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The School of Athens, Raphael, 1509-1511


THE SCHOOL OF ATHENS

The School of Athens (Scuola di Atene) decorates a wall of the Room of the Signatura (*Stanza della Segnatura*) in the Apostolic Palace in the Vatican. It was likely the third painting finished there by Raphael, painted from 1509 to 1511 after *The Disputation of the Sacrament (La Disputa del Sacramento)*, which represents theology (1509-1510), and *The Parnassus (Il Parnaso)*, representing literature (1509-1511), and before the *Cardinal and Theological Virtues* (1511). The room represents the four areas of human knowledge: philosophy, theology, literature and the law. *The School of Athens* represents philosophy.

It is suggested that almost every Greek philosopher can be found in the painting, but it is impossible to determine which beyond speculation: Raphael made no designations outside artistic likenesses. Many of the Greeks' appearances remain unknown to us, which compounds the problem of their association with the figures in the painting. Among the figures most highly suspected to be included are Anaximander, Pythagoras, Archimedes, Aeschines, Socrates, Heraclitus, Diogenes, Parmenides, Zeno of Citium, Averroes, who looks over the shoulder of Pythagoras, and Carneades.

It is undoubted that the two central figures at the architecture's central vanishing point are Plato, on the left, and Aristotle, on the right. Both hold copies of their books: Plato holds *Timaeus* and Aristotle holds his *Nicomachean Ethics*. Plato gestures upwards, reminiscent of his rationalist Theory of Forms, whilst Aristotle points downwards, representative of his empiricist emphasis on particulars. Their centrality represents their importance to the history of western philosophy. A contemporary philosopher might be reminded of Alfred North Whitehead's assertion, in *Process and Reality* (1929), that 'the safest general characterization of the European philosophical tradition is that it consists of a series of footnotes to Plato'.

Editor's Introduction: Or, A Theory Regarding the Neglect of Reviews and Discussion Pieces, Especially by Undergraduates

MBARRASSMENT IS AN APT DESCRIPTION, I think, of this state of affairs. But confusion would also suffice. It was promised in the previous issue that there would be, in time, a great flourishing of reviews and discussion pieces in *Critique*: both types of article are, after all, relatively quick to produce. There is no requirement to read some great tome, or a whole series, or the twenty-two volumes of the *Complete Works of Watsuji Tetsurō* 『和辻哲郎全集』 (Tokyo: Iwanami Shoten, 1961-1991) – one of Oxford University Press' *very short introductions* will do – nor must one dissect a densely logical essay from *Analysis* on whether scrutability conditionals are rationally deniable.¹

And yet time has passed and there are still none – except for my own, which I have contributed to the journal out of dedication to its success, and a couple of further reviews which were especially solicited by myself for this issue. These articles of mine were written especially for *Critique*, but it is to me quite bizarre that it was in the first place necessary to produce work bespoke for the journal. What is more, I even bent the rules of the journal, requesting of Mr. Zhu, now a postgraduate, another review for *Critique*. His review of Cheryl Misak's *Frank Ramsey: A Sheer Excess of Powers* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2020) met a standard one would expect of a professional, so I was certain, therefore, that he would be able to provide me with another review of a similar quality. The journal is, however, still totally without discussion pieces.

This is, firstly, because discussion pieces are seldom written in the first place. In professional journals, the vast majority of essays are original research articles, and discussion pieces and book reviews tend to take a back seat. This is, partly, because research is egotistical and self-centred. We research what we are interested in, not what would be the best for us to actually study – else, realistically, we would all be classical scientists, and we would see the death of journals in the social sciences, arts and humanities. This selfishness extends, of course, to undergraduates: they enrol onto the courses that contain subjects they wish to read, not those that they always think are the most important or the most lucrative – else, again, there would be an abundance of medical schools and faculties of business, and not a single faculty of arts and humanities left in the land.

Another reason for the neglect of discussion pieces by researchers is, more than likely, a lack of creativity. Even if it did strike one to write a discussion piece, it is another question entirely as to whether they would be able to. If there is nothing to be said about some particular article, then one will not have much luck in trying to discuss it.

¹ The reference is to Jens Kipper and Zeynep Soysal, (2021), “Are scrutability conditionals rationally deniable?” *Analysis*, vol. 81, no. 3, pp. 452-461.

There are, to me, two reasons why one would be simply unable to write a discussion piece, even if they wanted to. The first is, as I have mentioned, a lack of creativity on behalf of the reader of some article, the author of the prospect discussion piece. The second is a lack of creativity of the author of the article under discussion. Many academic articles today – and stress ought to be placed on the fact that these articles are *academic*, not philosophic – say nothing at all. If some trite comparison is made, or a dull exegesis with no real opinion, then there cannot, by reason, be anything much to say about the article. This strikes me as a problem which is no greater in undergraduates than in professional researchers: becoming a professional academic does not guarantee at all that one will be any more suited to creative insights into some topic or another – it simply means that one is able to write essays that are quite difficult to disagree with (probably on account of their not actually saying a great deal), and therefore quite difficult for peer-reviewers to dismiss.

Secondly, undergraduate essays are not very well read to comment on them in the first place, hence the problem is especially in undergraduates. One of the reasons for this is a lack of respect for results published in undergraduate journals,² even by undergraduates themselves. Occasionally, undergraduate essays focus on a very small number of articles and, in the end, take up a form very much resembling that of an extended discussion piece. However, the articles that are the main objects of such essays are, in my experience, never written by undergraduates. Such essays normally constitute some attempt to discuss highly established and very well cited articles from the twentieth century. Sometimes, mainly regarding the studies of race, gender and sexuality, newer, but no less influential (within their field) articles are discussed. Unfortunately, nobody seems to read undergraduate essays.

Thirdly, undergraduates do not write very much. What they do write are formative and summative essays, essays for examinations, and dissertations, all of which are a requirement for the fulfilment of a degree programme. Most – almost all (maybe all) – of the submissions to *Critique* are summative essays or dissertations. This goes for the vast majority of other undergraduate journals too, and the rare exceptions vary enormously in quality, some deserving publication in professional journals, others undeserving of publication at all. The kinds of essays that are required for the fulfilment of a degree are never reviews or discussion pieces. Undergraduate journals, therefore, struggle for them.

This is all very unfortunate: some dissertations make excellent, very sophisticated and ambitious points. Likewise, publication is part of an ‘undergraduate research experience’.³ It does not seem to me sensible to commence research suddenly at a postgraduate level without having experienced it before. Undergraduate journals serve in many ways as a stepping-stone to professional research. Many of the essays received by *Critique*, for instance, suffer grievously from errors in citation practice and basic literacy. Universities normally neglect this because it is uninteresting when it comes to examination, but academic journals take the matter of citation very seriously: it is, unquestionably, of extreme importance to be able to adhere to the basic stylistic requirements of a journal, and to submit to reviewers an essay which is not only presentable, but contains a consistent and complete style of citation. The editors of *Critique* expend a great deal of time correcting such errors and explaining how to cite and how to write. The editors of larger journals, however, will not. It is too bold to say that

² See Scott F. Gilbert, (2004), “A Case Against Undergraduate-only Journal Publications,” *Cell Biology Education*, vol. 3, no. 1, pp. 22-23.

³ Kestutis G. Bendinskas, Lester Caudill & Luis A. Melara Jr., (2020), “The Case for Undergraduate Research Journals,” *Mathematical Biology Education*, vol. 82, no. 100.

undergraduate journals are essential to training proper researchers – many survive the splash of cold water as postgraduates – but undergraduate journals certainly contribute to acquiring various skills important for professional academics.⁴ If the purpose of a university degree is to train academics – it is not, but some like to maintain it is – then it seems obvious to me that undergraduate publication should constitute a part of it.

I do not know how to restore, or to establish to begin with, the reputation of undergraduate journals. What is obvious is that undergraduate journals must avoid becoming vanity journals, barely better than the predatory journals that end up on Beall's List. Serious double-blind peer-review is obligatory. Articles need not be revolutionary, but must be good enough, or undergraduate journals will continue to be known for publishing work that is not good enough for professional journals, and nothing more. It is well known that journals come in degrees: journals such as *Noûs* and *Philosophical Review* are unquestionably first class, journals such as *Social Epistemology* less so, and those like the *Journal of French and Francophone Philosophy* are lower yet. There is no embarrassment in admitting that undergraduate journals are towards the bottom of the list: this does not mean that they do not contain good research, but it does mean that they are not required to be filled from cover to cover with excellent research. Some essays therein can be excellent, just as some essays in the best journals are trite, say nothing, and say it badly. The purpose of undergraduate journals ought to be, and this is the purpose of *Critique*, to gauge undergraduate philosophic sentiment as antennae, rather than to pressure undergraduates to produce new research.

To do this, *Critique* has to first become increasingly internationalized. This was also promised in the previous issue. And yet, this issue contains articles from the Anglophone world alone. Submissions were, in large, from the United Kingdom. A few came from the United States, a couple from Canada, one from Katholieke Universiteit Leuven in Belgium – except from the one, no others came from Europe – and nothing at all was heard from universities in Asia, Australasia, Africa, or South America, despite the attempts of the journal's editors to reach out to them on various occasions. It remains unclear whether this represents a trend in academic research more generally, with North American and Europe leading far ahead from the other regions, or whether it reflects specifically upon undergraduates. It is still too early into the experiment to tell for sure.

The journal's Editorial Board also remains incomplete. Mr. Korneev and Mr. Rasmussen have been appointed as Associate Editor and Review Editor respectively, but the journal still wants desperately for a Marketing Assistant and typesetters, as well as an increasingly internationalized board of peer-reviewers.

B.V.E. HYDE

⁴ Mico Tatalovic, (2008), "Student science publishing: an exploratory study of undergraduate science research journals and popular science magazines in the US and Europe," *Journal of Science Communication*, vol. 7, no. 3.

What Does Gadamer Mean By Prejudice?

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ONE OF THE MOST SIGNIFICANT concepts in the philosophy of Hans-Georg Gadamer is that of prejudice. Unlike those who came before and after him, Gadamer's definition and utilisation of the concept is quite unique and has thus aroused much controversy over the years. This essay will start by defining this form of prejudice and display its subsequent importance in interpreting the world. Following this, a variety of arguments against Gadamer's idea of prejudice will be analysed. It will be shown that all the potential concerns can be adequately tackled and that Gadamer's concept of prejudice is thus one that should be adopted.

When one thinks of the usual conception of prejudice, the thoughts and feelings it invokes are usually negative. As Rupert Brown puts it, prejudice is 'defined simply as an attitude, emotion or behaviour towards members of a group which directly or indirectly implies some negativity towards that group'.¹ An alternate, but compatible, definition is proposed by Gordon Allport, who suggests that prejudice 'is actively resistant to all evidence that would unseat it'.² These two definitions can be seen in conjunction to express the most common view of prejudice. The first part of this conception is that there is something inherently negative about prejudice; if you are said to be prejudiced towards a certain ethnic group, for example, you have views towards that group that are negative. Secondly, prejudice tends to be seen as anti-rational and very hard to overcome through reason; the aforementioned individual expressing hate towards an ethnic group will not have those views changed through simple discourse. We are thus left in a situation where the concept of prejudice is seen as a societal ill which must be condemned and overcome. It is important to understand this and contrast it with Gadamer's conception of prejudice.

Gadamer refutes the conception of prejudice we have just set out, arguing 'that not until the Enlightenment does the concept of prejudice acquire the negative connotation familiar today'; it in fact 'means a judgement that is rendered before all the elements that determine a situation have been finally examined'. Prejudice thus 'does not necessarily mean a false judgement, but part of the idea is that it can have either a positive or a negative value'.³ We already can see a clear contrast between Gadamer's view and the conventional view; prejudice is no longer inherently a negative view. In order to further understand why prejudice is so important for Gadamer, we must first focus on the fact that he subscribed to the Heideggerian view that 'the interpretation of the world initially starts with an innerworldly being'.⁴ Fellow German philosopher Martin Heidegger was essentially in opposition to the idea that we can

¹ Brown, 2010, p. 11

² Allport, 1954, p. 9

³ Gadamer, 1975, p. 273

⁴ Heidegger, 1996, p. 89

understand the world through the lens of an external observer, proposed by philosophers such as René Descartes. Heidegger's view is that part of our fundamental existence is that we are part of the world and our very understanding of it is dependent on this. Gadamer, in building on the views of Heidegger believes that pre-judgements are needed to come to any understanding on how the world works, since pure reason cannot fulfil that task. As a result, Gadamer asserts that 'all understanding inevitably involves some prejudice', opposing 'the rule of Cartesian doubt' which leads to us 'accepting nothing as certain that can in any way be doubted, and adopting the idea of method that follows this rule'.⁵ The result of this is 'that which has been sanctioned by tradition and custom has an authority that is nameless'.⁶ This is the clear logical conclusion of Gadamer's definition of prejudice; if pre-judgements are needed for us to understand the world, these views have to stem from a source of reliability. Since we cannot gain this from pure reason, the traditions and authority we adopt from society seem to be the right route to go down. Whilst this may be logically sound, it brings up a variety of objections which have led to Gadamer's conception of prejudice becoming greatly controversial.

Prima facie there are some very serious issues with Gadamer's conception of prejudice and its use in understanding the truth. Whilst his critique that Descartes' method of doubt means we struggle to understand anything is valid, it does not follow that Gadamer's use of prejudice takes us any further. If our only source of understanding is the prejudices of the past and the traditions and authorities it gave rise to, then surely there is no way to build any knowledge beyond that understanding. This would cause an inherently regressive society in which there would be no epistemological or social progress. Brice Wachterhauser realises this potential concern and clarifies that there are two ways in which prejudice arises. The first way it arises is 'from the intellectual traditions in which our intellects and sensibilities have been formed and they arise'. This is the sort of prejudice in which one may be concerned in leading to a regressive society. However, Wachterhauser goes on to explain that prejudices can also arise 'from the exigencies of our current historical situation which impinge on our inquiries in equally powerful but scarcely noticed ways'.⁷ This shows that Gadamer's concept of prejudice is not just based on those intellectual assumptions that we receive from the past, but that they are also brought about by the contemporary situation; for example, many previous pre-judgements our current society had about the history of pandemics may well have been altered by the reality of the ongoing Covid-19 pandemic. It is thus clear that Gadamer's prejudice does not limit our understanding to that of the past, and that progress can be made. It is important to note though that this does not mean we 'are approaching a point without prejudice; it implies simply that some of our prejudices have shifted sufficiently to cast light on some of our former prejudices'.⁸

Whilst it may be the case that prejudices can shift based on changing circumstances, there remain concerns that Gadamer's conception of prejudice can still lead to harmful outcomes on an institutional level. This is due to both the criticisms of modernity and the Enlightenment made by Gadamer in defining prejudice, as well as the subsequent importance placed on authority and tradition. The fact that prejudices can potentially shift does not overwhelm this, according to Gadamer's critics. One of these critics is Richard Wolin, who

⁵ Gadamer, 1975, p. 272-273

⁶ Gadamer, 1975, p. 281

⁷ Wachterhauser, 1988, p. 233

⁸ Wachterhauser, 1988, p. 236

believes that the conception of prejudice that is proposed can justify authoritarian regimes, making Gadamer philosophically complicit with Nazi Germany and Soviet Russia. This is due to the way in which he condemns modernity and the Enlightenment. Wolin explains that Gadamer's criticism of modernity is 'all too reminiscent of those German mandarin indictments of bourgeois *Zivilisation* that were standard issue in the 1920s'.⁹ It was such rhetoric that brought about an environment in which Nazism could develop and eventually flourish. The modernity of Weimar Germany was heavily criticised by Hitler and used as a means to make fascism palatable to the wider public; Gadamer lived through such an era and his continued condemnation of modernity displays to Wolin that he 'exhibited a distinct failure to learn'.¹⁰ Meanwhile, Wolin also notes that Gadamer rejected human rights due to the fact that they are 'too redolent of the Enlightenment's search for first principles'.¹¹ The conclusion of such a view would be to indirectly endorse the form of government witnessed in the Soviet Union, another authoritarian state which most now condemn as undesirable to mimic. We are thus left in a situation in which Gadamer's conception of prejudice seems to leave one in a situation where they have to defend regimes that are now seen as immoral.

It must also be noted that criticisms of Gadamer's conception of prejudice can also relate to emancipatory struggles in the West. Susan-Judith Hoffman explains that some feminist thinkers are opposed to Gadamer's views, since 'the appeal to the authority of tradition seems to be an affront to the intellectual and social emancipation of women'.¹² This makes logical sense considering the fact that Western society traditionally enforced patriarchal values, leading to the subjugation of women. If we rely too heavily on tradition, the emancipation of women is hindered from becoming a reality, even if prejudices are able to shift slightly. We are therefore left in a situation in which Gadamer's conception of prejudice justifies morally problematic regimes, whilst hindering emancipatory movements in the West.

Despite these concerns, there are various defences of Gadamer to consider. Richard Palmer directly considers the views espoused by Wolin and believes that they misrepresent what Gadamer was proposing. He explains Gadamer never argues that 'we should just piously surrender to tradition or accept authority just because it is there'. What Gadamer does accept is 'that there is such a thing as legitimate authority, just as there are some prejudgements that are fruitful, important, and necessary before we can understand something'.¹³ Essentially, whilst modernity and the Enlightenment are criticised by Gadamer, it is dishonest to argue that it leads from this that we should uncritically accept all authority. This is a development on Wachterhauser's explanation that prejudices can shift over time. To further understand this view we can also focus on the prior argument made regarding Gadamer's view being a hindrance to the emancipation of women. This potential view was raised by Hoffman, but she goes on to explain why these concerns are somewhat unfounded, arguing that 'the conflict between Gadamer's rehabilitation of tradition and the feminist call for emancipatory ideology critique is minor' compared to the ways in which Gadamer's views are compatible with feminism. The concern is minor since 'Gadamer explicitly states that an over-reliance on the authority of any tradition can spawn illegitimate prejudices'.¹⁴ This point that Gadamer does

⁹ Wolin, 2000, p. 45

¹⁰ Wolin, 2000, p. 45

¹¹ Wolin, 2000, p. 45

¹² Hoffman, 2003, p. 93

¹³ Palmer, 2002, p. 479

¹⁴ Hoffman, 2003, p. 93

not intend to rely too heavily on tradition is consistently ignored by his critics, severely weakening the arguments they make against his philosophy. Hoffman goes on to explain that Gadamer does not intend to rely too heavily on the Enlightenment or its Romantic opponent, since neither can ‘accurately describe the historical nature of tradition and the work it effects in the process of understanding’. Instead, ‘Gadamer proposes a historically situated account of reason that moves and lives in the universality of language’, which works against prior epistemological frameworks which constitute ‘the kind of reductive metanarrative feminist theorizing hopes to overcome’.¹⁵ Essentially, Gadamer’s rejection on more reductive schools of thought is heavily compatible with feminist theory, since those epistemological frameworks he opposes are too simplistic to be placed within a historical background and develop over time. Gadamer’s use of prejudice and its ability to shift over time means that it can both account for historic situatedness and modern contexts, allowing it to be an ally in the emancipation of women. We are thus left in a situation in which Gadamer’s conception of prejudice does not justify authoritarian regimes and can be used to aid emancipatory movements, rather than hinder them.

To conclude, when Gadamer refers to prejudice, he is referring to a prejudgement which is made before a situation can be fully examined. Such prejudgements are needed due to the fact that we make interpretations of the world after we already find ourselves in it, meaning that pure reason is limited in what it can teach us. As a result of this, authority and tradition become important parts of how we understand the world. This leads to many criticisms of Gadamer’s philosophy as being a means to limit both epistemological and social progress. Despite these concerns, it can be shown that these criticisms are unfounded due to the fact that prejudices can shift and that not all authority is legitimate. As such, Gadamer’s conception of prejudice should be adopted when we attempt to interpret the world.

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¹⁵ Hoffman, 2003, pp. 93-94

The Limitations of Block's 'Overflow' Argument With Respect to the Possibility of the Study of Consciousness

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I: THE PHENOMENAL/ACCESS DISTINCTION & THE STUDY OF CONSCIOUSNESS

Phenomenal consciousness [PC] and access consciousness [AC] are properties of mental states. After Nagel,¹ what makes a state P-conscious for Block is that 'there is something that it is like to be in that state'.² Accordingly, PC might be equated with experience, and the contents of PC at a given time with the totality of one's experiential states at that same time. As such, PC requires *Awareness*:³ a mental state is *Aware* if and only if it its 'content is in some sense 'presented' to the self' or 'comes with a sense of ownership or... has 'meshness''.⁴ By contrast a mental state is A-conscious if it can directly, rationally control our actions; AC does not require *Awareness* to have this property.

