved in cosmic processes. The fire is eternal because it is divine. The world owes its immortality to its divine origin.

**Phronetic Fire: πῦρ φρόνιμον**

To understand the relationship of the ἕν to the πάντα, we have to grasp the σοφόν character of the ἕν as the gathering unity of the λόγος and σοφόν. It is crucial for the comprehending of the πῦρ φρόνιμον, which, in turn, is indispensable for recognizing the relationship between the gods and human beings, which represents the reference of the ἕν τὸ σοφὸν to the πάντα (Heidegger, 1986b, pp. 181-182; 2002).

Heraclitus's cryptic teaching can be easily interpreted as yet another version of pre-Socratic cosmology. However, a close reading of fragments

[17] Kearney (2015, p. 20) continues: "And this breakthrough insight means that flesh always harbors a certain distance or interval through which touch navigates. Touch is not fusion but mediation through flesh… While I may seem to be immediately present to what I touch and to be immediately touched by what I touch-unlike sight, where I am not necessarily seen by what I see, or hearing, where I am not necessarily heard by what I hear, etc.-there is always something mediate in the immediate, something 'far' in the 'near.'"

B30[18] and B31[19] might speak to his uncompromising interest in indicating the dialectical tension of the opposites. The transformations (πυρὸς τροπαί) of everliving fire (πῦρ ἀείζωον) are at the core of his teaching and can be noticed in their perplexing disclosure by the wise human being. Then, only the σοφόν is on the way toward that which is true. It is wise to agree with and say: One is All: ὁμολογεῖν σοφόν ἐστιν Ἓν Πάντα (Fragment 50).

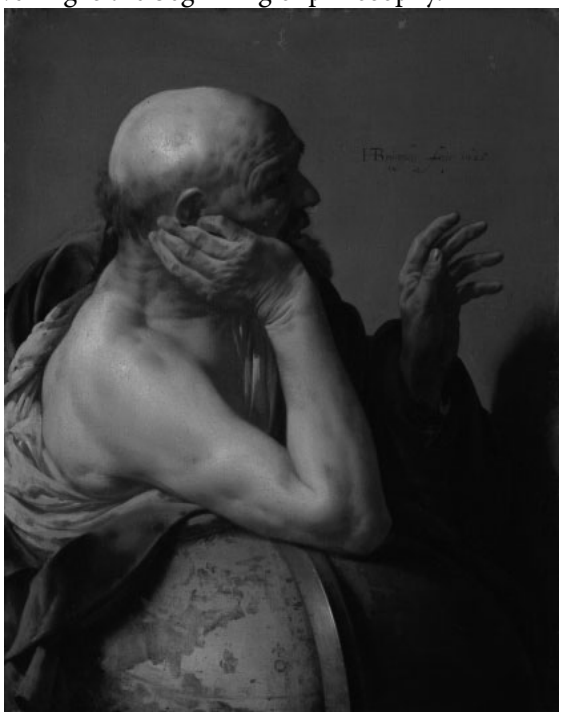
An interesting perspective on further understanding the πῦρ φρόνιμον is offered by the biblical theology of the New Testament. The King James Bible translates Lk 12: 49 as "I am come to send fire on the earth; and what will I if it be already kindled": Πῦρ ἦλθον βαλεῖν ἐπὶ τὴν γῆν, καὶ τί θέλω εἰ ἤδη ἀνήφθη. The verb, βάλλω, to throw, captures the idea of the hermeneutic play, throwing and catching. Here, it is in the sense of bringing into motion with attention and for a clear purpose, indicated by the verb θέλω (I wish). Jesus does not ignite fire. By using the aorist passive indicative from the verb ἀνάπτω, he expresses his desire to see the ignition of the fire happening. The fire needs to set itself on fire. Jesus is the beginning (Anfang) of that fire that needs to be caught by us. The dancing flames of fire express the permanent change, the formation of the other flame, and the transformation of fire. There is no extinguishing and no igniting. It burns. One flame passes over to become another flame. It will be no more fire, and it will be no less either. Like in dance, the step of the one partner is the invitation to the step of the other. It is the ever-lasting, never-resting movement, always in motion. The transformation, μεταβολή, is the play happening as the motion of throwing (βάλλω) and catching without a break in the self-evident logic of burning.