Whether PC and AC are in fact distinct is an empirical question, namely 'whether a subject can have an experience he does not and cannot think about',⁵ or indeed vice-versa. But though Block presents this as a single question, I think there are two separate but related claims here:

Weak Claim

A subject S can have a mental state which is P-conscious but which *isn't* A-conscious.

Strong Claim

A subject P can have a mental state S which is P-conscious but which *can't* be A-conscious.

Clearly, the strong claim modally entails the weak one. If a participant can have at least one mental state which is P-conscious but which *can't* be A-conscious, then a participant can have a mental state which is P-conscious but which *isn't* A-conscious. But it does not follow that because any given P-conscious mental state isn't A-conscious that it couldn't have been made A-conscious.

This modal difference matters because if the strong claim is true, the possibility of there being a scientific study of consciousness is under threat. Presumably, to study and theorise

¹ Nagel, 1974

² Block, 2002: 206

³ The term is capitalised because it's being used in a technical sense.

⁴ Block, 2007

⁵ Block, 2008: 289

about consciousness, we need to know at least superficially about the contents of conscious mental states. It seems reasonable to think of mental states in both AC and PC as being meaningfully ‘conscious’ according to our pre-theoretic understanding of consciousness. So any thorough investigation into or theory about consciousness should address the contents of both PC and AC.

How are we to investigate what the contents of an individual’s P-conscious mental states are? Reporting the content of one’s mental state (at least hypothetically) makes the mental state’s content indirectly accessible to a third-party.⁶ And as it stands, reporting seems to be the only way of even superficially determining the contents of a participant’s P-conscious mental states.⁷ But reporting the contents of a mental state requires it by definition to be A-conscious; for reporting is an action, and only contents of A-conscious mental states can directly influence our actions. So, currently, the only way for us to investigate the contents of a P-conscious mental state is for these contents also to be A-conscious.

The history of scientific progress warns any philosopher against boldly asserting that this will always be the case, i.e. that we will always be solely reliant on self-reporting to study the contents of a mental state. But until there’s a great methodological advance in the cognitive science of consciousness, we can only investigate the contents of P-conscious mental states which are also A-conscious. Hence, if there are mental states which are meaningfully conscious in the sense of being P-conscious, but which are inaccessible (i.e., if the strong claim is true), then we are likely limited in furthering our study of consciousness. For if we can’t gain knowledge about the contents of these mental states, our knowledge about the nature of such states of consciousness beyond the simple fact of their existence is limited. As Cohen & Dennett write in their criticism of Block (and others) theories of a PC/AC distinction: ‘inaccessible conscious states... inherently prevent the possibility of confirmation or falsification [of scientific hypotheses about the nature of conscious states]’.⁸ Accordingly, any scientific investigation into or theorising about such conscious mental states is greatly restricted – at least, as long as we are reliant on reporting to know the content of mental states.

This problem is particularly relevant to the question of whether it’s even possible to give an answer to the so-called ‘hard problem of consciousness’ – namely, what it’s like to experience something, to be in a certain mental state.⁹ If we can’t find out about the contents of some inaccessible P-conscious mental states even in the vaguest terms, then there is no hope *ab initio* of ever providing a rudimentary understanding of what it’s like to be in at least *some* mental states. And without such an understanding it isn’t at all clear how we could begin to provide a neuroscientific theory of the causes of the contents of such mental states (if this is even possible), or even to correlate mental state contents with neural states – for we would have no content to causally explain by, or associate with, neural states. At most a defender of physicalism could say that mental states are physical events, but they could never say *which* mental states are *which* mental events,¹⁰ and so they could never provide an interesting or useful causal explanation of consciousness. So again, the existence of mental states in PC but not AC would greatly limit the possibility of a theory of consciousness.

⁶ Chalmers, 2010

⁷ Cohen & Dennett, 2011

⁸ Ibid. 361

⁹ Chalmers, 2010

¹⁰ Nagel, 1974

But if no individual P-conscious mental state is inherently incapable of being A-conscious – if no P-conscious mental state is inherently inaccessible – then there must exist some conditions for any given P-conscious mental state by which it *can* be made A-conscious. Such conditions could be, for example, the use of a different cue in an attentional task. And as long as these conditions can be discovered for any mental state we wish to investigate then we can make any P-conscious mental state A-conscious, and thus make its contents susceptible to at least a superficial investigation and analysis. Thus if we can show that Block's argument fails to support the strong claim, we can significantly reduce the threat his position poses to the possibility of deepening our understanding of consciousness. Of course, this is not to say that by undermining the support for one of Block's particular claims that consciousness will magically become scientifically investigable – it's merely to show that the cognitive scientist of consciousness has dodged this particular bullet.

II: BLOCK'S 'OVERFLOW' ARGUMENT

As we have defined them, there is no reason *a priori* to think that the mental states in PC and AC must or mustn't always coincide. To demonstrate that PC and AC are (at least weakly) distinct we must show empirically that at a given time AC and PC aren't co-extensive: that there is some mental state (or information contained therein) which is in one but not the other. Block seeks to do this by claiming that there are perceptual contents of the visual system which are P-conscious but not A-conscious, meaning that the contents of PC is greater than or 'overflows' the contents of AC.¹¹

It should be noted that Block does not explicitly argue for the strong claim on the basis of the overflow argument – though he does posit this as an explanation of behavioural findings from patients with visuospatial extinction.¹² Rather the target of this article are those like Cohen and Dennett who seem to suggest that those who buy into a PC/AC distinction (what they call 'dissociative theories') on the basis of overflow arguments are committing themselves to the strong claim, and thus thinking that there are – for the foreseeable future – significant limitations to the scientific study of consciousness.¹³

Block's paradigmatic evidential basis for this overflowing comes from an experiment by Sperling.¹⁴ Sperling displayed 3x4 arrays of alphanumeric characters to participants for 50ms, followed by a blank screen. Participants reported seeing all twelve stimuli in the array and identified them correctly as letters. However, when Sperling asked participants to spontaneously recall which letters they had seen where, they were unable to report the location and identity of more than four accurately. Yet when cued by a tone shortly after the array had disappeared to indicate which row of the stimulus to recall in what is known as the *partial report* condition, participants could almost always accurately report the location and identity of all the letters in whichever row was cued. This is known as the *partial report superiority effect*.

What Block interprets this effect to mean is that, at the point of array presentation, participants experience the entire array in all its detail, but are unable to access/report all the

¹¹ Block, 2011

¹² Block, 2008

¹³ Cohen & Dennett, 2011

¹⁴ Sperling, 1960

information they have. For they apparently *can* recall any bit of it in detail after presentation *if cued*. In which case, there must be a functional distinction between PC and AC. For there is information in sensory impressions that is experienced (and thus in PC) but which can't (globally) effect our actions – as demonstrated by it being unreportable – and thus must not be in AC.¹⁵

The crucial assumption in the argument here is the *counterfactual assumption*:

Counterfactual Assumption

'Any aspect of experience present in a partial report condition *would* have been present even if some other partial report had been cued.'¹⁶

For it's this assumption which allows Block to claim that the whole array is present in PC, even if it doesn't make it into AC. This assumption in turn relies on the *independence* assumption – that 'a subject's experience of the stimulus in a [partial report] condition is independent of which report is cued because the cue comes only after display offset'.¹⁷ For otherwise the experience of the array and the experience of the cue could in fact be one, inseparable conscious event. In which case it would make no sense to talk counterfactually about what *would* have been recalled from a *given* presentation if another row had been cued. For a difference in cuing would result in a different experience altogether. While there may be good reasons to doubt the independence assumption,¹⁸ as I will show later, it's Block's counterfactual assumption that prevents him from establishing the *strong* claim. And it's the strong claim that poses the greatest risk to the possibility of the study of consciousness.

Before proceeding we should distinguish between *generic* and *specific* phenomenology.¹⁹ When participants in a Sperling-array task claim that they have seen 'all' of the array, they are able to report an experience of a generic phenomenon – namely that for every letter *c*, they see *c* as a letter-like form. But they can't report a *specific* phenomenon for every letter – that is, they can't report every letter *c* as being an 'A' or a 'B' or a 'C', etc.. That this sort of generic, perceptually degraded mental state is A-conscious for participants is not disputed. What Block must do for his argument to support either of his claims is first show that participants in a Sperling-array task have a P-conscious mental state of a *specific* phenomenon for each letter – even though demonstrably not all these mental states can be made A-conscious *on a given trial*. For this is what it would mean for PC to overflow AC.

If Block *is* able to show that participants in a Sperling-array task experience a specific phenomenon for each letter then this would appear to be sufficient (given the argument so far, together with the independence assumption) to support his weak claim – that a subject S can have a mental state which is P-conscious but which *isn't* A-conscious. But even if he can do this his argument so far on the basis of Sperling's experiment isn't sufficient to demonstrate

¹⁵ Whether mental states which can affect some actions but not others count as being A-conscious is a matter of taxonomical debate. At the very least we might say they are not *fully* A-conscious. But for the sake of simplicity in this paper I will assume that for a mental state to be A-conscious it must be globally accessible to any decision/action process, and thus that unreportable mental states are necessarily not A-conscious.

¹⁶ Phillips, 2011: 386 [emph. added]

¹⁷ Ibid. 386

¹⁸ Ibid.

¹⁹ Ibid. 402

the stronger claim – that a subject S can have a mental state which is P-conscious but which *can't* be A-conscious. And it isn't clear how Block's argument ever could.

III: THE COUNTERFACTUAL ASSUMPTION & THE POSSIBILITY OF THE STUDY OF CONSCIOUSNESS

Block's argument, as I have highlighted, relies on the consequence of the counterfactual assumption that (at least prior to the cue) any of the letters in the array *could* be recalled if they were subsequently cued. This assumption is necessary for him to argue evidentially that PC truly overflows AC. For it allows him to infer that, prior to the cue being given, a specific phenomenon for each letter exists in PC, and thus that it's only after the cue is given and some of these phenomena become A-conscious that others are incapable to be made A-conscious.

Without the counterfactual assumption, the only reason to think that PC overflows AC is on the basis of the self-reports of participants, who usually feel as if they experience a specific phenomenon for each letter in the array. But opponents of Block's approach can simply say that this experience is illusory – that in fact the participants only have a generic phenomenon for the unattended letters, even if they think they have a specific phenomenon for each letter. And the evidence, it seems to me, doesn't favour one interpretation over another.²⁰ It could be the case that people genuinely have P-conscious experiences of a specific phenomenon for each letter, and that these mental states overflows AC (and are thus unreportable). Or it could be the case that there are no A-conscious specific phenomena which weren't already P-conscious, and the purported P-conscious experience of a specific phenomenon for each letter is merely an illusion – the product of the existence of generic phenomena in both AC and PC for the unattended letters. Both of these contradictory hypotheses will produce the same outcomes in whatever tasks we give participants, as long as we are solely reliant on the reportability of the contents of a mental state to demonstrate that it's P-conscious. So Block's appeal to the self-reports of the participants is too speculative on its own to be good grounds to think that PC overflows AC.

So the counterfactual assumption is essential to motivating either of Block's claims. But doesn't it contradict the strong claim, that a subject P can have a mental state S which is P-conscious but which *can't* be A-conscious?

It depends on what it means to say that a mental state *can't* be made A-conscious. What Block can't mean, if he is to maintain the counterfactual assumption, is that there are mental states which *could never* be made A-conscious. As in, that there are P-conscious mental states for which there exist *no* conditions (say, a different attentional cue) by which they could ever be made A-conscious. Let's call this the *threatening version* of the strong claim, for it is this conclusion about the relationship between AC and PC which would threaten the possibility of studying consciousness. I hope it is clear that the threatening version of the strong claim is in direct contradiction with the counterfactual assumption.

For his argument to be coherent, what Block must therefore mean by the strong claim then is that, *after cueing*, there are P-conscious states which can't be made A-conscious. But this leaves open the possibility that there are conditions by which these states *could* have been made accessible – namely if they were cued. In which case these states aren't inaccessible and

²⁰ For a discussion of more recent empirical work on overflow and its failure to be persuasive, see Philips, 2016.

thus unreportable *simpliciter*, for there are conditions by which these states can be made reportable. So even if AC overflows PC, the way in which it does so poses no true threat for the possibility of the study of consciousness. For the contents of any mental state in PC *can* be made (at least superficially) reportable, if the correct condition obtains. (It would be an empirical task for cognitive science to determine which conditions were needed to make which P-conscious states A-conscious.)

So if someone in Block's shoes wanted to maintain the threatening version of strong claim then they would have to abandon the counterfactual assumption. But if they did this, it isn't clear how the argument could get off the ground in the first place, because there would be no way of even inferring what the contents of PC were (except those contents of PC which were also in AC) – not at least while the only indication of what is in PC is for individuals to report the contents of PC, which requires that these PC states are also A-conscious. But without any way of inferring what the contents of PC are over and above those PC mental states which are also in AC, there are no grounds for thinking that PC overflows AC – not at least if we think that the evidence from self-reporting isn't strong enough on its own. But if this is the case, then Block's argument fails at the first hurdle.

To summarise: Block's argument needs the counterfactual assumption to motivate the view that PC overflows AC. But if this counterfactual assumption is true, then there are no P-conscious mental states which can *never* be made A-conscious. In which case the threatening version of the strong claim must be false. And further rejecting the counterfactual assumption – as would be necessary if one wanted to make the threatening version of the strong claim – results in there being no reason to think in the first place that there are P-conscious mental states which aren't also A-conscious. In which case the argument for any version of the strong claim couldn't even get off the ground. So there is no good, coherent reason for believing the threatening version of the strong claim.

It should be noted that all this discussion leaves open whether AC could overflow PC – a direction Block has taken in other arguments, focussing on evidence from patients with hemispatial neglect.²¹ Discussion of these matters is beyond the scope of the present paper, though they may prove more fruitful for Block and his adherents in demonstrating a factual distinction between PC and AC. But even if AC overflowed PC this wouldn't pose the same threat to the possibility of the study of consciousness that PC overflowing AC would. For it wouldn't mean that there are mental states which are meaningfully conscious yet unreportable.

CONCLUSION

Even if we accept Block's overflow argument for the division between AC and PC, it does not follow that there are P-conscious mental states which can *never* be made A-conscious. For Block's motivation for the existence of specific phenomena in PC relies on the counterfactual assumption that for any given trial any given phenomenon *could* be recalled, if there were different conditions with respect to (attentional) cueing. And this assumption stands in direct contradiction to the threatening version of the strong claim. Further, it's unclear how one could motivate the view that there really were specific phenomena in PC which could never be made A-conscious without the counterfactual assumption; not, at least, given the current impossibility of finding out about the contents of P-conscious mental states without reporting. But if this is the case, then there is no good reason to think that there are mental states in PC

²¹ Block, 2008

whose contents, given the right conditions, are inaccessible and thus (at least superficially) unreportable.

In which case accepting Block's division between PC and AC on the basis of his 'overflow' argument doesn't require one to think that there are inherently unreportable, yet conscious, mental states – rather it implicitly requires one to *reject* the threatening version of strong claim. So *pace* those like Cohen and Dennett, one can comfortably maintain that there's a meaningful dissociation between AC and PC without necessarily threatening the possibility of the scientific study of consciousness.²²

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²² The author extends his thanks to McIntosh, Noble and Le Poidevin for their advice while writing this article.

Don't Misread my Body—A Steinian Approach to Bodily Alienation

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IN THE SOCIAL CONSTITUTION OF THE BODY: Bodily Alienation and Bodily Integrity, Celine Leboeuf proposes ‘bodily alienation’ as a concept to describe and ‘diagnose’ the egregious relationship that we can adopt towards our body in different contexts. According to her, ‘to be alienated from one’s body is to have a defective relation to one’s body, and more specifically, a defective way of relating to one’s bodily activities.’¹ In this piece, she gives two big examples of occasions in which people are alienated from their bodies. Firstly, she describes the relationship that women might have to their bodies when they try to abide to a particular ‘body type.’ Secondly, she describes the experiences of members of oppressed groups (specifically Black people and women) as they become subject to the gaze of a dominant group. In explaining these examples, she argues that a consequence of the gaze for the victim is deworlde d activity, that is, activity that fails to establish a successful connection between the victim and the people and objects around them. Based on this, she argues that bodily alienation (as deworlde d activity) can also produce social alienation.

In this paper, I will argue that applying Stein’s framework of the empathic act and bodily expression can clarify the relationship between bodily alienation and social alienation that Leboeuf described. I will do this by showing that, in Stein’s framework, bodily expression is a crucial pathway to understanding the experiences of others. When we fail to understand the meaning of the bodily expressions of others, we are at risk of alienating them socially. To demonstrate this, I will first reconstruct Leboeuf’s theorization of the phenomenon of bodily alienation, paying particular attention to her understanding of deworlde d activity. Then, I will expose certain worries I have about Leboeuf’s claim about the connection between social and bodily alienation. After this, I will provide an overview of Stein’s understanding of the empathic act and the role of bodily expression in it. I will then use this reconstruction of her view to reinterpret the original examples in Leboeuf’s account of bodily alienation in a way that makes the relationship between bodily and social alienation clearer. I will finish by responding to a worry about the compatibility between Stein’s and Leboeuf’s frameworks.

BODILY ALIENATION AND DEWORLDED ACTIVITY

In this section I will expand upon Leboeuf’s characterization of bodily alienation as ‘deworlde d activity.’ To do so, I will reconstruct her account by focusing on the examples she provides of instances of this type of activity. These examples come from narratives of victims

¹ Leboeuf, 2016, p. 1

of the white and male gaze, and they illustrate the ways in which dominant groups (such as white people and cis men) can perpetuate their privileged social status by alienating oppressed individuals from their own bodies.

The examples Leboeuf provides are the following:

Passage 1: The White Gaze

And then we were given the occasion to confront the white gaze. An unusual weight descended on us. The real world robbed us of our share. In the white world, the man of color encounters difficulties in elaborating his body schema. [...] As a result, the body schema, attacked in several places, collapsed, giving way to an epidermal racial schema. In the train, it was a question of being aware of my body, no longer in the third person but in triple. In the train, instead of one seat, they left me two or three. I was no longer enjoying myself. I was unable to discover the feverish coordinates of the world. I existed in triple: I was taking up room. I approached the Other...and the Other, evasive, hostile, but not opaque, transparent, and absent, vanished. Nausea.²

Passage 2: Responding to the White Gaze

Despite what I think about myself, how I am for-myself, her perspective, her third person account, seeps into my consciousness. I catch a glimpse of myself through her eyes and just for that moment I experience some form of double consciousness, but what I see does not shatter my identity or unglue my sense of moral decency. Despite how my harmless actions might be constructed within her white racialized framework of seeing the world, I remain capable of resisting the white gaze's entry into my own self-vision. I am angered. Indeed, I find her gaze disconcerting and despicable. As I undergo this double consciousness, my agency remains intact. My sense of who I am and how I am capable of being – that is, the various ways in which I am able to deploy an oppositional form of self-representation – has not been eradicated. I know that I am not a criminal or a rapist. At no point do I either desire to be white or begin to hate my dark skin. And while I recognize the historical power of the white gaze, a perspective that carries the weight of white racist history and everyday encounters of spoken and unspoken anti-Black racism, I do not seek white recognition, that is, the white woman's recognition. Though I would prefer that she does not see me through the distorting Black imago, I am not dependent upon her recognition. For me to seek white recognition as a stimulus to a healthy sense of self-understanding is a form of pathology.³

Passage 3: The Male Gaze

“At thirteen, I walked around bare legged, in a short dress,” another woman told me. “A man, sniggering, made a comment about my fat calves. The next day, my mother made me wear stockings and lengthen my skirt, but I will never forget the shock I suddenly felt in seeing myself seen.” The little girl feels as though her body is escaping her, that it is no longer the clear expression of her individuality; it becomes foreign to her; and at the same moment, she is grasped by others as a thing; in the street, eyes follow her; her body is subject to comments; she would like to become invisible; she is afraid of her flesh and afraid to show her flesh.⁴

² Fanon, 1952, pp. 90–92

³ Yancy, 2008, pp. 847–848

⁴ Beauvoir, 2011, p. 321

Passage 4: Responding to the Male Gaze

“See yourself in wool.” Yes, I would like that. I see myself in that wool, heavy, thick, warm, swinging around my legs in rippling caresses. And who might I be? An artist, perhaps, somewhat well established, thinking of my next series. Or maybe I will be a lecturer coming off the airplane, greeted by my colleagues, who will host me at a five-star restaurant. Or perhaps I’m off to meet my new lover, who will greet me face to face and stroke my wool. But who’s this coming up behind me? Bringing me down to his size? Don’t look back, I can’t look back, his gaze is unidirectional, he sees me, but I can’t see him. But no—I am seeing myself in wool seeing him see me. Is it that I cannot see myself without seeing myself being seen? So I need him there to unite me and my image of myself? Who does he think I am? So I am split. I see myself, and I see myself being seen. Might such a split express a woman’s relation to clothes, to images of clothes, to images of herself in clothes, whoever she imagines herself to be? Can we separate the panels?⁵

According to Leboeuf, there are some commonalities in these examples. All of them narrate how individuals from a socially oppressed group experience a break in their understanding of themselves after feeling the gaze of a dominant group. Notice how in examples 1 and 2, the Black individuals that are subject to a white gaze in a train cabin and an elevator describe acquiring a ‘third-person’ point of view: ‘I was unable to discover the feverish coordinates of the world. I existed in triple: I was taking up room’ and ‘despite what I think about myself, how I am for-myself, her perspective [that of the white woman in the elevator], her third person account, seeps into my consciousness.’