Jesus's consuming fire (πῦρ καταναλίσκον) is also the purifying fire. This wise fire has the power to discern what is to be destroyed and what is to be saved (Heb 12: 29). Jesus is aware that people need the saving power of fire. This living fire πῦρ ἀείζωον is full of discernment (πῦρ φρόνιμον) (Van Unnik, 1970). Jesus's salvific mission was brought about by the lack of

[18] B30: κόσμον τόνδε, τὸν αὐτὸν ἁπάντων, οὔτε τις θεῶν οὔτε ἀνθρώπων ἐποίησεν, ἀλλ› ἦν ἀεὶ καὶ ἔστιν καὶ ἔσται πῦρ ἀείζωον, ἁπτόμενον μέτρα καὶ ἀποσβεννύμενον μέτρα: This world, which is the same in all, is made neither by gods nor by men, but it was ever, is now, and ever shall be an everliving fire, fixed measures of it kindling and fixed measures going out.

[19] B31: πυρὸς τροπαί· πρῶτον θάλασσα, θαλάσσης δέ· τὸ μὲν ἥμισυ γῆ, τὸ δὲ ἥμισυ πρηστήρ.... <γῆ> θάλασσα διαχέεται, καὶ μετρέεται εἰς τὸν αὐτὸν λόγον, ὁκοῖος πρόσθεν ἦν ἢ γενέσθαι γῆ: The transformations of fire are, first of all, sea; and half of the sea is earth, half whirlwind… It becomes liquid sea, and is measured by the same tale as before it became earth.

understanding in people, who lost their capacity to differentiate between good and evil and are not able to recognize him as their Savior. He cries over Jerusalem (Lk 19: 44). We are already familiar with Heraclitus's tears, who cried over the thoughtlessness and foolishness of his compatriots. Heraclitus was famous for being the obscure (σκοτεινός) and weeping (κλαυθμός) philosopher in contrast to Democritus, who was known as the laughing philosopher, γελώντας φιλόσοφος. Heraclitus was truly wondrous, θαυμάσιος: His dwelling is the beginning of philosophy.



Heraclitus by Hendrick ter Brugghen (https://www.rijksmuseum.nl/en/collection/SK-A-2784)

Heraclitus, a mature man, is leaning on a globe with his right arm. He might be philosophizing, albeit his left hand seems to be frozen, like in a freeze frame. Hendrick ter Brugghen congenially depicted the cryptic philosopher by calling attention to the philosopher's imperative of thinking: The apparent obscurity in the philosophy of Heraclitus lies essentially in its speculative power (Hegel, *Lectures on the History of Philosophy*). We needed to wait for the poetic philosopher Heidegger to capture the luminosity of Heraclitus. It was Heidegger (1986c, pp. 102-103) who called Heraclitus luminous (*der Lichte*):

> The quotations and the sources, taken together, still do not yield what is essential: the definitive, all-articulating unity of the inner structure of Heraclitus' writing. Only a constantly advancing insight into this structure will reveal the point from which the individual fragments are speaking, and in what sense each of them, as a saying, must be heard. Because we can scarcely surmise what the well-spring is that gives the writing of Heraclitus its unity, and because we find this source so difficult to think, we are justified in calling this thinker "the Obscure." Even the inherent meaning of what this epithet says to us remains obscure.
>
> Heraclitus is called "the Obscure." But he is the Lucid. For he tells of the lighting whose shining he attempts to call forth into the language of thinking. Insofar as it illuminates, the lighting endures. We call its illumination the lighting [*die Lichtung*]. What belongs to it, and how and where it takes place, still remain to be considered. The word "light" means lustrous, beaming, brightening. Lighting bestows the shining, opens what shines to an appearance. The open is the realm of unconcealment and is governed by disclosure. What belongs to the latter, and whether and to what extent disclosing and lighting are the Same, remain to be asked[20].

Hendrick ter Brugghen was a Dutch painter of genre scenes and religious subjects. He was a leading member of the Dutch followers of Caravaggio, the so-called Utrecht Caravaggisti. His bold tenebroso technique is very fitting to portray Heraclitus, the philosopher of the philosophers, in his teaching of the proximity of the opposites that are expressing the same