Similarly, examples 3 and 4 illustrate cases in which women subject to the male gaze acquire a consciousness of what they represent for that gaze. Example 3 narrates the passage into adolescence and the new consciousness it brings to girls of their position as objects of sexual desire: ‘The little girl feels as though her body is escaping her, that it is no longer the clear expression of her individuality; it becomes foreign to her; and at the same moment, she is grasped by others as a thing; in the street, eyes follow her; her body is subject to comments.’ Example 4, on the other hand, expands upon the consequences that this consciousness has for the construction of the identity of the woman. In this example we see the male gaze as an intrusive, disruptive glance that threatens to be present constantly and to bias the decisions the woman can make regarding her own body image.

In all of these examples, the gaze generates a consciousness in the individuals of what their bodies represent for a foreign individual/group. In the case of Black persons, they gain a perspective of their bodies as an intrusion and a threat. In the case of women, they gain an understanding of their bodies as an ever-sought object of sexual desire for men. And this, Leboeuf argues, has consequences for the way in which these individuals relate to their own bodies when this ‘third person’ view of their bodies is internalized – that is, when they start viewing themselves as this external perspective portrays them. Specifically, she argues that (1) it disrupts their capacity to act skillfully in the world (or to have ‘worlded activity,’ as Leboeuf terms it) and (2) disrupts their capacity for social integration in the world (that is, it alienates them from their social environment because it annuls their capacity to interact with other people).

First, I will deal with consequence number 1. If we look back at example 1, we find that a salient aspect of the experience of the white gaze is a sense of disorientation and

⁵ Young, 2005, p. 321

awkwardness. Leboeuf interprets this disorientation as a failure to fulfil mundane activities that would otherwise have no hindrance, were it not for the presence of the white gaze.⁶ For example, the failure of the Black individual to find *one* seat in the train to sit on and the feeling that the ‘the real world robbed us of our share’ demonstrate a break in the daily dealings of the individual in the world.

This break is characterized in Fanon’s example as a breakdown of the ‘bodily schema’ and a replacement of it for a ‘racial epidermal schema.’ The term bodily schema was proposed by Maurice Merleau-Ponty as a way to explain the phenomenology of skillful action, and – grossly put – it is the intuitive, practical understanding of our body and its spatio-temporal location that allow us to interact with objects around us in an uninterrupted and efficient manner. The racial epidermal schema is a radicalization of this concept proposed by Fanon, and he understands it as the image of the Black/colored body constructed from the perspective of the white person that is made out of racial stereotypes about Black individuals (like the stereotype that Black persons are aggressive, or that their bodies are built to endure much more pain than white bodies).

It is beyond the scope of this paper to analyze in depth what these terms mean and what their relationship is, but there is one connection between these concepts and Leboeuf understanding of bodily alienation: in Fanon’s example, it is the realization of this view that the white people of the train have of the Black body that disrupts the Black person’s capacity to move around in the world. For Leboeuf, it is the internalization of the dominant gaze that disrupts the activity of the victims. Internalizing this view means seeing oneself through the perspective of the dominant other. In the case of the Black person in the train, this means seeing themselves as an intruder, as someone that does not belong in the train. In the case of the man in the elevator, this means seeing himself as a rapist and therefore someone to be afraid of.

This also explains the harm done to the women in examples 3 and 4. As Leboeuf states it, ‘what wreaks havoc in both cases is the internalization of another perspective.’⁷ In these cases, viewing themselves as the objects of desire of men makes them feel ‘ashamed’ and ‘afraid’ of their own bodies. In Beauvoir’s words, ‘she would like to become invisible; she is afraid of her flesh and afraid to show her flesh.’ This has consequences for how the woman behaves in the world. In *The Second Sex*, Beauvoir enlists some of the consequences that these feelings have for girls and women. She describes, for instance, that the intention of women to communicate with men might be disrupted by the blushing and avoidance of eye contact that are expressions of the shame felt by them. The fear they feel in walking through a street where they might expect a male harasser might lead to them walking ‘awkwardly’ or anxiously.⁸

But how is it that this internalization leads to interference with activity? At this point, I would like to introduce her concept of deworldeed activity. This first requires a closer look at her understanding of skillful action. According to Leboeuf, skillful action in the world is not necessarily action that completely fulfils the intentions. For example, to skillfully play a guitar, it is not necessary that the melody I desire to play sounds exactly like what I actually end up playing in the guitar. Rather, what defines skillful action is a form of ‘intuition’ about how to use things. Additionally, skillful action is not the result of ‘agency’ necessarily. That is, for an action to be skillful, it is not necessary that I have a capacity to decide to do it. For Leboeuf, skillful action is something that is ‘drawn from the world,’ it is a result of the meaning that the

⁶ 2016, p. 73

⁷ 2016, p. 82

⁸ Beauvoir, 2011, pp. 321–323

objects we encounter in the world have for us.⁹ Thus, I skillfully use a chair when I understand that it is meant for me to be seated on, and I approach it with such intention.

Worlded activity is activity that results from us 'responding to a call' from the objects around us. This 'call' corresponds to a certain understanding that we have about how we should use the objects around us. To return to the example of the chair, we can say it 'calls us' to sit on it because we understand that chairs are meant to be used for sitting down. In this sense, worlded activity is activity that results in social integration. That is, it allows us to act in ways that 'make sense' for those around us too. As I mentioned earlier, worlded activity is one of the expressions of 'bodily realization' for Leboeuf.

On counterpart, deworlde d activity is activity that comes across as incoherent to those around us and that does not allow for us to use the objects in the world as they are meant to. Deworlde d activity is, in her view, a hallmark of bodily alienation. As she explains of the first example, "the world can no longer draw skillful activity out of him [the Black person in the train]. The gaze of the dominant other has taken up the place that the world occupied in the origination of skillful movement."¹⁰ That is, because the Black person's understanding of their own body is replaced by that of the White oppressor, the world ceases to solicit action from them. The same occurs to the woman that is a victim of the male gaze. This is a consequence of the image that oppressors have of their victims as objects in the world that are incapable of acting skillfully like they do (think 'Black people are stupid,' or 'women are passive').

With this in mind, I will discuss the second consequence of bodily alienation. That is, social alienation. According to Leboeuf, there are two ways in which the victim of the gaze is alienated socially by virtue of their bodily alienation. On the one hand, she argues that, because of the sense of rupture with their own understanding of their bodies, victims are unable to respond to the gaze. They are unable to confront their oppressors. On the other hand, victims are unable to 'build a world together' with their oppressors.¹¹ In the case of the Black person, the prejudices that the white oppressors share about them prevent them from empathizing with the Black person. In the case of the women subject to the male gaze, the desire to hide their bodies either withdraws them from social interactions with them or make them 'awkward' and 'uncomfortable.'

I think there are two issues with Leboeuf's account of this phenomenon so far, and I hope to shine light on them by integrating insights from Stein's treatment of empathy and bodily expression. Before that, I will expand upon the limitations I see in Leboeuf's account of bodily alienation.

LIMITATIONS IN LEBOEUF'S ACCOUNT OF BODILY ALIENATION

There are two crucial points I think Leboeuf's discussion omits. On the one hand, she states that bodily alienation leads to social alienation because it prevents victims from 'building a world' with their oppressors and from interacting with them efficiently. However, she does not go into detail as to how it is that bodily alienation leads to such consequences. It is clear that the prejudices that white people hold about Black people might prevent them from interacting with them. Similarly, it is clear that the objectifying actions of men can generate fear and shame in women. But I do not clearly see from Leboeuf's account what place bodily

⁹ 2016, pp. 84–85

¹⁰ 2016, p. 96

¹¹ Leboeuf, 2016, p. 93

alienation holds in this. She treats bodily alienation as a cause for the social alienation instead of as a consequence of it, but how is it that it causes social alienation? I think the way in which the bodily movements and expressions of the victims are interpreted by the perpetrators might play a role in this, but Leboeuf does not go into detail about this.

On the other hand, her account assumes that there is a socially shared meaning of the world around us that allows objects in the world to ‘solicit’ actions from us. Presumably, the meaning that the chair in the train had for the Black person changed after experiencing the gaze of whites in the train. It is also likely that the meaning that an empty street at night has for a cis man is different for a woman that has experienced the male gaze and sees herself in danger in such a street. Once again, though, Leboeuf does not clarify the link between the bodily manifestations of these differences in the meaning of the objects in the world for the oppressed and the oppressor (the brisk walk of the woman in the street, the confusion of the Black man in the train), and their social effect. I think that to understand the relationship between social and bodily alienation clearly, an exploration of this bodily manifestations and their interpretation by the people that witness them is necessary.

In the next sections, I will argue that Stein’s treatment of empathy and bodily expression can resolve these issues by explaining the role that the bodily expressions of the victims – and the meaning they might have for their oppressors – play in their social interactions with oppressors.

STEIN’S THEORY OF EXPRESSION AND OUR EXPERIENCE OF THE OTHER

Stein’s treatment of the concept of empathy follows Husserlian phenomenology. I think this offers a potential bridge between Stein’s thought and that of Leboeuf, particularly considering that both of them deal with the phenomenon of social understanding of the other.

For Stein, our understanding of the experience of the other derives from empathy. Empathy for her is not a particular moral or aesthetic value, but the procedure that allows us to reach an understanding of others’ experience based on our own experiences. Thus, she defines the question of empathy as “the perceiving of foreign subjects and their experience.”¹² The problem of how we perceive the others is for Stein a fundamental problem of phenomenology because, even though we cannot be certain of the existence of other individuals around me and even if we cast doubt upon their existence, we are still left with an experience of these others as objects of our perception. And this is not merely an experience of them as physical objects, but of ‘lived bodies’ – of centers of perception just as ‘I’ am.¹³ (I will expand upon this notion later).

Stein characterizes this perception of the other as a series of steps: “(1) the emergence of experience, (2) the fulfilling explication, and (3) the complete objectification of the explained experience.”¹⁴ She characterizes these series of steps as follows:

So now to empathy itself. Here, too, we are dealing with an act which is primordial as present experience though non-primordial in content (...). When it arises before me all at once, it faces me as an object (such as the sadness I ‘read in another’s face’). But when I inquire into its implied tendencies (try to bring another’s mood to clear

¹² 1989, p. 1

¹³ 1989, p. 5

¹⁴ 1989, p. 10

givenness to myself), the content, having pulled me into it, is no longer really an object. I am no longer turned to the content but to the object of it, am at the subject of the content in the original's subject place. And only after successfully executed clarification, does the content again face me as an object.¹⁵

I will introduce an example to explain this passage further. Let us take, for instance, Stein's own mention of 'reading the sadness' in another person's face. If a close friend approaches me and I see they are in a sad mood (by identifying a grimace in their face and tears coming out of their eyes, for instance), I first have a non-primordial experience of the sadness of the person. That is, I experience their sadness not in the way I would experience my own sadness (as originating in my own self), but nonetheless have an experience of their experience of sadness. This is the point when we read the person's sadness in their face. After this, I would try to understand the sadness felt by the person (perhaps by inquiring into its cause). At this point, I now have an experience of sadness itself ('am at the subject of the content in the original's subject place'). Finally, after experiencing this sadness in a primordial way (that is, as originating in myself), I can then again see the sadness in my friend as belonging to them with an understanding of the feeling based on my own experience of it.

This passage provides a good point of entrance into Stein's discussion of bodily expressions and feelings. First, I will expand upon her understanding of her living body. According to Stein, we experience our bodies not as 'externally given' physical objects. That is, we do not only have a perception of our bodies' movement as we do of objects we encounter in perception. In addition to having a perception of our bodies as entities in the world that occupy space, we also experience our bodies as the 'zero point of orientation.'¹⁶ This means that we experience our bodies as the entity from which we experience every object around us: 'what refers to the "I" has no distance from the zero point, and all that is given at a distance from the zero point is also given at a distance from the "I".'¹⁷

An important aspect of this living body is its capacity to feel. That is, to have feelings (such as peacefulness, restfulness, hunger, arousal). Stein argues that feelings always manifest in a certain way, and this manifestation stems from the living body: '(...) as I live through the feeling, I feel it terminate in an expression or release an expression out of itself. Feeling in its pure essence is not something complete in itself. As it were, it is loaded with an energy which must be unloaded.'¹⁸ According to Stein, there are several possible manifestations of feelings. One of them is action. For example, when I hit the table out of anger. Another one might be an act of reflection through which I become aware of my feeling as an object of perception. A crucial one for the purposes of this essay is bodily expression.

Stein argues that, as we experience a feeling and an expression of it, we also have a bodily perception of such expression: '(...) I not only feel how feeling is poured into expression and "unloaded" in it, but at the same time I have this expression given in bodily perception.'¹⁹ For instance, our feelings of shame are accompanied by a bodily perception of a rush of blood to the cheeks (we blush).

¹⁵ Stein, 1989, p. 10

¹⁶ Stein, 1989, p. 43

¹⁷ Ibid.

¹⁸ Stein, 1989, p. 51

¹⁹ 1989, p. 53

Different feelings can have different bodily expressions, and a perception of these expressions can be tied to different originating feelings. For example, I can cry of happiness but also of sadness. Stein:

Similar perceptual phenomena are also seen as different phenomena of expression independently of the will. I blush in anger, for shame, or from exertion. In all these cases I have the same experience of “blood rising into my face.” But in one instance I experience this as an expression of anger, in another I experience the same occurrence as an expression of shame, and, again, not as an expression at all but as a causal result of exertion.²⁰

I would like to note two important things here. One, Stein states that expression occurs ‘independently of the will.’ That is, I blush in anger regardless of my desire not to. This is important because these expressions can often be easily perceived by others too in spite of our desire to not show them. This reminds us of the Beauvoir example, where the growing girl blushes every time, she speaks with a man even if she does not want to. I will elaborate on the significance of this later, but this leads directly to the second point I wanted to make. If we can have the same expression for different feelings, there is a likelihood that we make a mistake when we are trying to empathize with someone on the basis of a perceived expression. This is because the possibility to have the same bodily expression for different feelings generates some ambiguity as to how expressions in others should be interpreted (at least when we first identify them).

Let me return to the example of my sad friend. Say I initially perceive in them a downcast semblance. Based on my own experience of sadness and my own perception of also having a downcast semblance while I feel sad. This triggers the initial step of empathy – I obtain a non-primordial experience of their sadness – and, say, I go through all the steps outlined by Stein. Upon talking to my friend, I realize they were actually feeling tiredness. My interpretation of their expression would have gone completely wrong. This does not mean that I could not empathize, but that the procedure provided the wrong outcome (I failed to grasp what it was that my friend was experiencing).

These points lead us to recognize that bodily expression can play a crucial role in our understanding of others, an understanding that is grounded on empathy. Because we have a perception of our own bodily expressions as tied to certain feelings, it is likely that identifying these expressions in other living bodies is a crucial aspect of empathizing. This is hinted at by a subsequent passage in Stein’s discussion:

We have said that it requires an observant glance to make the bodily perceived expression into an intentional object in the pregnant sense. Yet the felt expression, even though experienced in the mode of actuality, also requires a particular turning of the glance to become a fully comprehended object.²¹

I think this passage possibly refers to the way in which, for us to understand a bodily expression as an expression of a particular feeling, we need an ‘observant glance’ or an awareness of our feeling as the originator of the expression. But I think it can also be interpreted in a different way. If we consider what I mentioned earlier regarding the way bodily expression can serve as

²⁰ 1989, p. 53

²¹ 1989, p. 54

a starting point for the process of empathizing (and therefore knowing the other), this passage might be pointing towards a social role of bodily expressions. What I mean is that bodily expression might only become fully meaningful in social contexts.

For example, it might be that whenever I feel sad, I have a downcast semblance. After different people have seen this expression in me and have asked me if I feel tired, I recognize that for them the downcast semblance is probably never a bodily expression of sadness, but of tiredness. After I communicate to them that this is not what I am feeling, and that instead I feel sad, they might learn something new about the meaning of a downcast face: that it can also be an expression of sadness. Similarly, I learn that it can also be an expression of tiredness. This example shows that a glance is necessary to make the bodily expression fully meaningful because it expands/changes the meaning that we attribute to the expression.

These remarks open up a space of dialogue between Stein's theory and Leboeuf's, since I think these insights on the nature of bodily expression can be used to explain further the relationship between social and bodily alienation.

A STEINIAN TWIST TO BODILY ALIENATION

My worries about Leboeuf's account can be summarized as follows: (1) there is no link between the incapacity of victims to 'build a world together' with their oppressors, and the ways that their bodily expressions are interpreted by the dominant person/group. And (2) there is no link between the differences in the 'meaning of the world' for victims and oppressors, and their bodily expressions. This is important because Leboeuf places great emphasis on the bodily effects the gaze has on its victims.

Stein's framework can easily resolve both issues. To show how, let me return to the examples of the blushing girl and the Black person in the train. In both instances, the victims perceive a bodily expression as they become subject to the glance of a dominant other. The Black man's feeling of disorientation manifests in 'nausea,' an inability to find a seat (i.e., a lack of action), and 'no longer enjoying himself.' In the case of the girl, her shame when she is looked at by a man is expressed bodily through blushing. The examples Leboeuf provides give us no clue as to how the oppressors react to these expressions. But I think we can have an intuition for how this would go about. If the white people on the train have a prejudice against Black people as 'unintelligent' and 'unsuited' for certain tasks, it is likely that the Black person's disorientation and nausea are interpreted by his spectators as further proof for these stereotypes. After all, if the person is not capable to go about a mundane task like sitting on the train, there must be 'something wrong' with them. In the case of the girl, it might be the case that the man interprets her blush as a signal of attraction or arousal, completely misinterpreting the feelings of the girl. Once again, the man might have a prejudiced view of women as mere sexual objects.

In both examples, it can be the case that the process of empathizing is carried out by the dominant persons. They might try to understand the expressions of the victims based on the feelings that they usually associate to those bodily expression. But, ultimately not finding a coherent link between the context in which the victims are in and the expressions they are displaying, the empathetic procedure might yield the wrong result.

I think this provides a way of explaining the gap that arises between victims and oppressors in a social setting. If we consider that the failure of the empathetic procedure to yield the correct understanding of the experience of the victim leads to a reinforcement of the

stereotypes that already existed in the oppressors, it is only natural that the victim and the oppressor will find it extremely hard to ‘build a world together.’ After all, if their bodily expressions are constantly misread, there is no way for them to reach a clear understanding of each other through empathy. If we consider the power imbalance between victims and oppressors, it is also natural to think that, even in the case where the victim tries to clarify to their oppressor that their bodily expression is actually a manifestation of them being alienated from their bodies because of the glance of the oppressor, the oppressor might not believe them. This is not a place for a discussion of epistemic injustice or the imbalance of credibility between marginalized and dominant groups, but this outcome is likely in this scenario because of the preexisting power imbalances between the oppressed and the oppressor. On the other hand, Leboeuf already stated that another social consequence of bodily alienation is the incapacity of the victim to confront their perpetrator. It is therefore likely that this act of capitulation will never even occur.