[20] "Die Zitate samt den Fundstellen überliefern uns das Wesentliche gerade nicht: die alles gliedernde und maßgebende Einheit des inneren Baues der Schrift Heraklits. Nur aus einem ständig wachsenden Einblick in dieses Baugefüge ließe sich dartun, von woher die einzelnen Bruchstücke sprechen, in welchem Sinne jedes als ein Spruch gehört werden darf. Weil jedoch die quellende Mitte, aus der Heraklits Schrift ihre Einheit empfing, kaum zu vermuten und immer schwer zu denken ist, kann dieser Denker erst recht für uns »der Dunkle« heißen. Der eigentliche Sinn, in dem der Beiname zu uns spricht, bleibt selbst dunkel. Heraklit heißt »der Dunkle«. Aber er ist der Lichte. Denn er sagt das Lichtende, indem er versucht, dessen Scheinen in die Sprache des Denkens hervorzurufen. Das Lichtende währt, insofern es lichtet. Wir nennen sein Lichten die Lichtung. Was zu ihr gehört, wie sie geschieht und wo, bleibt zu bedenken. Das Wort »licht« bedeutet: leuchtend, strahlend, hellend. Das Lichten gewährt das Scheinen, gibt Scheinendes in ein Erscheinen frei". Das Freie ist der Bereich der Unverborgenheit. Ihn verwaltet das Entbergen. Was zu diesem notwendig gehört, ob und inwiefern die Entbergung und die Lichtung das Selbe sind, bleibt zu erfragen." (Heidegger, 2000, pp. 265-266).

one reality. The mastery of the painter allows for presenting the power of concentration in such a way that the world stands still. But the world does not stop. Nothing stops. Everything is in motion. It is rather the wish to hold the fleeting moment and pray, "please remain" (*verweile doch*). Heraclitus's language of density in its almost oracular character is again perfectly captured by the painter in depicting the intensity of language as conversation. Heraclitus's hand held in suspension seems to be able to embrace the whole world, only because the world is condensed in this blessed instance of the utmost concentration of attention.

This portrait stunningly shows the melancholic nature of the mourning philosopher. Heraclitus understands that human life is a path toward understanding. On the one hand, it is illuminated by the clash with reality, but on the other hand, this understanding is still unattainable. Hence, understanding can never be supported by seeing from one side. For the gloomy, enigmatic, and paradoxical philosopher, understanding is the great future that is coming into being. The kairological dimension of human life calls us to perfect our grasping of being in the world with Others. It is the art of sharpening the senses to perceive the complexity of the world that is our *Lebenswelt*. It calls on us to strive not for world domination (*berechnendes Denken*), but to live human solidarity with our *Lebenswelt*. This is the real ecology of the future: The practice of integral care for the entire *Lebenswelt*, solidarity between people, those who suffer as well as those who do not understand.

**Facing our Lebenswelt in the proximity of the opposites**

The vocation of a human being is to develop oneself. However, *Bildung* as formation means that it is also something that happens in us and to us. This formation is definitely not a matter of accumulating information (Fragment 17)[21]. As culture, Bildung is *expressis verbis*, a cultivation of a human being[22]. Practicing thinking is a matter of Bildung. In that sense, Bildung is bringing something to fullness. Hence, Heidegger can speak emphatically of the accomplishment as *Vollendung, producere*, leading or bringing forth. Here accomplishment can be called production: "To pro-duce (her-stellen) means to make presently available (not just to make)" (Heidegger, 1981,

[21] Fragment 17, οὐ γὰρ φρονέουσι τοιαῦτα (οἱ) πολλοί, ὁκόσοι ἐγκυρεῦσιν, οὐδὲ μαθόντες γινώσκουσιν, ἑωυτοῖσι δὲ δοκέουσι: Many people have not as many thoughts as the things they engage (learn, meet with); nor, if they do learn (perceive) them, do they understand them, though they believe they do. Here, Heraclitus clearly differentiates between learning and understanding. He is also vocal about the power of self-deception.

[22] *Cultura* from *cultus*, perfect passive participle of *colo*, to till, cultivate.

p. 179; 1995, p. 154). Herstellen draws our attention to the double meaning of the word: The finished product (*das Verfertigtsein*) and being available now, being at disposal (*nunmehr zur Verfügung sein*), are present in the process of production (Kuhlken, 2014).

Similarly, thinking of Bildung, we can see the relationship between *educare* and *educere*. Bildung is not simply a matter of making something any more or less organized and controlled operation. As nurturing and uplifting, educare promotes the growth of an individual. It offers an opportunity to build upon one's inherent potential. Educere emphasizes the aspect of leading, drawing, or taking out, forth, or away. Thus, it is more oriented toward the development of a person in order to meet the requirements of others, family, society, and the world. Here, again, the actual conflict of interpretation is not a matter to be overcome. On the contrary, what is necessary is the productive tension between the trust in the potentialities of an individual and the sympathetic gestures pointing toward a new horizon. To practice life in tension is not a question of skillful maneuvering between the opposed poles, but an art of listening to oneself and the Other. It is a conscientious exercise in sharpening the senses while recognizing the infinite task of interpretation in our life as *existentia hermeneutica* in its being in the world with Others. Bildung is thus more a patient witnessing to the growth of the individual and letting that which wants to show itself, show itself rather than the busyness (*Geschäftigkeit*) of formal attempts to model the person according to established rules. Bildung is the openness into the Open, the support for the happening of the revelation of the identity of an individual as a person in her *Lebensworld* (*sich Zeigenlassen*).