Similarly, a consideration of the role of bodily expression might also shine light on the process whereby similar spaces and objects in the world might take on different meaning for victims and perpetrators. The misread between the victim’s expression and the oppressor’s interpretation of it is likely to make the victim alienated in spaces where the oppressor abounds. The Black person in the train might start avoiding enclosed spaces with many white persons, for example. The aging girl might start avoiding empty streets or alleys, she might avoid sitting on chairs next to unknown men in the metro. To use Leboeuf’s terminology, the chair no longer ‘solicits skillful action’ from the girl. Neither those the train wagon full of white people for the Black person.

I would like to finish by addressing a worry about the applicability of Stein’s framework to Leboeuf’s. In Stein’s view, knowledge of the meaning of a certain bodily expression is required *prior* to the act of empathy that yields an understanding of the emotional experience of others. Earlier in this essay, I suggested that the meaning of bodily expression is socially informed. My application of Stein’s framework to illuminate the relationship between bodily alienation and social alienation rests upon this claim.

This can be resolved by noting that I am not suggesting that the meaning of bodily expressions is entirely derived from external sources. That is, that our understanding of bodily expressions is given to us by the meaning that others attribute to them before we have an association of the feelings that are tied to certain bodily expressions. What I am trying to say is that our encounters with others in the world might influence our already existing understanding of the meaning of those bodily expressions.

To return to my example of the downcast semblance, it is not the case that, before I was asked by several people whether I was tired, I did not understand the feelings tied to a downcast face. It was only the case that, in my own experience, I had always associated this trait with sadness, since this is how I had experienced it before. My understanding of the meaning of it was simply expanded to recognize that some people associate the trait to another emotion, probably based on their experience of tiredness.

Indeed, this reading aligns with Stein’s claim that, the more different the bodily constitution of the entity I am trying to empathize with, the more likely it will be for me to yield the wrong ‘object.’ That is, the more likely it is for me to reach the wrong conclusion

about the experience of the individual. She suggests this when she explains the difficulties a blind person might have in empathizing with a non-blind person, and vice versa:

A person without eyes fails to have the entire optical givenness of the world. Doubtless, a world image suiting his orientation exists. But if I ascribe it to him, I am under a gross empathic deception. The world is constituted for him only through the remaining senses, and in reality, it may be impossible for me to fulfill his world given in empty perceptions.²²

If we apply this to the examples Leboeuf provides, we can see that something similar occurs between members of dominant and victimized groups. The white person will likely err in reading the bodily expressions of the Black person when they are subject to the white gaze because they have no experience of the white gaze themselves (and, more broadly, of racist segregation, hate and policing). Similarly, the man will most likely read the girl's expressions erratically because he has no experience of the male gaze (and misogyny as a tool men have for policing the behavior of women more generally). The Black person and the growing girl are further from their oppressors than the oppressors are from members of their own class. It is therefore likely that their attempts at understanding the bodily expressions of their victims are often erratic. This argument, ultimately, provides another reason as to why victims are socially isolated from their perpetrators.

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²² Stein, 1989, p. 62

Is the Special Theory of Relativity Fatal for the Presentist Ontology of Time?

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THERE IS EXTENSIVE DEBATE in metaphysics concerning the best way to explain the ontology of time. In this dissertation, I show we should disqualify presentism as a candidate due to its incompatibility with Einstein's respected Special Theory of Relativity (STR).¹ I first introduce the concepts key to my argument including STR, absolute simultaneity (AS) and presentism. I show that STR is in fact fatal for the presentist. I do so by first considering the argument put forward by Putnam, exploring his argument with special focus on his 'No Privileged Observers' principle,² and contextualising his argument using an example inspired by Einstein's famous train thought experiment. I then utilise Minkowski light cones to show how the issue of relative simultaneity (RS) arises.³ Ultimately, I argue the incompatibility of the No Privileged Observers principle with AS shows presentism to be untenable.

Further, I explore Hinchliff's relativised cone presentism (CP) as a potential way to uphold presentism alongside STR.⁴ I do so by using argumentation by Savitt, amongst others, to show CP is unsuccessful due to it becoming unrecognisable as a theory of presentism – losing its intuitive appeal.⁵

Finally, I discuss the implications of the arguments I have presented and conclude that STR is fatal for presentism and thus we should turn to an alternative theory to explain the ontology of time.

¹ Einstein, Albert., ([1905] 1923), "On the Electrodynamics of Moving Bodies", in H. A. Lorentz, A. Einstein, H. Minkowski, and H. Weyl, *The Principle of Relativity*. London: Methuen, 37-65. Originally published as "Zur Elektrodynamik bewegter Körper", *Annalen der Physik* 17: 891-921.

² Putnam, Hilary., 1967. 'Time and Physical Geometry', *The Journal of Philosophy*, Vol. 64, no. 8, pp. 240-247. New York: The Journal of Philosophy.

³ Minkowski, Hermann., ([1908] 1923), "Space and Time", in Lorentz, Hendrick Antoon., Einstein, Albert., Minkowski, Hermann., and Weyl, Hermann., *The Principle of Relativity*. London: Methuen, 75-91. Originally presented as an address, Eightieth Assembly of German Natural Scientists and Physicians. Cologne, Germany, September 21, 1908.

⁴ Hinchliff, Mark., 2000. A defense of presentism in a relativistic setting. *Philosophy of Science*, 67, pp. S575-S586.

⁵ Savitt, Steven F., 2000. There's no time like the present (in Minkowski spacetime). *Philosophy of science*, 67, pp. S563-S574.

1. PRESENTISM

Presentism, put simply, is the idea that the only things that exist are those things that presently exist.⁶ It was favoured as a theory of time up until the 19th century, with many people adopting it as it made sense in an everyday context.⁷ For example, when engaging in a discussion with your friends that have no philosophical knowledge about time, it would be natural to treat only the things that exist now as actually existing, the future things as not existing – although they eventually will – and past things as no longer existing – although they once did at the appropriate time⁸. This is intuitive. Putnam terms this ‘the man on the street’s view’.⁹

Hinchliff interestingly compares presentism to modality:

For the presentist, time is like modality: other times are like other possible worlds; they are not real. As there is something special about what is actual it is all there is-so there is something special about the present-it is all there is. The way things are is the way things presently are.¹⁰

It follows that presentism is a tensed theory, meaning it endorses past-ness, present-ness and future-ness; all relative to the ontologically privileged ‘now’.¹¹

Presentism is an A-Theory of time and implies temporal becoming – or a commitment to temporal passage being an objective world feature.¹² This is directly opposed to eternalism which is a B-Theory of time and argues the past, present and future all exist timelessly and no special ontic privilege is given to the present. Time is a dimension just like space and other times are like other places and there is nothing special regarding what exists *here*.¹³ Thus, it is tenseless. Eternalists instead view events as bearing the relation ‘before’ or ‘after’ with respect to other events.¹⁴

To fully understand the problems associated with presentism, it is first essential to understand STR. This is what we turn our attention to in the next section.

2. THE SPECIAL THEORY OF RELATIVITY AND RELATIVE SIMULTANEITY

The Special Theory of Relativity (STR) shows that absolute simultaneity (AS hereafter) does not exist. The presentist relies on a concept of AS as they argue everything that exists exists simultaneously. The presentist requires an objective-now because they believe that is all that exists, but STR shows there *cannot be* an objective-now. STR and presentism are not compatible; something must give. Due to STR’s respected status and abundance of supporting

⁶ Hinchliff, op.cit. See further Crisp (2004) and Markosian (2004).

⁷ Bigelow, John., 1996, “Presentism and Properties”, *Philosophical Perspectives*, 10: 35–52.

⁸ This is known as temporal becoming

⁹ Putnam, op. cit.

¹⁰ Hinchliff, op. cit.

¹¹ Hinchliff’s use of the term ‘real’ is ambiguous. In this context, I take it to be synonymous with ‘actual’.

¹² McTaggart, John McTaggart Ellis., 1908. *The unreality of time*. *Mind*, pp.457-474. It should be noted there is recent literature that detaches Presentism from these A-theory ideas. See Tallant, (2012) for further exploration.

¹³ Hinchliff, op. cit.

¹⁴ Dempsey, Patrick., 2013. *On the Compatibility of Presentism and our most fundamental Physics*.

research, absent of any other motivations for presentism, we should not be willing to give up STR to uphold presentism.

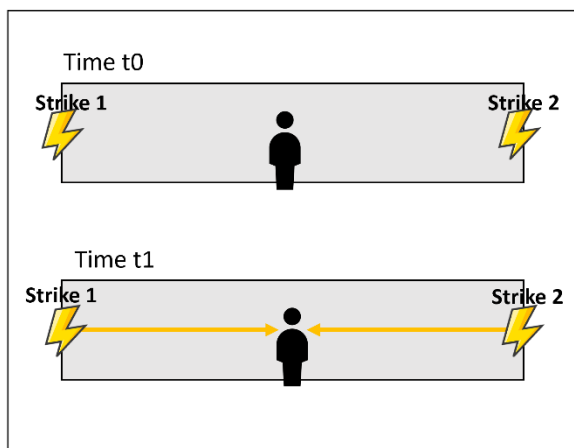
Following a brief overview of Einstein's STR, I will explain AS and show its tension with presentism.¹⁵

STR was first established by Albert Einstein in 1905. It relies on two postulates:

- (1) The laws of physics are the same for all inertial frames (IF) (perspectives in which there is no acceleration).
- (2) Light in a vacuum travels at a constant speed in one direction for all observers.¹⁶

On STR, simultaneity can be relativised to each individual's IF. The implication of this is that there can be no universal concept of simultaneity because every observer is going to experience the same event slightly differently, meaning there is no objective-now and all events are impossible to define as happening at the same time. This is bad news for our presentist who relies on the idea of a single present as central to their theory – without an objective present, the whole theory begins to come apart. These issues will be explored in the following paragraphs.

First consider how simultaneity is shown to be relative using our example: You are waiting at a bus-stop during a storm. Two flashes of lightning strike at either end of the bus-stop. You are stood precisely in the centre of the bus-stop and so perceive the light from the two flashes at the same time t_1 . The light from each strike has the exact same distance to travel to get to your eyes, so to you these strikes are simultaneous (see figure 1.1).¹⁷



The rectangle represents the bus-stop. The two lightning bolts represent the first and second strike. The yellow lines represent the light travelling.

Figure 1.1 – The person represents you stood in the middle of the bus-stop. As you are stood directly in the middle of the strikes, the yellow lines are the same length meaning the light has equal distance to travel from each strike to you at the bus-stop and you see them at the same time.

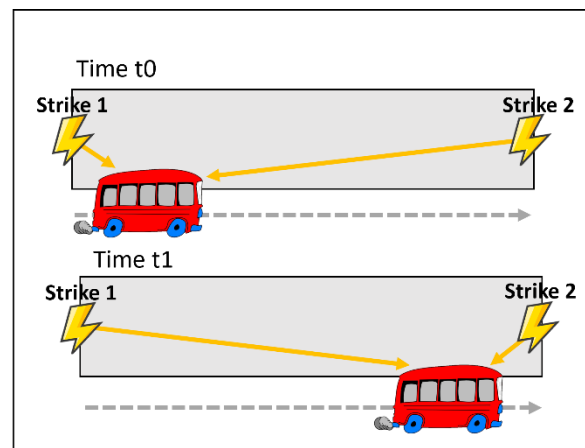


Figure 1.2 – The bus represents the bus moving past the bus-stop close to the speed of light. The grey line shows this motion. Given the motion of the bus, the yellow lines are different lengths at different times meaning the bus driver will see strike 1 before strike 2.

¹⁵ Einstein, op. cit. Although there are other aspects of STR, for present purposes, I will focus on simultaneity as it is most relevant for the arguments that follow.

¹⁶ STR deals with things moving close to the speed of light – 299,792,458 m/s.

¹⁷ All diagrams included are created by the author.

A bus travelling close to the speed of light passes you at the bus-stop just as the lightning strikes. As the bus is in motion, and not directly in the middle of the two strikes, the bus driver will see the light from the strike closest to him first as the light has less distance to travel t_0 (see figure 1.2). From the bus driver's perspective, the lightning strikes were asynchronous – he saw strike 1 at t_0 , before you had seen either flash, and he saw strike 2 at t_1 , when you see both strikes simultaneously. This is called relative simultaneity (RS) and it shows that what is 'now' for you may not be for someone else; the lightning strike has already been experienced by the bus driver.

This can also be illustrated using Minkowski light cones. Understanding the issue in this way is vital to my later arguments. I will use diagrams to support my explanation.¹⁸ For simplicity in our explanation, let us solely consider the first lightning strike.

It is first important to understand that spacetime can be plotted onto a 4-dimensional graph, with 3 axes for space and an additional one for time (see figure 2.1).

Now, imagine the first flash of lightning strikes. This point can be plotted on to our graph and over time, the light from the strike will spread, creating a cone shape on our graph. This cone is known as the future cone. There is also a past cone which represents all the past events in spacetime reaching event A. This creates an hourglass shape in our graph, this is what is known as a Minkowski light cone (see figure 2.2).

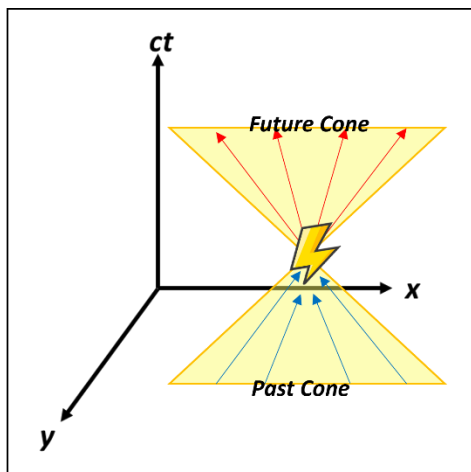


Figure 2.2 – The lightning bolt represents the lightning striking. The red arrows show how light is emitted from it in the future cone. The blue arrows show the light reaching it in the past cone.

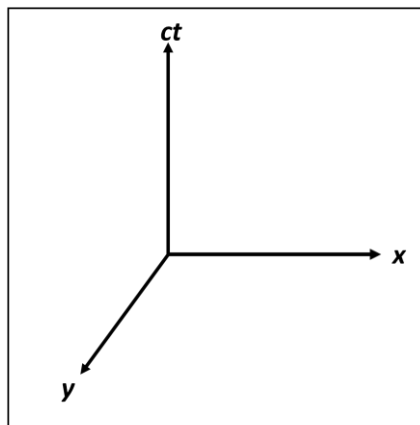


Figure 2.1 – A four-dimensional spacetime graph depicted with three axis to make understanding in a 2D format easier. Axis x and y represent space and ct represents time.

A stationary object will move in a straight line – or worldline - through our graph – moving only through time and not space. Imagine this is you stood still at the bus-stop. Eventually the light cone created by the lightning will intercept your worldline – this creates an event – Event A - and this is when you can see the strike (see figure 2.3).

Let us now turn to our bus driver. Due to his being on a bus that is travelling close to the speed of light, this is going to affect when he sees the lightning strike. The additional motion of the bus travelling at close to the speed of light will impact the worldline for the bus driver (see figure 2.4). The worldline for uniform motion is diagonal according to the lightlike worldline – which is at a 45-degree angle.

¹⁸ These diagrams are a simplified versions of a 4-dimensional idea – it should be noted that the two worldline do not cross at any point.

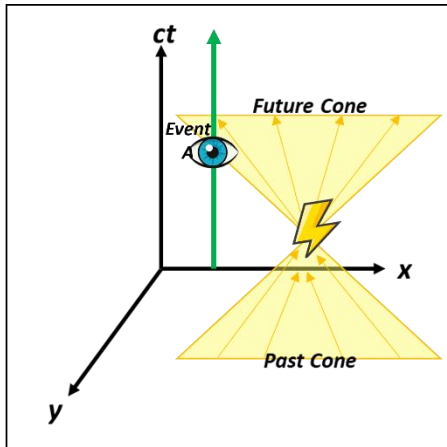


Figure 2.3 – The green line represents the worldline of a stationary observer – moving through time and not space. The blue eye represents the stationary observer seeing the lightning strike (event A).

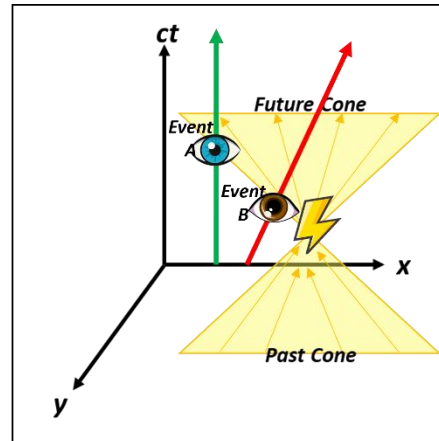


Figure 2.4 – The red line represents the worldline of an observer in uniform motion. The brown eye represents the observer in uniform motion seeing the lightning strike (event B).

We can now see the problem of RS begin to show. These two diagrams show that the lightning strike – which according to ontic transitivity¹⁹ must be simultaneous for all observers – is seen at a different time by you and the bus driver.²⁰ The blue and the brown eye in figure 1.4 are clearly located at different positions on the light cone (and specifically the temporal axis) – meaning they happen at different times. As I will now explain, RS violates the principle of ontic transitivity.

3. PUTNAM'S ARGUMENT

Now we understand how the simultaneity issues posed by STR are problematic for presentism, let us consider these ideas critically. I will be focussing on Putnam's argumentation.²¹ Putnam, like me, attempts to show the incompatibility of STR and presentism. He proposes that using simultaneity to define the present is not possible if we are to grant STR.²² His argument is a *reductio ad absurdum*; he assumes the truth of both presentism and STR and shows that a contradiction ensues. He thus concludes that we must reject presentism as STR offers more reasons we should adopt it.

Putnam's argument rests on three assumptions:

(A1) I-now am real.

¹⁹ If the lightning is real for the bus-driver, and the bus driver is real for you at the bus-stop, then the lightning must be real for you at the bus-stop. Ontic transitivity will be discussed in more depth in section 4.

²⁰ A further interesting implication of RS is its use in a proof for determinism – see Rietdijk (1966). An event will be seen at different times relative to an observer as discussed in this section. Concerning our example, the bus driver may see the lightning strike before you meaning your present event is still in your future, but it is certain that you will see the lightning strike, it will just happen slightly after the bus driver does.

²¹ Putnam, *op. cit.*

²² Eichman, Peter., 2007. *Relativistic Challenges to Presentism.*

(A2) It can be granted at least one other observer is real and they are in relative motion to me.²³

(A3) If something that stands in relation R to me-now is real, then it must be the case that something that stands in relation R to you-now is real.

A1 and A2 are pretty unproblematic on a presentist account but A3 - also referred to as the No Privileged Observers principle – is what poses the problem for the presentist and it shall be this that I focus on for my argument.²⁴

A3 is intuitively plausible.²⁵ If an event is real to an observer, and there is a second observer real to the first, it makes sense that that event is also real to the second observer.²⁶

Considering the apparent intuitive nature of A3, it would be in the presentist's favour to adopt such a premise given they pride themselves on having a theory of time that aligns with 'the man on the street's view'.

Upon introducing inertial frames (IF), Putnam advocates that each observer has a differing plane of simultaneity, meaning they have a unique set of events that constitute their present.²⁷ It further seems intuitive that all observer's presents should have equal status – it is not obvious that one should be granted a privileged position.

Putnam goes on to state that A3 requires the relation R to be transitive. Simply put, if x is real for y , and y is real for z , then x must be real for z . This can be understood logically as $xRy \wedge yRz \rightarrow xRz$. This is the principle of ontic transitivity.²⁸

A3 cannot be compatible with STR due to the relativity of simultaneity. Let us refer back to our bus-stop example to help illustrate this problem.

Recall that when you are stood at the bus-stop and the lightning strikes, you see the lightning strike after the bus driver. Let us explain this in terms of Putnam's three assumptions. According to A1, you-now – standing at the bus-stop – exist and according to A2, the bus driver also exists now and is in motion relative to you. With the application of A3, it must follow that the lightning strike exists for both you and the bus driver. However, due to the relativity of simultaneity, you have not yet seen the lightning strike at t_0 when the bus driver sees it – it is still a future event for you and thus according to the presentist, does not exist. This all shows that future events must exist as something in the present for the bus driver is still in your future. But presentism denies this. Something must give if we want to allow presentism.

4. CONE PRESENTISM

One way the presentist may attempt to avoid the apparent fatality of STR is by offering a different form of presentism; namely relativised presentism. Relativising presentism highlights and utilises the importance of individual observers' distinct inertial frames (IF). The

²³ In the context of his paper, Putnam's use of the term 'real' should be considered synonymous with 'existing'.

²⁴ Putnam, op. cit.

²⁵ Although I believe this to be an intuitive principle to anyone, it will be particularly so to those that endorse a four-dimensionalist theory of time.

²⁶ Sklar, Lawrence., 1985. Time, Reality and Relativity. Philosophy and Spacetime Physics, pp.289-304.

²⁷ Putnam, op. cit.

²⁸ Dempsey, op. cit.

idea is that for an observer O , real events are just those simultaneous with O in O 's IF .²⁹ This is opposed to the classic presentist idea that real events are all events that are simultaneous simpliciter.

By allowing what is real to be real relative to an IF , this allows the present not to be identified with any individual event (absolute simultaneity) but with a set of observable events. It also implies that the present is relativised to each observer – every distinct observer will identify a different set of events that constitute the present.³⁰ The aim here is to shift from a requirement of AS to RS. This shift is desirable as not only is the former incompatible with STR, but further the latter is compatible with STR *and* allows for an avoidance of A3.

Godfrey-Smith advocated for this type of relativised presentism.³¹ It was named cone presentism (CP) due to its appeal to Minkowski spacetime. Our earlier discussion of light cones will be useful here.

According to CP, an event is simultaneous with the set of events – S – included in its past light cone. This is possible due to the lightlike separation of an event – event E – and any event in S . A lightlike separation is when a spacetime interval is 0. This means a beam of light can travel directly from one event to another. Relative to our context, the spacetime interval from E to any event in S is 0 or less – a beam of light can travel directly from an event in S to event E .³²

Put simply, the present is just the set of events 'seen now' by an observer.³³ The past cone, as earlier mentioned, contains all the past events in spacetime reaching a certain event. Relative to our example, when you are stood at the bus-stop, your past cone would contain all the light that is just reaching you, so the sunlight allowing you to see, the bus-stop lights showing bus times, the lightning strike etc. Figure 3.1 shows this idea.

CP appears to sidestep ontic transitivity, thus it is compatible with STR. It does so because relativising the present to an individual's IF allows that certain events for one IF may not be present in another. Or, if something that stands in relation to me-now is real, it does not necessarily follow that something that stands in relation to you-now is real.

By forfeiting absolute for relative simultaneity, CP appears to be able to align with STR, thus showing STR not to be fatal for presentism.

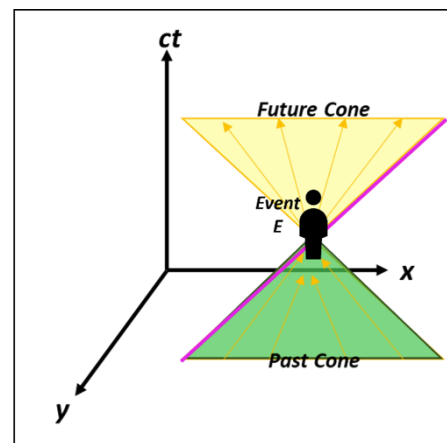


Figure 3.1 – The person represents you stood at the bus-stop (event E). The green past cone represents everything that is considered present for event E according to the cone presentist. The purple line is the lightlike worldline (this will become relevant in section 6.2.1).

²⁹ Savitt, op. cit.

³⁰ Godfrey-Smith, William., 1979. Special relativity and the present. *Philosophical Studies: An International Journal for Philosophy in the Analytic Tradition*, 36(3), pp.233-244.

³¹ Ibid.

³² See Godfrey-Smith (1979), Taylor and Wheeler (1992) and Savitt (2000) for further discussion of lightlike separation.

³³ Ibid.

5. RESPONSES TO CONE PRESENTISM

However, this alternative view faces extensive scrutiny. In this section, I will explore two of the most promising objections to the theory as posed by Savitt and consider an additional problem that appears to be relevant to presentism universally.³⁴ The conclusion of this section is that cone presentism (CP) does not succeed in overcoming the problems the special theory of relativity (STR) poses for presentism.

5.1.1. ACHRONALITY

Achronality is an intuitive principle. It requires that no events be both present *and* future/past relative to one another. It is important to remember here CP's key commitment that the present is constituted of all the events that occur in its past cone.³⁵

Consider the set of events S that make up the present. Let the present here be event E . Now consider two events – event A and event X which are located in E 's past cone. Both A and X belong to S . A , however, is located further down the past light cone than X , suggesting that it happened before X relative to E . It seems impossible that these two events constitute the present when intuitively A preceded X for E . This would make A simultaneously past *and* present in the same IF. A is intuitively in the absolute past to X yet both are considered as present for E .

Let us once again refer to our example (see figure 4.1 for reference throughout).

You are stood at the bus-stop (event E). You have just heard the thunder (event X) that *followed* you seeing the lightning (event A). As lightning is always seen before the consequent thunder is heard, relative to you stood at the bus-stop, you seeing the lightning is going to be lower down in your past cone than you hearing the thunder. As CP argues that the present is made up of all those events on its past cone, it is committed to saying that A and X are simultaneous. However, it seems implausible to say that the lightning and thunder both construe the present because clearly the lightning strikes before you hear the thunder.³⁶

To adhere to achronality, CP seems committed to saying that there are currently existing events that are past in relation to others. Their only other option is to oppose achronality which seems unpalatable. Something's got to give if CP is to uphold their position.

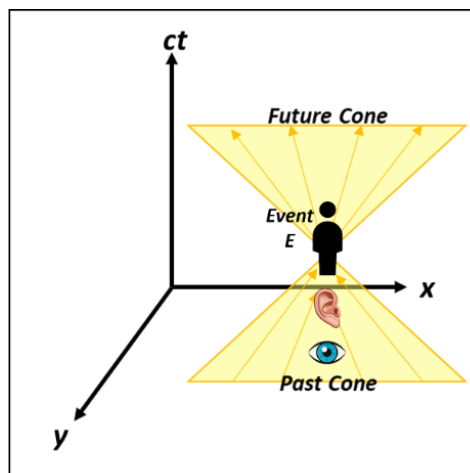


Figure 4.1 – The person represents you stood at the bus-stop (event E). The blue eye represents you seeing the lightning strike (event A). The ear represents you hearing the thunder (event X).

Event A and X are aligned in the past cone of E as they are perceived by a stationary observer therefore the worldline is straight. The eye is lower than the ear in Event E 's past cone, from this, it is intuitive that Event A happened before Event X . According to the cone presentist, both are present for Event E . Achronality is violated.

³⁴ Savitt, op. cit.

³⁵ Ibid.

³⁶ Recall the past cone represents all the past events in spacetime reaching a certain event. Relative to this case, the past cone is everything reaching you at the bus-stop thus the lightning strike is included in the relevant past cone. 'Reaching' meaning these events can have an impact on E .

5.1.2. RESPONSE TO ACHRONALITY

Hinchliff's move in defence of CP is to object that the objections raised by Savitt all depend on residual intuitions from pre-relativistic conceptions. Hinchliff wants to reiterate that there is no reason for relativised presentism to capture these pre-relativised intuitions, in fact, by relativising, the hope is to move away from these intuitions altogether.³⁷

Hinchliff argues that by relativising, the presentist need not deal with temporal intervals but spatiotemporal intervals instead. The implication of this is that including events in the now that happened in the very distant past is no longer an issue. The present need not be limited to temporal intervals of 0 (what we consider as present took a time interval of 0 to reach us) but spatiotemporal intervals of 0. This move towards spacetime means the issues posed by achronality do not apply. Spatiotemporal intervals need not be invariant meaning how far away in time an event is is not relevant.

Hinchliff offers a potential counter on his opponent's behalf. The presentist's move away from time here means the presentist is not remaining true to their original ideas. He deals with this by saying we must grant the same latitude to the presentist that we would elsewhere in physics when shifting from classical to relativistic accounts.³⁸

This is an inadequate response. It avoids confronting any of the relevant philosophical worries. Further, relative to our question, if relativised presentism no longer deals with time, it is unclear how adopting such a theory can help answer our time-specific questions, even if this concession does allow for the theory to be useful in other contexts. It seems like too big of a step away from what is required in presentism – it is too big of a bullet to bite.

5.2.1. ARBITRARINESS

The second objection arises from CP's broadening of the now. CP allows for a larger set of events to qualify as the present – namely all the events that make up the past light cone of a said event. Savitt suggests this is problematically arbitrary.³⁹

As previously mentioned, event E has a spacetime interval of 0 or less to any events in S. It follows that event E and any event in S have a lightlike separation.⁴⁰ However, this lightlike separation is also a feature of events in the future cone of E. So, following this logic, the future cone should constitute the present in the same way the past cone does. It would be arbitrary not to allow this.⁴¹ Savitt states this outcome is undesirable. If all future events on the light cone constitute the present, it is not wrong to say that the end days of the world, perhaps the apocalypse, are to be included in the present. It is plausible the apocalypse is an event in S; the apocalypse may be an event lightlike separated from E.

I struggle to see how it is desirable or even comprehensible that the present includes events that are lightlike separated but so far off they are the origin/end of the universe. This seems like a desperate attempt to save presentism.⁴²

³⁷ Hinchliff, op. cit.

³⁸ Ibid.

³⁹ Savitt, op. cit.

⁴⁰ See section 5 for more on lightlike separation.

⁴¹ Ibid.

⁴² Ibid.

Further from this, talking about the future or a future cone at all seems counterintuitive to double-cone presentism which claims we are mistaken to identify some events as future rather than present. By broadening what is included in the present to the future as well as the past cone only worsens the issue posed by achronality. The argument that we may be able to include the apocalypse in the now goes against the supposed simplicity of presentism that allows it to align with everyday intuition. It seems difficult to permit such an account that allows for such far-fetched ideas to be in line with the ‘man on the street’s view’; the everyday person is unlikely to be making suppositions like this.⁴³

5.2.2. RESPONSES TO ARBITRARINESS

Hinchliff argues that CP is not obliged to endorse this view, which he terms double-cone presentism, that both the past and future cone qualify as the present, on non-arbitrary grounds. He offers two reasons in support of this.⁴⁴

Firstly, he reiterates the difference between the past and future cones. The former is the set of events – S1 – from which light can reach E. The latter is the set of events – S2 – that can be reached by a light from E. Thus, the difference is due to the asymmetrical nature of the spatiotemporal framework itself.⁴⁵

And secondly, this in turn arises from the asymmetric nature of causation⁴⁶ – it extends past to future and not vice versa.⁴⁷ Hinchliff argues that causation is a non-arbitrary foundation that provides the distinction between cone and double-cone presentism.⁴⁸

This differentiation from Hinchliff is promising. It is a strong explanation that makes explicit the differences between cone and double-cone presentism. However, although I grant this to Hinchliff, making this distinction is unavailing as the next claim he makes undermines his theory and proves there are still inescapable arbitrariness issues for his account.

Hinchliff suggests that allowing the future cone to constitute E as well as the past cone would allow an event to be present twice. It will be present once in S1 and then again in S2. This additional line of argument from Hinchliff contradicts his initial argument that events are only present once in CP.⁴⁹

In relativising presentism, the presentist moves from an application of time to one of spacetime. Spacetime is continuous.⁵⁰ This is reflected in Hinchliff’s argument that the past cone constitutes the present. Any event in S1 is only present once because once it becomes present, it remains so even when it is in the past cone.

⁴³ This feeling of unease surrounding the inclusion of such apparently far-off events in event E is implied in the earlier discussion of achronality

⁴⁴ Hinchliff, *op. cit.*

⁴⁵ McDaniel, Brannon David., 2004. An assessment of presentism (Doctoral dissertation, Texas A&M University).

⁴⁶ This is the relation held between two temporally simultaneous or successive events when the first brings about the other – cause and effect.

⁴⁷ *Ibid.*

⁴⁸ This could potentially be countered by the possibility of backwards causation. See Evans (2015) for further discussion.

⁴⁹ Hinchliff, *op. cit.*

⁵⁰ Baron, Sam., 2018. Time, physics, and philosophy: It's all relative. *Philosophy Compass*, 13(1), p.e12466.

This differs to classical presentism. According to classical presentism, an event comes into existence upon becoming present and can be present for several moments⁵¹ before continuing into the past cone and ceasing to exist. But on cone presentism (CP), which argues every event in the past cone is present, once an event comes into existence and therefore becomes present, it remains present – it is *continuously* present.

So, the issue is, by allowing the future cone to additionally count as the present, an event will not be present twice – it will still only be present once. It is present in S2 and continues to be present in S1. An event is continuous, it does not stop being present when it passes from the future to the past cone. Further, differentiating between S1 and S2 seems arbitrary – all events, whether they are in the past cone, future cone or in the middle of the cone are present and of equal metaphysical status.

This should not be appealing to the presentist. Whether or not one includes S2 in the now or just S1, CP has become so refined it is barely recognisable as presentism. The initial appeal of presentism was the intuitiveness of temporal becoming - existent things are present but they can become past and cease to exist. Upon enlarging the present to include the past, CP redefines this initial theory completely.⁵² Given this, I fail to see how Hinchliff's argument against arbitrariness can be considered a presentist argument at all. It raises the question if we can alter presentism so much, what exactly *is* it about presentism that makes it a valuable theory of time worth upholding?

5.3.1. NO DISTINGUISHED INERTIAL FRAME

Finally, I believe the CP's reliance on relativised simultaneity (RS) to be problematic.

The initial appeal of presentism is that it is an ontology of time that is simple to grasp and aligns with our intuitive ideas on time flow. In relativising simultaneity to each observer, an important aspect of presentism is lost. Savitt supports this idea that relativised presentism is too far removed from presentism, arguing no relativised account captures the fundamental metaphysical intuitions of presentism as suggested by Hinchliff.⁵³

Although CP's shift from absolute to relative simultaneity may allow for a sidestepping of ontic transitivity, I do not think it possible for any theory of presentism to avoid issues presented by distinguished inertial frames (DIF). A DIF is the particular inertial frame in which the order of events is actual, unaffected by relativity.⁵⁴ This allows us to assign events their correct dates.⁵⁵ From this, we can relativise all other IFs.

An objective-now can only be determined through a DIF. Giving up the idea of finding a DIF and thus an objective-now poses the question of what exactly it is about presentism that makes it a favourable position to uphold. This step away from requiring an objective-now distances CP too far from how presentism is defined in the first place. Presentism requires an objective-now, and absent of another way of determining this, the problems posed by there being no DIF will remain.

If there is not some DIF, there is no way to determine the now objectively because every observer is going to perceive a slightly different version of events and it is not clear how we

⁵¹ However this may be quantified.

⁵² McDaniel, op. cit.

⁵³ Savitt, op. cit.; Hinchliff, op. cit.

⁵⁴ Savitt, op. cit.

⁵⁵ Hinchliff, op. cit.

can determine a cohesive ontology based on this if we cannot deduce which IF we should favour and value above the others. A DIF is required to relativise from, and this will give us a basis to determine which other inertial frames (IF) are accurately depicting events and which ones are not.

For example, due to the laws of physics, there are things that will appear differently in different IFs e.g. length contraction.⁵⁶ By allowing for variations such as length contraction, the implication is there is some IF in which an event is at its ‘proper length’. Proper length is something largely explored by Lorentz.⁵⁷ The proper length is observed by an observer at rest. But, due to every observer existing in an IF, none are truly at rest or if we grant at least one observer is at rest, it is impossible to tell which observer has access to the privileged IF. Without this, we cannot establish the objective base we require.

Let us once again turn to our bus example. You stood at the bus-stop perceive yourself to be at rest and the bus to be moving past you. However, as motion is relative to an observer’s IF, the bus driver will take himself to be at rest and the bus-stop zooming past him.

As every IF is in motion relative to another, there is no way to tell which one is at rest. It will always appear as if everything else is in motion relative to your own frame of reference even if this is not the case. Further, given that the earth is in constant orbit, even frames that are in every other way stationary, technically are not so. There is no way to gain an objective perspective of IF as you, as an observer, are always in one.

By not allowing there to be a distinguished inertial frame (DIF) that determines the actual present, we open the door to scepticism. If every observer is experiencing the present differently e.g., through different order of events, and we do not have a standard IF from which to relativise, it is hard to say whose IF should determine proper length and whether these can even be shown to be true. Further still, it is not clear how we can determine an ontology – or a definitive list of what exists.

There is a further troublesome implication of these ideas that once again requires the relativised presentist to give up a key premise of presentism. Baron highlights that due to the continuous nature of spacetime, there are infinite ways to define the present – there are infinite numbers of constructible sets of spacetime points.⁵⁸ This is applicable to both cone and double-cone presentism but let us consider it on the former (given Hinchliff’s rebuttal).⁵⁹

If we apply A3, it is not apparent at which point we consider an event to constitute S1 – there is no privileged set of events. Now, given that cone presentism (CP) grants that every set of spacetime points defines its own privileged present, this may not initially appear troublesome. However, the implication of this is that there is nothing metaphysically special about the present (Baron, 2018) - an idea the opposing eternalist theory adopts. This is because the universe is made up of spacetime points and all these points belong to infinite sets and every set can be considered present. This contradicts Hinchliff’s definition of presentism.⁶⁰ The relativised presentist must not only give up on the initial appealing flow of time but also that there is something metaphysically special about the present, again posing the question what is it about presentism that makes it worthwhile upholding?

⁵⁶ Lorentz, Hendrick Antoon., 1892. *De relatieve beweging van de aarde en den aether*.

⁵⁷ *Ibid.* See Fayngold (2008) and Franklin (2010) for further discussion.

⁵⁸ Baron, *op. cit.*

⁵⁹ Hinchliff, *op. cit.*

⁶⁰ *Ibid.*

5.3.2. RESPONSE TO NO DISTINGUISHED INERTIAL FRAME

Hinchliff attempts to counter the idea that a distinguished inertial frame (DIF) is impossible to determine by flipping an objection posed by Savitt against CP.⁶¹ Savitt introduces Cosmic Microwave Background Radiation (CMBR), which originated about 15 million years ago and we have been observing for four decades, arguing it is problematic that the origin of CMBR be considered as part of the present for those observing it.⁶²

However, Hinchliff responds to this by saying this objection is conflating two horns of a dilemma.⁶³ On one hand, the force of this objection is derived from the ‘fact’ that CMBR originated 15 billion years ago. The ‘fact’ of the CMBR’s origin implies the existence of a DIF, in which case classical presentism can hold. The events simultaneous with you-now in that DIF are the existing events.⁶⁴ On the other hand, Savitt says it seems confused to say an event that occurred 15 million years ago is occurring presently. However, this is nicely accommodated by the CP view that the past is included in the present. Savitt appears to be attacking two different forms of presentism simultaneously.⁶⁵ Thus, Hinchliff declares that on either horn, we can offer a form of presentism that accommodates the relevant concern meaning this dilemma is solvable. Either classical for the former or CP for the latter.

My move is to grant that Hinchliff is correct in this specific line of argumentation. I believe that Savitt’s talk of this particular event being factual is detrimental to his overall argument as it grants potential for a DIF to the presentist.⁶⁶ However, I further believe that this argumentation is confused and simply by denying it is a ‘fact’ that CMBR originated 15 billion years ago on the basis of the discussion of what is factual in the previous section, this entire counterargument from Hinchliff can be sidestepped. It can still be upheld that it is impossible to determine a DIF. This problem remains for CP.

A further potential counter to the argument against there being no DIF can be explored through Lorentz’s suggestion of a ‘World Spirit’.⁶⁷ According to Lorentz, a ‘World Spirit’ is a being not bound to a specific place and one who can ‘feel’ immediately all events. On this definition, a ‘World Spirit’ would be able to determine a DIF.