**Conclusion**

What is fascinating in our experience of the conflicts of interpretations is the not-always-easily recognizable power of disagreement. What is essential is to not prematurely eliminate all possible differences, but to discover the richness of arguments and disputes. Accepting the differences in understanding is not a matter of pragmatics and conformity. It is rather a welcoming gesture toward the variety of possible meanings, even if they seem incompatible with our initial interpretations. We can celebrate this variety and be genuinely grateful for disclosing to us what is worthy of being addressed (*denkwürdig*) and questioned (*fragwürdig*). Heraclitus helps us to grasp the meaning of language in its paradoxical, metaphorical, and plurivocal expression. Our understanding is always provisional and limited because it is our human understanding, i.e., temporal, historical, and finite.

As mortals, we lack the divine perspective. Only by engaging in other ways of thinking do we have a real opportunity to discover the limits and limitations of our own thinking. Therefore, we are invited to search within ourselves since the divine Logos is manifested in us.

The courage to ask difficult questions discloses the infinite richness of understanding. Heraclitus was a true master of meditating on the perplexities of being in the world. The profundity of his thinking inspired the whole of Antiquity with Plato and Aristotle, and in German Philosophy, especially in Hegel, Nietzsche, and Heidegger, found its profound rereading.

Facing the reality of our *Lebenswelt* in an accelerated and often conflict-driven environment, we realize that we desperately need the wise fire, πῦρ φρόνιμον, that will keep restoring ourselves, our relationships, and every life on earth. This everlasting fire in its correcting and life-giving potentiality is the true hope for a world plagued with wars, hostilities, natural and man-made disasters, insatiable hunger, social injustice, violence, and oppression. Yearning for healing visions, we want to imagine the realistically impossible made possible. We trust in the unpredictability of education, which has the potential to form and transform us by inspiring us to listen to the Other and strengthen our human solidarity, which is rooted in the firm conviction that we all are the children of the living God.

Human achievements are great and often unsurpassed, as is the case with the achievements of the human spirit. But they also bring hatred, envy, often (dis)interested envy, persistent conflicts, and wars. From the beginning (*Anfang*) to the final fulfillment (ἔσχατον), we go through the world, trying to connect the end with the beginning and discover the meaning of the history of the world and human beings. We continue to learn self-understanding by participating in conversation to find our way in and through the world here and now (*hic et nunc*). Without depreciating the role of erroneous searches and decisions, every determined, i.e., serious, search for the Truth by a human being is much more important than obsessive tracking, controlling, and punishing possible mistakes. Regular self-purification takes place through the Revelation, i.e., a humble lesson in opening up to God, thanks to which the seed of God can sprout in us. In the parable of the sower (Mt 13:1-23), the most challenging is understanding whether the earth is fertile or not. Our task is to work on the fertility of the soil. Yes, when the seed is sown, there is growth. We do not know what it will be like, because we do not determine the germination, growth, maturation, or harvest time. The Holy Spirit always works; therefore, the kingdom of God always and everywhere grows through

our efforts and independently of them, just like any understanding beyond our wanting and doing.

Understanding the dialectic of power means letting ourselves be inspired by the divine everlasting fire. Hermeneutics helps us to grasp that this letting happen (*Geschehenlassen*) is much more difficult than busyness (*Geschäftigkeit*) and excessive activism. It is not a call to unacceptable passivity or indifference, but an awakening to a permanent flame representing the inextinguishable spark of life in each of us. The groundbreaking insight of the dialectic of power is that building a peaceful future is to let it be built (*Bauenlassen*), i.e., to critically recognize that we are the led rather than the leading. Our capacity of being peacemakers, εἰρηνοποιός (Mt 5: 9), reminds us that we witness the bringing forth of peace, which is the literal meaning of ποίησις. What is especially illuminating is not the bringing forth into existence like in the case of a craftsperson, but rather in the sense of bringing forth in itself, thus bringing out of concealment into unconcealment. The bringing forth of peace as ποίησις happens in the horizon of revealing, ἀλήθεια. This letting happen of peace (Geschenlassen) as Gelassenheit is one of the most demanding and challenging tasks of *existentia hermeneutica*.

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