This appeal to some omnipotent being can be equated to another popular philosophical idea of ‘stepping out of the universe’.⁶⁸ This allows for a perspective that reveals which frame is at absolute rest and further a direct verification of simultaneity. This is possible as it is implied this ‘World Spirit’ does not itself exist in an inertial frame (IF) so there is no need to apply relativity – they are outside the existence of IF, like an onlooker. Relative to our bus example, they are watching over the whole occurrence from some space outside of the universe – they will be able to tell if it is you at the bus-stop moving or the bus driver.

However, Eichman shows this proposed idea of stepping out of the universe would not in fact give us the answers we are looking for.⁶⁹ He uses an example from Feynman that

⁶¹ Ibid.

⁶² Savitt, *op. cit.*

⁶³ Eichman, *op. cit.*

⁶⁴ Hinchliff, *op. cit.*

⁶⁵ Savitt, *op. cit.*

⁶⁶ Ibid.

⁶⁷ Kox, Anee, J., (1988). Hendrik Antoon Lorentz, the Ether, and the General Theory of Relativity. *Archive for History of Exact Sciences*. 38 (1), pp. 67-78.

⁶⁸ Eichman *op. cit.*

⁶⁹ Ibid.

discusses three-dimensional objects and how apparent width and depth are not fundamental properties of the object because looking from a different angle, you perceive different lengths and widths.⁷⁰ This can be applied to spatiotemporal intervals. Stepping out of the universe may allow us to see clearly the invariant quantity between two spacetime event points but does not give us any reason to think there is a particular coordinate system more real than any other, in the same way that walking around a three-dimensional object does not help us determine which side is the width and which one is the length. The coordinate system we choose is important because without a favoured coordinate system, we cannot establish a simultaneity relation. This relation will change depending on which system we apply because spacetime points will be measured differently.⁷¹

We will be able to see an invariant quantity between two spacetime event points but this does not give us a reason as to why we should adopt this coordinate system over some other.

Finally, let us explore how the presentist might respond to Baron's contention that given spacetime is continuous, there is nothing metaphysically valuable about the present.⁷² Baron offers a potential counter to his argument on cone presentism (CP)'s behalf. It may be argued that it is just a brute fact that one particular spacetime is present and although this is impossible to determine, we should not dismiss its existence as impossible – this moves away from a metaphysical concern to an epistemic one.

Some may contend that Baron's suggestion is reliant on a translation of the brute fact that there is a privileged time in a pre-relativistic setting to the brute fact there is a privileged spacetime in a relativistic setting and these two cannot be equated.⁷³ Time and spacetime are different concepts.

However, Hinchliff here offers a familiar response. The idea of relativising presentism is to step away from pre-relativised conceptions, so this comparison need not be made.⁷⁴ The brute fact there is a privileged spacetime need not be compared to the brute fact there is a privileged time – these are two separate ideas from two differing versions of presentism.

5.4. CONCLUSIONS ON CONE PRESENTISM

Despite all this, Hinchliff insists that CP offers a '*good enough*' fit to maintain that presentism is compatible with the special theory of relativity (STR).⁷⁵ He believes due to CP's close association of the present with the nature of light, that the problem here is not presentism but the fact that light behaves in such peculiar ways.

I do not like the conclusion Hinchliff reaches here. It may be so that light behaves in peculiar ways, but the issues with CP go beyond such peculiarities. For example, the problem of there being no distinguished inertial frames (DIF) and Baron's conclusion there is nothing metaphysically valuable about the present.⁷⁶ These are both ideas any worthwhile presentist

⁷⁰ Feynman, Richard., 1997. *Six Not So Easy Pieces*. Cambridge, MA: Basic Books.

⁷¹ Eichman, op. cit.

⁷² Baron, op. cit.

⁷³ Ibid.

⁷⁴ Hinchliff, op. cit.

⁷⁵ Ibid.

⁷⁶ Baron, op. cit.

would want to avoid. Further, the consequences of Hinchliff's move to CP contradicts the earlier explanations he gives of presentism.

So, further from these conclusions, I do believe a good attempt is made by CP to align presentism with STR in such a way that does not violate Putnam (1967)'s No Privileged Observers principle, namely by introducing inertial frames (IF) to allow for a shift from absolute simultaneity (AS) to relative simultaneity (RS). However, given the problems discussed here, CP is not successful in showing how presentism is compatible with STR. Thus, my stance that STR is in fact fatal for the presentist ontology of time remains.⁷⁷

The implication of these conclusions is that we cannot hope to establish a DIF and further AS is not possible. However, some presentists believe AS is intuitive and obviously correct and thus the concept of a DIF should not be given up despite the repercussions. This is supported by Prior who is happy to live with this consequence in order to allow for AS.⁷⁸

6. CONCLUSION

I conclude the special theory of relativity (STR) is fatal for the presentism. I have shown how STR is a knockdown argument for presentism, exploring both traditional and cone presentism as an alternative route.

I have shown, using Putnam's classic argumentation that both versions of presentism fail to overcome objections posed to their counterpart.⁷⁹ They may fix some issues but both version remains imperfect. As the presentist defines and redefines their motivations, they continue to encounter bullets I believe too big to bite. This leaves presentism an unmotivated theory or alternatively, so redefined it can no longer be identified as presentism.

It initially seemed the intuitive nature of presentism is what makes it appealing, but this is given up in the hopes of accommodating STR. Thus, it is unclear what exactly it is that makes presentism a theory that is worth upholding.

The implications of the arguments I have made is that we should adopt an alternative theory of time if we want to maintain STR which I believe is the most compelling theory of relativity. I believe we should adopt a 4-dimensionalist theory of time based on the spacetime arguments made by Minkowski and Einstein; eternalism being the most favourable.⁸⁰ Although

⁷⁷ One further conclusion presented by Eichman (2007) that is interesting to note is that although arguably cone presentism (CP) is successful in providing us with an invariant notion of the present for observers in different IF, this will only apply if the two observers are at the same spatial location. If the spatial location differs, the light cones will no longer be identical and thus each observer will have different presents. This is the case even if they lie on the plane of simultaneity for that reference frame.

⁷⁸ Prior, Arthur., 1996. "Some Free Thinking About Time", in Copeland, Brian Jack., (ed.), *Logic and Reality: Essays on the Legacy of Arthur Prior*. Oxford: Oxford University Press, 47-51. Although the scope of this essay does not permit in-depth discussion, I would like to flag that surface presentism is an alternative route the presentist may choose to adopt. This version reverses the direction of fit and attempts to accommodate STR or some empirically equivalent theory into presentism to allow for AS. See Hinchliff (2000), Prior (1968), (1970), Tooley (1997), Maudlin (2011) for further discussion. However, it is not evident to me any alternative version accommodates presentism in such a way without significant conflation (see discussions of Neo-Lorentzian Relativity: Lorentz (1916), Craig (2000)) (see Gersten (2003), Hsu & Hsu (2006) for discussion of other alternatives) and thus Occam's razor determines we should retain STR. Surface presentism fails.

⁷⁹ Putnam, op. cit.

⁸⁰ Minkowski, op. cit.; Einstein, op. cit.

this may not have the same initial intuitiveness as presentism, it encounters significantly less issues and is able to maintain its core, valuable premises.

For presentism to be salvaged, it must somehow account for its requirement of a distinguished inertial frame whilst also remaining compatible with STR. Or alternatively, an equivalent theory to STR must be suggested that allows for absolute simultaneity (AS).

From here, the presentist may try to advance on or relativise classic presentism in a way that has not yet been done or that has not been discussed in this essay. Alternatively, as hinted in footnote 78, other theories of relativity aside from STR and Neo-Lorentzian relativity are available, the best move for the presentist may be to explore these other options. There may be some theory of relativity that has all the same epistemic value as STR and allows for AS as Neo-Lorentzian relativity does. This is beyond the scope of this essay but would be an interesting pathway to pursue succeeding from this and would appear the best option available for the presentist given the failure of relativising presentism.

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Really Interactive Kinds: Ontological Confusion in Ian Hacking on Psychiatry

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JONATHON TSOU, responding to Ian Hacking, argues that mental disorders that are real/natural kinds will remain stable despite “looping effects,” and therefore cannot also be interactive kinds. I contend that Tsou’s argument rests on an ontological confusion in Hacking’s definition of interactive kinds. Interactive kinds are an important tool for conceptualising mental disorders without falling into the extremes of understanding them as wholly biological, or wholly socially constructed. Tsou’s argument attempts to undermine the reality of interactive kinds within the space of psychiatry to push the discipline towards a wholly biological understanding. In this paper I will argue that we can understand a mental disorder as a ‘real kind’ in the same sense as Tsou, without undermining its interactivity. First of all, I will explicate Hacking’s theory of interactive kinds, classifications that undergo “looping effects” because of their members interacting with the idea of the classification. Secondly, I will explain Jonathon Tsou’s argument that some mental disorders are natural kinds and therefore are invulnerable to changing because of “looping effects”. Following this, I will outline Rico Hauswald’s ontology of interactive kinds, which distinguishes between interactive and indifferent real kinds, and interactive and indifferent classifications. Finally, I will show how this clarified ontology undermines Tsou’s argument, which rests on the mutual exclusivity of interactive and real kinds.

INTERACTIVE AND INDIFFERENT KINDS

Hacking distinguishes between *interactive* and *indifferent* kinds.¹ Members of interactive kinds are able to ‘interact with the idea of’ the kind that they are a member of.² This usually takes the form of becoming aware of their categorisation. This awareness will almost invariably cause some change in the individual’s behaviour. Sometimes, the behaviour of a kind’s members changes in a sufficiently uniform and severe manner that it causes the kind itself to change in some way. Hacking calls this a ‘looping effect’. The name stems from the cyclical nature of the process. Thus, as the kind changes to account for this new behaviour, the behaviour often changes again in response. A weak looping effect may merely change the

¹ Hacking applies this distinction in a number of fields, but since Tsou is concerned exclusively with psychiatry, we will only consider its application to mental disorders (which Hacking himself also discusses)

² Hacking, 1999, p. 105

stereotype³ associated with the kind. A strong looping effect changes the kind such that some fact about it is no longer true, possibly even such that the criteria for membership changes. Members of indifferent kinds are unable to become aware of how they are categorised. As examples of indifferent kinds, Hacking lists ‘water, sulphur, horse, tiger, lemon, multiple sclerosis, heat and the color yellow.’⁴ Indifferent kinds are invulnerable to looping effects and therefore are not ‘moving target[s]’.⁵

Hacking gives ‘mental retardation’ as an example of an interactive kind.⁶ A whole series of terms preceded this one: ‘ill-balanced, idiots, imbeciles, morons, feeble-minded, mental deficient, moral imbeciles, subnormals, retardates’.⁷ Each term was used to refer to a similar demographic. However, each was accompanied by (to varying extents) different stereotypes, treatment regimes, and psychological concepts. Falling under the label ‘feeble-minded’ would affect someone’s self-experience and behaviour in a different way to falling under the label ‘mentally retarded’ because of the different stereotype associated with each label. While obviously this progression of labels was determined to some extent by external social influences, it would also have been affected by the change in behaviour brought about by each label. The institutional and social practises which go along with each of these labels also affect the self-experience and behaviour of those labelled. For example, in California, each classroom is required to integrate a certain number of ‘special education’ children. This will obviously affect the stereotype associated with those children, as well as the children’s self-experience and behaviour in a different way to if these children were instead all put into separate classrooms or schools.

Since psychiatry is concerned exclusively with conscious human beings, the categories that it individuates will necessarily be interactive kinds. The criterion for being an interactive kind is simply that its members be capable of changing their self-experience and behaviour as a direct result of their categorisation – Hacking calls this ‘interact[ing] with the idea of’ the kind.⁸ The members of an interactive kind must therefore be self-aware. In most cases this interaction would stem from direct awareness of their being categorised. However, it could also occur, for example, with a highly autistic child whose self-experience was altered by changes in their parents’ behaviour, which in turn resulted from the child’s categorisation. Strong looping effects – i.e. those that change the kind sufficiently that some previous fact about it is no longer true – do not have to actually take place for a kind to count as interactive. However, such looping will always be at least theoretically possible for any interactive kind.

THE STABILITY OF NATURAL KINDS

Jonathon Tsou argues that some mental disorders, because they are natural kinds, are invulnerable to looping effects, and thus cannot be interactive kinds.⁹ As Tsou points out, what Hacking refers to by ‘kind’ is a socio-linguistic category for which the term ‘classification’ is

³ “Stereotype” is not understood here as something inherently negative; it refers simply to the socially understood characteristic aspects of a classification or kind.

⁴ Hacking, 1999, p. 107

⁵ *Ibid.*, p. 105

⁶ *Ibid.*, p. 111

⁷ *Ibid.*

⁸ *Ibid.*, p. 105

⁹ Tsou, 2016

more appropriate.¹⁰ This is shown by the fact that the difference between interactive and indifferent kinds is the instability of the classification, rather than anything about the objects classified (except insofar as the latter is relevant to the former). This is important because Tsou uses the term ‘natural kind’ to refer to supra-linguistic classes of objects; that is, classes of objects whose relations are significantly independent of manmade classifications. He contrasts ‘natural kinds’ to ‘artificial kinds.’ The key difference being that the former is discovered, while the latter is invented. ‘Uranium atoms’ is an example of a natural kind, while ‘conservatives’ is an example of an artificial kind. The natural sciences attempt to create classifications that correspond directly (or as directly as possible) to natural kinds. The existence of natural kinds within physics and chemistry is almost universally accepted, whereas the existence of natural kinds within biology and the human sciences is more controversial.

In distinguishing ‘natural’ and ‘artificial’ kinds, Tsou draws on Boyd’s Homeostatic Property Cluster (HPC) theory. This says that the criteria for being a natural kind is

- (1) there is a cluster of properties that frequently co-occur;
- (2) this co-occurrence is due to homeostasis: either these properties are more likely to occur when other properties in the cluster are also occurrent, or there are underlying mechanisms that cause the occurrence of these properties, or both; and
- (3) there is a term that is used to refer to objects in which this co-occurrence takes place.

He proposes the Mechanistic Property Cluster (MPC) theory as the most appropriate for conceptualising psychiatric natural kinds. Instead of (2), this theory requires that there be ‘networks of biological mechanisms... that interact to produce the key features of the kind.’¹¹ This is a more specific version of HPC theory. Tsou uses the MPC theory instead of the HPC theory from which it derives because, as he argues, it is more capable of explaining the ‘projectability’ of natural kind mental disorders, i.e. our ability to make successful predictions about the behaviour of these mental disorders and/or people with them.

Tsou claims that there is good evidence that certain mental disorders are MPC kinds. For example, numerous studies support ‘the “dopamine hypothesis”, [according to which,] excessive dopamine activity in the mesolimbic pathway [...] causes the “positive symptoms” [...] of schizophrenia’.¹² There is also strong evidence that ‘depression is caused by deficient activity of monoamine neurotransmitters, especially serotonin and norepinephrine.’¹³ This analysis explains why we can make such accurate predictions about these kinds of disorders. For example, how we can predict, with high reliability, the subsidence (or at least weakening) of symptoms when a schizophrenic is given anti-psychotics. Tsou argues that MPC kind disorders will remain stable despite looping effects because ‘they are constituted by a set of stable biological mechanisms’.¹⁴ As the possibility of undergoing strong looping effects is the necessary and sufficient condition for being an interactive kind, Tsou is arguing that MPC kinds are not and cannot be interactive.

¹⁰ Ibid., p. 408

¹¹ Ibid., p. 411.

¹² Ibid.

¹³ Ibid.

¹⁴ Ibid., p. 412.

HAUSWALD'S ONTOLOGY – REAL AND INTERACTIVE KINDS

Since Tsou's argument is that real kinds cannot be interactive, I will now draw on Rico Hauswald's ontology of interactive kinds to show that they should instead be understood as a subset of real kinds.¹⁵ As discussed above, what Hacking refers to as kinds, are really classifications. What Hacking refers to as interactive and indifferent *kinds* should therefore rather be called interactive and indifferent *classifications*. Following Hauswald, we will now adopt this latter terminology. However, Hauswald argues that CPC real kinds (defined below) can also be interactive (or indifferent). We therefore have the following distinctions: interactive classifications, indifferent classifications, interactive kinds, and indifferent kinds. Interactive kinds are thus a subset of real kinds: those which can undergo looping effects and therefore those members are self-aware. Any kind whose members are not self-aware would be an indifferent kind. Hauswald distinguishes between four possible types of looping effects: *individual-looping*, in which an individual's behaviour changes because of their awareness that they fall under a certain classification; *aggregated individual-looping*, in which individual-looping takes place in a similar manner across a significant portion of the individuals who fall under a certain classification; *classification-looping*, in which the classification itself is changed; and *kind-looping*, in which the kind that corresponds to the classification changes. The last two types of looping are caused by aggregated individual-looping. Tsou's argument is compatible with the existence of individual-looping (aggregate and non-aggregate) and classification-looping, but not kind-looping.

I will now explain why kind-looping is possible, why interactive kinds should be understood as a subset of real kinds, and why Tsou is therefore wrong about the relative invulnerability of the latter to looping effects. Hauswald uses a Causal Property Cluster (CPC) theory of real kinds.¹⁶ This is identical to the MPC theory explicated above, except that the causal mechanisms need not be biological. The criteria for being a CPC real kind are therefore:

- (1) there is a cluster of properties that frequently co-occur;
- (2) this co-occurrence is due to causal mechanisms; and
- (3) there is a term that is used to refer to objects in which this co-occurrence takes place.¹⁷

Hauswald argues that interactive kinds are a subset of CPC real kinds. This is a significant deviation from Hacking, who understood interactive kinds 'as counterparts to natural kinds.'¹⁸ Hacking says that he prefers the term "indifferent kind" because 'too much philosophy has been built into the epithet "natural kind."¹⁹ CPC kinds are capable of change because (1) and (2) do not require that the cluster of properties remains identical over time, so

¹⁵ Hauswald, 2016

¹⁶ Hauswald uses 'real kinds' instead of 'natural kinds' because his theory does not require that these kinds be discovered rather than constructed. I will exclusively use the former term for the remainder of this paper, distinguishing between Tsou's version and Hauswald's by reference to the theory of real kinds that they use.

¹⁷ All use of numbering in this format will from here on out refer to the tripartite definition of Causal Property Cluster theory of real kinds

¹⁸ Ibid., p. 204

¹⁹ Hacking, op. cit., pp. 106-107

long as the new properties are still clustered and produced by causal mechanisms. For example, in the case of a species evolving some new trait, the cluster of properties changes but we are still dealing with the same species, and thus the same kind.

Classifications are socio-linguistic categories. Tsou's 'artificial kinds' would be (mere) classifications, but we also have classifications that we expect correspond to real kinds. For example, 'common toad' is a manmade, linguistic category. However, we believe that there is a real kind that corresponds to our classification 'common toad'. It is very unlikely, however, that the classification '(a) liberal' has any underlying real kind to which it corresponds. If we compare the use of the word 'liberal' in the 18th Century, such that it applied to Adam Smith, to its use now, we see that the properties associated with it have changed dramatically. Since there is no underlying kind associated, this is (merely) a change in *classification*. If the common toad were to evolve such that the entire species no longer had toxic skin, this would be a change in the real *kind* corresponding to our category 'common toad', as well as a change in the category itself.

If we assume that 'autism' qualifies as a CPC real kind (which is not necessarily actually true) then it would be an interactive kind, and capable of undergoing *kind*-looping. In the case of mental disorders that are real kinds, the behavioural patterns of people with that disorder would be among the properties described in (1), and the self-experience of these people would be among the mechanisms described in (2).²⁰ This self-experience would be in large part determined by the stereotype and institutional practises associated with that disorder. Thus, if changes in the stereotype and/or institutional practises associated with autism altered the self-experience of autistic people such that their typical behavioural patterns changed, this would be *kind*-looping, not merely *classification*-looping. Since the behavioural patterns of autistic people would be among the clustered properties described in (1), if these patterns change significantly enough, then the cluster itself will have moved/changed. Analogously to the above example of the common toad, this would therefore be a change in kind. Since the cause is the interaction of autistic people with the idea of autism, i.e. a looping effect, this is *kind*-looping.

Even if autism had a single underlying cause, C, it would still be able to undergo *kind*-looping. Even if there is a single property common to every member of a kind, this is not the only property of that kind. All gold is constituted primarily of atoms with 79 electrons and 118 neutrons. Nonetheless, gold, as a kind, has other properties, such as an average melting point of 1064.43°C. Similarly, if all autism was caused by C, then the presence of C would be a property shared by all members of the kind autism. Nonetheless, the typical behavioural patterns of autistic people would still be among the clustered properties described in (1). Furthermore, even though C would cause every instance of autism, this in no way entails that C would determine every aspect of how autism manifests in these instances. Thus, the self-experience of autistic people would still be among the mechanisms described in (2). Therefore, the *kind*-looping described above would still be able to take place.

²⁰ If the requirement that the causal mechanisms be biological rules out the consideration of self-awareness and stereotypes, then Tsou's definition begs the question. In that case, it would assume the irrelevance of these factors in order to prove that changes in the stereotype associated with a kind, and the resultant alterations to the self-experience of members of that kind, will not have a relevant effect. If the aforementioned requirement does not rule out said considerations, then it has no impact upon the following argument. Therefore, we will use the CPC rather than MPC definition of real kinds in what follows.

THE INSTABILITY OF REAL KINDS

I will now explain how this undermines Tsou's argument. Tsou argues that mental disorders that are real kinds will remain stable despite looping effects because they are underwritten by stable (biological) mechanisms. If only classification-looping was possible, then classifications that correspond to real kinds would be essentially anchored by the stability of the kinds, as the kinds themselves would not change. However, as shown above, mental disorders that are real kinds are still susceptible to kind-looping. Thus, a mental disorder being a real kind, does disqualify it from also being an interactive kind. As the members of any psychiatric category (kind/classification) will be self-aware human beings, any mental disorders which are real kinds will also be interactive kinds, and any which are mere classifications, will be interactive classifications. That is to say, they will all be susceptible to looping effects, and the category being a real kind will only change the type of looping effect it is susceptible to from *classification*-looping, to *kind*-looping. The extent and frequency with which these kinds actually change is an empirical matter which falls out of the scope of this essay. I believe it satisfactory to merely prove that this type of change is ontologically feasible.

CONCLUSION

Contrary to Tsou's argument, a mental disorder being a real kind does not disqualify it from being an interactive kind. Rather, interactive kinds are a subset of real kinds. Hacking distinguishes between interactive and indifferent kinds, but according to Hauswald's ontology, he is in fact referring to interactive and indifferent classifications. Therefore, when he identifies that members of a classification interacting with the idea of said classification can cause "looping effects," he only proves the existence of *classification*-looping. This enables Tsou to argue that if a mental disorder is a real kind, in contradistinction to a mere classification, it is invulnerable to changing because of looping effects. Tsou claims that while the classification for a mental disorder may undergo looping effects, if this classification corresponds to a real kind, the stability of that kind will anchor the classification, since the kind itself cannot change. Hauswald's ontology distinguishes between interactive and indifferent real kinds and interactive and indifferent classifications. Since kinds themselves are capable of change, interactive kinds can undergo *kind*-looping. If kind-looping, and not merely classification-looping, takes place, then the real kind itself changes and therefore cannot provide stability. The purpose of Tsou's argument was to undermine the interactivity of real kinds, and the reality of interactive kinds, within the psychiatric discipline. In doing so, his intention was to push psychiatry to understand real kind mental disorders wholly biologically. By adopting Hauswald's ontology, we preserve interactive kinds as a useful and important conceptual tool, which allows us to both affirm the reality of mental disorders and understand the social factors affecting them.

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Superabundance and Excess

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1. INTRODUCTION

Georges Bataille's concept of general economy strikes at the core of our prevailing understanding of economics. He posits two contrasting premises in the first volume of *The Accursed Share (TAS)*:

- 1) The condition of the world is one of superabundance rather than scarcity. Bataille proposes that all life and wealth derive from the sun, which is effectively an unlimited source of energy. In the general economy, what the world faces is not scarcity, as foundationally assumed in conventional economics, but superabundance. While pockets of poverty can be found, the world on aggregate has an excess of wealth.
- 2) However, there are limits to growth, because there is only so much space on the planet which life can occupy. Once the limits are reached, no further growth is possible. Hence the excess cannot be used for growth; it cannot be saved and it needs to be expended. The choice we have is to either expend it well or badly.

Is Bataille's conception of general economy credible? In addition to examining these two premises, this paper investigates Bataille's method to reconceptualise how we can understand the world by adopting a radical position on political economy so as to derive novel insights. Specifically, I analyse his ideas of limits and savings, his empirical approach and his critique of scarcity and utility in conventional economics. I contrast his views of capitalism and potlatch with Jean-Joseph Goux's critique that Bataille's solution of consumption has already come to pass in today's capitalist economies and George Gilder's notion that giving is central to entrepreneurial capitalism, and I propose a possible Bataillean response. I then consider Andrew Abbott's extension to Bataille's theory of general economy, which Abbott draws on to argue that problems of excess are fundamentally different from problems of scarcity, hence requiring their own solutions. I conclude by assessing whether Bataille has been successful in challenging conventional economics and the applicability of *TAS* to political economy today.

2. BATAILLE'S THEORY OF GENERAL ECONOMY

TAS is a systematic exposition by Bataille of his theory of political economy. He begins by explaining the need for a theory of *general* economy. Bataille believes that economics, as a system of production and consumption, cannot study its phenomena in isolation unlike the hard

sciences, because its factors interrelate with one another and with other disciplines. However, the way economics is studied in his time (and currently) is as if it was an ‘isolatable system of operation’ which can ignore the impact economic activity has on the world and how it is influenced by the world.¹ Hence, Bataille argues that we need to study economics within a broader theoretical framework since we need to understand its ‘*general* consequences’ to ‘pose the *general* problems that are linked to the movement of energy on the globe’.² He terms such a study ‘general economy’ as it is concerned with the global or cosmic level as opposed to ‘restrictive economy’, which focuses on the level of the particular.³

Why does Bataille link economics to a terrestrial movement of energy? Bataille observes that all wealth is a ‘cosmic phenomenon’ arising from the ‘superabundance’ of sunlight.⁴ ‘Solar energy is the source of life’s exuberant development. The origin and essence of our wealth are given in the radiation of the sun, which dispenses energy—wealth—without any return’, he explains.⁵ Sunlight, our source of energy and wealth, is excessive—its quantity is more than what is required to sustain life. The energy of the sun is first used by living things to meet basic requirements for survival, after which the excess is used for growth and reproduction. Consuming food *in excess* of the basic requirements allows a living thing to grow.⁶ When an animal’s individual growth can no longer consume all the excess, it reaches sexual maturity. Though it is no longer able to grow as an individual, the group it belongs to can continue to grow through the reproduction of its individuals, starting a new stage of growth but for the group rather than for the individual. In this way, living things as a totality depend on the expenditure of excess to grow.⁷ However, there is a limit to growth, after which whatever energy or wealth that remains must ‘necessarily be lost without profit’ because there is only so much space available to living things before ‘life occupies all the available space’ on the planet after which no more growth is possible since no more space for growth is available.⁸

2.1 EVIDENCE FROM NATURE

Bataille arrives at this notion of limits by once more turning to natural phenomena. He studies the micro-organism, duckweed. Floating in a pond, duckweed reproduces until the pond’s entire surface is covered with it. The boundary of the pond is the limit of growth for the duckweed. Once this limit is reached, there is an equilibrium of life—unless some duckweed is removed, through death or external forces, there cannot be any more new duckweed. Bataille uses this example to express the tendency for lifeforms to keep growing, as if life ‘aspires [...] to an impossible growth’.⁹ However, growth becomes harder when the lifeform encounters the limits of space, leading to a build-up of pressure. This pressure can be resolved through extension, where in the case of a stadium, a higher demand to attend its events may encourage the stadium owners to put in more seats or to enlarge the stadium.

¹ Georges Bataille, *The Accursed Share: An Essay on General Economy. Volume I: Consumption*, trans. Robert Hurley (New York: Zone Books, 1988), 19.

² Bataille, *TAS*, 20.

³ Bataille, *TAS*, 25, 22.

⁴ Bataille, *TAS*, 20, 27.

⁵ Bataille, *TAS*, 28.

⁶ Bataille, *TAS*, 27.

⁷ Bataille, *TAS*, 28.

⁸ Bataille, *TAS*, 21, 30.

⁹ Bataille, *TAS*, 30.

Similarly, ‘the earth first opens to life the primary space of the waters and the surface of the ground’, and when this is filled, living things, such as trees, start growing upwards into the air.¹⁰ But what if there is no more capacity to add more seats or enlarge the stadium because, for instance, the land outside it is already occupied? The pressure can then be relieved through squander, when living things compete with one another or are depleted by external forces such as natural disasters or accidents. In the extreme, these result in death, creating some vacant space which can then be occupied by other living things, hence restoring equilibrium. As a totality, there is no more growth once the limits are reached, but simply a maintenance or an equilibrium. Any new growth will require destruction to create capacity or vacant space for growth. From this, Bataille infers that the history of life is not a story of scarcity but is ‘the effect of a wild exuberance [... and] the development of luxury’, where luxury is ‘the production of increasingly burdensome forms of life’.¹¹

2.2 LIMITS TO GROWTH

Bataille hence reasons that to overcome this inability to keep growing, on an individual or group basis, excess needs to be squandered. He considers this requirement a principle of life, which we overlook to our detriment.¹² This further excess, since it cannot be used for growth, has no alternative but to be lost, and ‘in no way can this inevitable loss be accounted useful. It is only a matter of an acceptable loss, preferable to another that is regarded as unacceptable: a question of *acceptability*, not utility’.¹³ Bataille is not against utility as a concept, understanding that ‘as soon as we want to act reasonably, we have to consider the utility of our actions’.¹⁴ However, he asserts that the concept of utility is only relevant if there is a possibility for ‘an advantage, a maintenance or growth’.¹⁵ Since excess is what is left over after such possibilities of usage, it falls outside the sphere of utility. With no way to usefully employ excess, how else can it be spent? Since utility can no longer be the criterion of assessment, the criterion then becomes whether the way excess is expended is acceptable to the donor. Regardless, ‘it must be spent, willingly or not, gloriously or catastrophically’, writes Bataille.¹⁶

Conventional, or in Bataillean terms, restrictive economics is centred on production as the objective of human activity. Profit is the aim for actors in a capitalist economy but the pursuit of profits is futile according to Bataille since ‘a series of profitable operations has absolutely no other effect than the squandering of profits’.¹⁷ Bataille explains that while this squandering may be anathema to the capitalist who will regard it as ‘failure’ or ‘misfortune’, it is a matter of inescapable necessity:

When one considers the *totality* of productive wealth on the surface of the globe, it is evident that the products of this wealth can be employed for productive ends only insofar as the living organism that is economic mankind can increase its equipment.¹⁸

¹⁰ Bataille, *TAS*, 31.

¹¹ Bataille, *TAS*, 33.

¹² Bataille, *TAS*, 21.

¹³ Bataille, *TAS*, 31.

¹⁴ Bataille, *TAS*, 30.

¹⁵ *Ibid.*

¹⁶ Bataille, *TAS*, 21.

¹⁷ *Ibid.*

¹⁸ Bataille, *TAS*, 22.

This increase of equipment can be interpreted as capital investment such as machinery, office buildings and factories, or research investment and innovation to develop new ‘equipment’ in the form of tools, processes, techniques and technology. He argues that such investments can ‘neither always nor indefinitely’ be profitable; profitability will hit limits and so profits must be somehow disposed of.¹⁹

Bataille explains that human labour and technological innovation extends the available space by augmenting ‘living matter with supplementary apparatuses’, increasing the capacity available for growth.²⁰ New techniques initially use up what was previously excess energy or wealth but in turn produces even more excess. ‘This surplus eventually contributes to making growth more difficult, for growth no longer suffices to use it up’, he writes.²¹ Bataille’s explanation corresponds to the economic law of diminishing returns, where increasing inputs result in marginally smaller increases in output. What he adds to this law is how ‘at a certain point the advantage of extension is neutralised by the contrary advantage, that of luxury’.²² Beyond this point, expenditure will take over primary importance from growth since growth is no longer as advantageous.

2.3 SAVING THE ACCURSED SHARE

Even if we accept Bataille’s version of diminishing returns, it remains to be explained why excess cannot be saved. According to Asger Sørensen, Bataille ignores the notion from classical political economy that money has a special quality that allows for an ‘almost unlimited accumulation of wealth’, instead considering money as a form of energy.²³ Sørensen claims that the energy from money comes from the social recognition of the value of money. ‘Bataille’s disregard for money can therefore be interpreted as a disregard of what is specifically capitalist about modern society, since precisely capital could never come into existence without money in this sense’, he notes.²⁴

To resolve this puzzle, I propose that one way to understand Bataille’s position is to consider John Maynard Keynes’s equality of saving and investment on the macroeconomic level, expressed by the following sets of accounting identities:²⁵

- (1) $\text{Income} = \text{value of output} = \text{consumption} + \text{investment}$ (rearranging, $\text{investment} = \text{income} - \text{consumption}$)
- (2) $\text{Saving} = \text{income} - \text{consumption}$

Therefore, $\text{saving} = \text{investment}$

¹⁹ Ibid.

²⁰ Bataille, *TAS*, 36.

²¹ Bataille, *TAS*, 37.

²² Bataille, *TAS*, 37.

²³ Asger Sørensen, “On a Universal Scale: Economy in Bataille’s General Economy”, *Philosophy & Social Criticism* 38, no. 2 (2012): 187.

²⁴ Ibid.

²⁵ John Maynard Keynes, *The General Theory of Employment, Interest, and Money* (Cham: Springer International Publishing, 2018), 56. While Bataille does not reference Keynes’s *General Theory of Employment, Interest and Money* directly in *TAS*, he is aware of Keynes, referring to Keynes’s bottle in the preface of *TAS* (*TAS*, 13).

(1) identifies national income as the sum of the value of the economy's output of consumption goods and services, and investment goods and services, there being no other class of goods and services. (2) identifies saving as any excess of income over what is not spent on consumption. Keynes explains his conclusion:

The amount of saving is an outcome of the collective behaviour of individual consumers and the amount of investment of the collective behaviour of individual entrepreneurs; these two amounts are necessarily equal, since each of them is equal to the excess of income over consumption.²⁶

Following this accounting logic, savings on the level of the general economy must ultimately be unleashed as investments. Hence, such savings, in the form of investments, will eventually face the law of diminishing returns and the advantages of luxury over extension. Keynes's theory is applicable to Bataille's theory of general economy as it deals with the general level of the economy.

According to Bataille, since we cannot save the excess, we can either choose how we wish to expend the excess or be forced to 'undergo' the expenditure nonetheless.²⁷ If excess is not expended in peaceful ways, it is then accursed. 'Like an unbroken animal that cannot be trained, it is this energy that destroys us; it is we who pay the price of the inevitable explosion', claims Bataille.²⁸ To prevent such harm, Bataille reasons that the pursuit of growth has to 'subordinated to giving', and to use the method of restrictive economy, which advocates accumulation, to address the problems of general economy will be a mistake.²⁹ While his theory seems plausible, does it bear out in reality? The next section examines the historical evidence he advances.

2.4 HISTORICAL EVIDENCE

Bataille positions his method as empirical, though he admits pushing his case studies to their 'boiling point' to hammer home his message.³⁰ Just as he looks to nature, he also examines the historical record to adduce empirical support for his theory of general economy. From his study of the historical data covering the Aztecs, Islam, Tibet, the early days of capitalism to his time of Soviet industrialisation and the Marshall Plan, and potlatch which will be further examined in section 4.1, he concludes that previously, 'value was given to unproductive glory, whereas in our day it is measured in terms of production: Precedence is given to energy acquisition over energy expenditure'.³¹

Bataille sees the two world wars as periods when luxury was more advantageous than growth. After long intervals of population growth and peaceful industrialisation, the two wars were 'the greatest orgies of wealth' in history.³² He observes that the wars were preceded by rises in living standards, where 'the majority of the population benefits from more and more

²⁶ Ibid.

²⁷ Bataille, *TAS*, 23.

²⁸ Bataille, *TAS*, 24.

²⁹ Bataille, *TAS*, 25.

³⁰ Bataille, *TAS*, 10.

³¹ Bataille, *TAS*, 29.

³² Bataille, *TAS*, 37.

unproductive services; work is reduced and wages are increased overall'.³³ According to Bataille and contrary to popular thinking, the wars were not sparked by an attempt to overcome insufficiency and need but by excess. From this and his other case studies, Bataille thus believes the true function of excess wealth is not to be accumulated but to be squandered 'without reciprocation'.³⁴ He recognises that the distribution of wealth can be uneven—from the perspective of the particular, scarcity is the dominant condition. However, from the perspective of the general, it is excess that dominates and presents its own difficulties, different from the difficulties caused by scarcity. I elaborate on these differences in difficulties in section 4.3. For now, having examined Bataille's theory of general economy, I turn to his method to better understand what he is attempting to achieve with *TAS*.

3. BATAILLE'S METHOD

Bataille explicates his method of analysis in *TAS*'s preface. He thinks that the problem of political economy remains unsolved because it is not properly 'framed'—we are not asking the right questions.³⁵ He aims to solve it by writing 'a book of political economy' to offer a 'bold reversal that substitutes a dynamism, in harmony with the world, for the stagnation of isolated ideas, of stubborn problems born of an anxiety that refused to *see*'.³⁶ He contends that it is not necessity that gives living things including mankind its problems but its opposite, the accidental and the superfluous which he has termed 'luxury'.³⁷

Political economy is a study of how a country is governed, taking into account both political and economic factors. Allen Drazen notes that up until the 20th century, what is today called economics was known as political economy, reflecting the notion that economics and politics are inseparably bound with political factors potentially having a 'determining influence' in economic outcomes.³⁸ Tracing the evolution of Bataille's thoughts on political economy leads us to his 1933 essay, *The Notion of Expenditure*,³⁹ where he lays the groundwork which he will later develop into his key economic concepts of excess, expenditure, transgression and sovereignty in his three-volume *TAS*. Benjamin Noys speculates that Bataille's reflection on the 'crisis of value'⁴⁰ in *The Notion of Expenditure* was influenced by the 1929 Wall Street Crash and the subsequent Great Depression. Unleashing widespread suffering globally, this episode was a catastrophic failure of market-based principles in furthering the welfare of man, though Bataille advances evidentiary support for his notion of expenditure using anthropological and sociological studies instead.

He is however very much aware of the impact of economic crises. He writes in *TAS*: 'Economic crises, which necessarily have in my work a sense in which they are decisive events, are only represented therein in a summary, superficial fashion. If the truth must be told, I had

³³ *Ibid.*

³⁴ Bataille, *TAS*, 38.

³⁵ Bataille, *TAS*, 10.

³⁶ Bataille, *TAS*, 11.

³⁷ Bataille, *TAS*, 12.

³⁸ Allan Drazen, *Political Economy in Macroeconomics* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2000), 3.

³⁹ Georges Bataille, "The Notion of Expenditure", in *Visions of Excess: Selected Writings, 1927-1939*, ed. Allan Stoekl (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1985), 116–29.

⁴⁰ Benjamin Noys, *Georges Bataille: A Critical Introduction* (London: Pluto Press, 2015), 105.

to choose'.⁴¹ The fear and suffering caused by economic crises gave him the impetus to search for a solution, but he notes that such anxiety can impede the research process.⁴² Hence, instead of an analysis of economic crises, he adopted 'rules of a reason that do not relent [...] laws that govern us', in a manner akin to the appeal to laws in conventional economics, though he is careful to 'avoid redoing the work of the economists'.⁴³ He takes a broader view of 'the general problem of nature', shifting the focus of his economics to expenditure instead of production which is the conventional loci of supply-side economics.⁴⁴

Bataille is against the (then and still current) way the economy is managed, which is mostly along capitalistic lines based on modern economic theory. Scarcity is the concept at the heart of modern economic theory, which he terms as '*restrictive economy*'.⁴⁵ According to Lindsey McGoey, 'a fundamental axiom of orthodox economic thought has been the assumption that universal scarcity constrains economic decision-making'.⁴⁶ Such economics addresses how scarce resources can be allocated efficiently to maximise the welfare of mankind. While Bataille's critique of scarcity and utility in restrictive economy is focused on capitalism, communism is not the solution since Marx's economic theory is also premised on these same concepts. Abbott observes that Marx's *Capital* is 'one long meditation on scarcity; declining wages and class conflict are all about scarcity'.⁴⁷ Reflecting on Bataille's ideas, Jean Baudrillard comments that the Marxist critique of capitalism is insufficient since it is 'only a critique of capital [...] a critique of exchange value, *but an exaltation of use value*'.⁴⁸ Marxists are still trying to find a 'good use of economy'⁴⁹ in a world governed by scarcity while what Bataille is trying to do is to completely reimagine the condition of the world, where if we simply became aware of the true reality of a superabundant world, we would not be fixating on the efficient allocation of resources and the accumulation of savings for 'a rainy day'. Instead, we would turn our attention to our true economic moral duty to expend excess 'gloriously' rather than 'catastrophically'.⁵⁰

The conventional perspective of economics can be traced back to Adam Smith, who has been lauded as the 'Father of [Modern] Economics'.⁵¹ Smith presents an economic rationalism that equates the market with society as a whole. Omid Nodoushani posits that Bataille seeks to overturn Adam Smith's morality of the marketplace and its associated notions

⁴¹ Bataille, *TAS*, 13.

⁴² Bataille, *TAS*, 14.

⁴³ Bataille, *TAS*, 12–13.

⁴⁴ Bataille, *TAS*, 9, 13.

⁴⁵ Bataille, *TAS*, 25.

⁴⁶ Lindsey McGoey, "Bataille and the Sociology of Abundance: Reassessing Gifts, Debt and Economic Excess", *Theory, Culture & Society* 35 (2018): 70.

⁴⁷ Andrew Abbott, "The Problem of Excess", *Sociological Theory* 32, no. 1 (2014): 4.

⁴⁸ Jean Baudrillard, "When Bataille Attacked the Metaphysical Principle of Economy", in *Ideology and Power in the Age of Lenin in Ruins*, ed. Arthur Kroker and Marilouise Kroker (London: Macmillan Education UK, 1991), 136.

⁴⁹ *Ibid.*

⁵⁰ Bataille, *TAS*, 21.

⁵¹ Berry Christopher J., *Adam Smith: A Very Short Introduction* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2018), 101. While Smith is known as the Father of Economics, I inserted the word 'modern' since economic thought predates him. Indeed, one of the things Bataille attempts to show in his economic writing is how the origins of economics lies not in accumulation but in loss, using potlatch as his seminal example.

of scarcity and utility which are foundational to modern economic theory.⁵² Similar to the ancient Greeks who directly participated in the *polis* by debating at the *Agora*, a public space for assembly and markets, the modern marketplace in which economic activity is conducted remains as one of the few venues still available where ‘people have an opportunity to participate *directly* in public life’, writes Noudoushani.⁵³ Consumers participate mainly by using money to express their demands for goods and services, using their dollars to ‘vote’ for the products they desire. Suppliers participate by responding to these votes by setting prices to meet the demands of the consumers, so that at market equilibrium, the price would be such that the quantity demanded is met by the same quantity supplied, clearing the market of the product.⁵⁴

3.1 BATAILLE’S CORRECTION OF UTILITY

Understanding demand and supply formation is hence critical to understanding how the economy works. Demand is expressed on an aggregate basis through the demand curve. The construction of the demand curve in microeconomic theory is based on utility, making it a cornerstone axiom of modern economic thought.⁵⁵ According to Noudoushani, utilitarian principles remain ‘hegemonic’ today in determining market behaviour even after a revolution in business ethics in the 1990s, recalling Karl Marx’s eternal words: ‘The ideas of the ruling class are in every epoch the ruling ideas’.⁵⁶ Utility is the property of an object to produce ‘benefit, advantage, pleasure, good or happiness’, theorises Jeremy Bentham, the founder of modern utilitarianism.⁵⁷ According to utilitarianism, people are propelled by the desire for pleasure and the avoidance of pain. The principle of utility is hence to *maximise* utility by maximising our pleasure and minimising our pain.

As already explained, while Bataille is not against utility *per se*, he contrasts the worldview based on utilitarian rationalism where one spends only when one can obtain a return, with his general economics based on unproductive expenditure where waste and expenditure wreathes in glory those who give generously. However, is not glory, such as the glory received by the giver in potlatch, also an aspect of utility? Bataille observes that the notion of utility in conventional restrictive economics has long departed from Bentham’s ‘benefit, advantage, pleasure, good or happiness’. In the former, the goal of material utility is

theoretically, pleasure—but only in a moderate form, since violent pleasure is seen as *pathological*. On the one hand, this material utility is limited to acquisition (in practice, to production) and to the conservation of goods; on the other, it is limited to reproduction and to the conservation of human life.⁵⁸

⁵² Omid Nodoushani, “A Postmodern Theory of General Economy: The Contribution of Georges Bataille”, *Studies in Cultures, Organizations and Societies* 5, no. 2 (1999): 333.

⁵³ Ibid. My italics

⁵⁴ John Sloman, *Economics*, 6th ed (Harlow: Prentice Hall/Financial Times, 2006), 43.

⁵⁵ Sloman, *Economics*, 96.

⁵⁶ Nodoushani, “Postmodern Theory of General Economy”, 333; Karl Marx and Friedrich Engels, *The German Ideology: Including Theses on Feuerbach and Introduction to The Critique of Political Economy* (Amherst: Prometheus Books, 1998), 67.

⁵⁷ Jeremy Bentham, *An Introduction to the Principles of Morals and Legislation* (Kitchener: Batoche Books, 2000), 14.

⁵⁸ Bataille, “The Notion of Expenditure”, 116.

Hence, Bataille's critique of utility is not on utility *per se* but on the outcomes of a utilitarian economic mindset which makes production and accumulation the central phenomena in human life. He writes:

Any general judgement of social activity implies the principle that all individual effort, in order to be valid, must be reducible to the fundamental necessities of production and conservation. Pleasure, whether art, permissible debauchery, or play, is definitively reduced, in the intellectual representations *in circulation*, to a concession; in other words it is reduced to a diversion whose role is subsidiary.⁵⁹

Bataille, with his themes of excess, transgression, eroticism and sovereignty, wishes to correct for this reduction and return to Bentham's original conception of utility with one important difference: he believes concepts of honour and duty ought to be 'situate[ed] beyond utility and pleasure' instead of being 'hypocritically employed in schemes of pecuniary interest', vulgarising the nobility of both concepts.⁶⁰

Bataille presents India in relation to America, as a case in point. India faces a situation of poverty while America has excess resources. 'General economy suggests, therefore, as a correct operation, a transfer of American wealth to India without reciprocation', a kind of Marshall Plan but for India.⁶¹ He adds that the pressure resulting from this inequality is a threat to America, seeming to suggest that it is in America's own interest to use its excess to raise the 'global standard of living' since it could otherwise result in 'danger'.⁶² A utilitarian economics that includes honour and duty as part of the utility calculation would understand Bataille's proposal as *quid pro quo*—a payoff in the guise of humanitarian assistance to avoid potential war. This is however not Bataille's intention if we use his ideas on potlatch, with America as the giver of potlatch and India as the receiver. He explains:

The *gift* that one made [...] was a sign of glory [...] By giving, one exhibited one's wealth and one's good fortune (one's power) [...] some splendid expenditure that might add lustre to his person by displaying the favour of the gods who had given him everything.⁶³

It is a way for the donor country to 'grasp what eludes him, to combine the limitless movements of the universe with the limit that belongs to him', in transcending its limits of growth to gain not 'pecuniary interest' but 'prestige, glory and rank', to exchange its 'profane' resource wealth for the 'sacred'.⁶⁴

3.2 COPERNICAN REVERSAL

Bataille's approach is so radical as to initially seem absurd. With his theory of general economy based on a solar cosmology, is Bataille proposing a metaphysics of the world where superabundance rather than scarcity is the basic condition because he believes that is how our

⁵⁹ Bataille, "The Notion of Expenditure", 117.

⁶⁰ Bataille, "The Notion of Expenditure", 116.

⁶¹ Bataille, *TAS*, 40.

⁶² *Ibid.*

⁶³ Bataille, *TAS*, 65–66.

⁶⁴ Bataille, *TAS*, 70, 73.

world actually is, or is he presenting a radical normative account of our world so as to conceptualise a new way forward for mankind? I believe it is the latter as Bataille makes clear that his conception of general economy is intended to transform our approach to economics and its accompanying ethics. He aims to ‘shock’ and ‘jostle’ our thinking.⁶⁵ He writes:

I will simply state [...] that the extension of economic growth itself requires the overturning of economic principles—the overturning of the ethics that grounds them. Changing from the perspectives of *restrictive* economy to those of *general* economy actually accomplishes a Copernican transformation: a reversal of thinking—and of ethics.⁶⁶

Bataille believes that the curse of the accursed share can be lifted—it ‘depends on man and *only on man*’.⁶⁷ To do this, Bataille thinks, similar to Marx, that people first need to be *conscious* of the ‘movement from which [the curse] emanates’, that is, the general economy, so that living standards globally can be raised.⁶⁸ He believes that his solution is so simple that it can achieve widespread acceptance. The way to raise it to the self-consciousness of mankind is to understand how general economy has been present in history, but is Bataille’s interpretation of history correct? This question is especially important since he presents his method as empirical. To answer it, this paper will next examine a critique of Bataille’s conception of capitalism and potlatch by Goux et al. who draws on the work of Gilder.

4. CRITIQUE AND EXTENSION

4.1 THE ECONOMICS OF POTLATCH

In a move reminiscent of Max Weber’s linking of the Protestant Calvinist work ethic to capitalist economics, Bataille re-introduces religion to the domain of political economy but to rather opposite effect from Weber.⁶⁹ For Weber, Calvinist thrift provided the right conditions for the development of capitalism due to its ethic of accumulation, investment and reinvestment while Bataille thinks that such behaviour belongs to the domain of the profane and not the religious.⁷⁰ Goux analyses Bataille’s move:

Whereas the profane is the domain of utilitarian consumption, *the sacred is the domain of experience opened by the unproductive consumption of the surplus*: what is sacrificed. [...] The religious or artistic domain is not a simple superstructure of vague whims built on the economic infrastructure: it is itself economic, in the sense of a general economics founded on the expenditure of the excess, on the unproductive and

⁶⁵ Bataille, *TAS*, 11.

⁶⁶ Bataille, *TAS*, 25. ‘

⁶⁷ Bataille, *TAS*, 40.

⁶⁸ cf. Karl Marx, “Letter to Ruge”, in *Early Writings* (London: Penguin, 1975), 209: ‘We shall simply show the world why it is struggling, and consciousness of this is a thing it must acquire whether it wishes or not’; Bataille, *TAS*, 41.

⁶⁹ Bataille, *TAS*, 116.

⁷⁰ Max Weber, *Protestant Ethic and the Spirit of Capitalism* (Hoboken: Taylor and Francis, 2013), 116.

ecstatic consumption of the surplus, *through which the human being experiences the ultimate meaning of existence.*⁷¹

In Goux's analysis, capitalism became the leading economic force through the 'complete desacralisation of life (inaugurated by Calvinism and carried to its limit by Marxism)'.⁷² This move was needed to break free from previous economic regimes in which religion played an important role in directing resources. The impulse towards sacrifice had to be minimised in capitalism because while such a form of consumption was glorious, it was one of pure economic loss which contradicts capitalist economic principles, which is based on utilitarian rationality as discussed in section 3.1. Goux notes that Bataille interprets our anthropological history as a 'unification of the two forces that have been considered individually the motors of human societies', the forces of religion and economics, since 'until the birth of capitalism, every society is one of sacrificial expenditure', after which accumulation took centre-stage in a restrictive economy.⁷³

Potlatch is Bataille's prime example of such sacrificial expenditures. Potlatch is a means of 'circulating wealth' involving gift exchanges, throwing festivals or banquets for the community, or a 'solemn destruction of riches', by chiefs, lords and merchants, among other successful people.⁷⁴ These rituals are done to 'add lustre to his person by displaying the favour of the gods who had given him everything'.⁷⁵ However, Goux disputes Bataille's account of capitalism and potlatch. Goux does not think that the current state of capitalism is the capitalism of the Calvinists with its values of 'thrift, sobriety and asceticism' as portrayed by Weber and Bataille.⁷⁶ According to Goux, such Calvinist capitalism has already been displaced by an 'ethic of consumption, desire, and pleasure', which makes Bataille's general economy theory *passé* since what Bataille prescribes as the antidote to his conception of capitalism is precisely the form that capitalism has adopted.⁷⁷ The current state of capitalism has gone beyond its beginnings rooted in restrictive economy to one where 'no society has 'wasted' as much as contemporary capitalism', observes Goux.⁷⁸

In addition, Goux points to the work of Gilder who provides a reading of *The Gift* by Marcel Mauss, from which Bataille adapted his account of potlatch, that differs from Bataille's interpretation. Gilder posits that potlatch-style giving is not something belonging only to primitive societies but is at the heart of capitalism, drawing on Jean-Baptiste Say's economic law of how supply creates its own demand. He explains:

The unending offering of entrepreneurs, investing jobs, accumulating inventories—all long before any return is received, all without any assurance that the enterprise will not fail—constitute a pattern of giving that dwarfs in extent and in essential generosity any primitive rite of exchange. Giving is the vital impulse and moral centre of capitalism.⁷⁹

⁷¹ Jean-Joseph Goux, Kathryn Ascheim, and Rhonda Garelick, "General Economics and Postmodern Capitalism", *Yale French Studies*, no. 78 (1990): 207–8. My italics.

⁷² Goux, Ascheim, and Garelick, "General Economics and Postmodern Capitalism", 208.

⁷³ *Ibid.*

⁷⁴ Bataille, *TAS*, 67–68.

⁷⁵ Bataille, *TAS*, 66.

⁷⁶ Goux, Ascheim, and Garelick, "General Economics and Postmodern Capitalism", 209.

⁷⁷ Goux, Ascheim, and Garelick, "General Economics and Postmodern Capitalism", 210.

⁷⁸ *Ibid.*

⁷⁹ George Gilder, *Wealth and Poverty* (New York: Bantam Books, 1981), 30.

In Gilder's account, demand for non-necessities is not assured, certainly not *a priori*, and is preceded by a supply which causes the demand by creating new desires. For Gilder, the element of giving in capitalism resides in suppliers taking the risk that their 'gift' will not be reciprocated by demand, payment and subsequently, profits.

According to Goux, even Mauss's own interpretation of gifts in the contemporary world is not the frenetic squandering envisioned by Bataille but rather a staid picture of 'the industrialist who creates family insurance funds' or a society who has national health insurance for its members, 'where the community gives to the workers something other than a simple salary'.⁸⁰ Clearly, Bataille's interpretation of potlatch is just one of several interpretations and not necessarily even the most accurate one. Hence, Goux accuses Bataille of romanticising primitive societies. Instead of the generous utopias that Bataille seems to suggest, Goux observes that primitive societies are 'extremely unequal, even cruelly hierarchical [...where] spectacular consumption is the tool with which the powerful maintain their position above the dazzled, miserable masses'.⁸¹

In Goux's account of post-industrial societies, the primacy of consumption has already arrived and it is not quite what Bataille had envisioned. According to Goux, in such economies, 'the appeal [to consumers] to compete infinitely in unproductive consumption (through comfort, luxury, technical refinement, the superfluous) allows for the development of production'.⁸² Goux argues that the unproductive consumption of tobacco, alcohol, pleasure trips and movies allows for productive, profit-making industries. 'If one remains on strictly economic ground, it is in truth impossible to separate productive consumption from unproductive squandering', he writes.⁸³ How can Bataille respond to Goux's and Gilder's critique?

4.2 BATAILLE'S POSSIBLE DEFENCE

Noys agrees with Goux that 'Bataille's economy of excess might have traction on the ascetism of the Protestant ethic of accumulatory capitalism [which] seems to come into strange congruence with a 'postmodern' capitalism of realised excess'.⁸⁴ They indeed correctly depict Bataille's view of capitalism as an economics of accumulation since Bataille sees capitalism as a system where there is a preference for '*an increase of wealth to its immediate use*'.⁸⁵ Bataille was however clearly aware of the existence of consumerism which includes luxury and waste, himself raising the use of alcohol as an example of 'consuming without a return' though he was referring to the consumer's lack of return and not the producers.⁸⁶ Besides, the term 'conspicuous consumption' was already invented 50 years before the publication of *TAS* and Weber had also written about 'heartless hedonism'.⁸⁷

⁸⁰ Goux, Ascheim, and Garelick, "General Economics and Postmodern Capitalism", 214.

⁸¹ Goux, Ascheim, and Garelick, "General Economics and Postmodern Capitalism", 220.

⁸² Goux, Ascheim, and Garelick, "General Economics and Postmodern Capitalism", 219.

⁸³ Goux, Ascheim, and Garelick, "General Economics and Postmodern Capitalism", 220.

⁸⁴ Benjamin Noys, "'Grey in Grey': Crisis, Critique, Change", *Journal of Critical Globalisation Studies*, no. 4 (2011): 54.

⁸⁵ Bataille, *TAS*, 119.

⁸⁶ *Ibid.*

⁸⁷ Ishay Landa, "Bataille's Libidinal Economics: Capitalism as an Open Wound", *Critical Sociology* 41, no. 4-5 (2015): 582.

Ishay Landa details a shift in Bataille's thought between *TAS*'s first and later volumes. In volume three, in what might be a refinement of his view, Bataille writes: 'Those who mean to lead the world—and change it—opt [...] for accumulation. Those who prefer that others lead it [...] aim at nonproductive consumption'.⁸⁸ This suggests that Bataille is not oblivious to the consumption of modern capitalism. However, while the masses may participate in such a capitalism of consumption as noted by Goux, those in power remain in accumulation mode, perhaps including the industries that Goux refers to that profit off the unproductive consumption of the masses and Gilder's gift-giving entrepreneurs whose gifts are not pure acts of generosity but ultimately aim at profits.

Bataille also admits that methodologically, it is difficult to distinguish between productive and unproductive expenditures: 'Real life, composed of all sorts of expenditures, knows nothing of purely productive expenditure; in actuality, it knows nothing of purely unproductive expenditure either'.⁸⁹ Regardless, Bataille claims that the kinds of luxury and waste that present and past societies engage in are insufficient to avert the dangers he warns about:

Ancient societies found relief in festivals; some erected admirable monuments that had no useful purpose; we use the excess to multiply "services" that make life smoother, and we are led to reabsorb part of it by increasing leisure time. But these diversions have always been inadequate: Their existence *in excess* nevertheless (in certain respects) has perpetually doomed multitudes of human beings and great quantities of useful goods to the destruction of wars.⁹⁰

Wasteful festivals, monuments and services from past and present-day consumerist capitalism can only absorb part of the excess—they are mere *diversions*. Since there is excess left over, excess remains a problem. The possibility of war due to excess remains and may possibly be exacerbated by the profitability of Goux's industries of unproductive consumption and Gilder's giving entrepreneurs. Following Bataille's reasoning, the generation of even more profits from both groups increases the danger of catastrophe since there will be even greater excess leading to even more pressure on the limits of growth. We have hence not escaped Bataille's problems of limits outlined in Section 2.2. Excess remains a problem.

Even if we dispute the details of Bataille's account, we must acknowledge that there are problems of excess that are not merely the flip-side of problems of scarcity. Problems of excess such as obesity resulting from over-eating and environmental pollution from too much industrial activity and too many vehicles differ from problems of scarcity, such as insufficient food, underproduction of goods or a lack of transportation. Hence, they require different solutions. They also urgently need solving, with Bataille's theory of general economy presenting a useful theoretical lens to examine such problems. Abbott demonstrates one such fruitful use of Bataille's theory to develop strategies dealing with the problems of excess.

⁸⁸ Georges Bataille, *The Accursed Share, Volumes 2 and 3*, trans. Robert Hurley (New York: Zone Books, 1991), 422.

⁸⁹ Bataille, *TAS*, 12. Bataille explains that he makes this over-simplified distinction so that his thinking can first be grasped, but this 'rudimentary classification' will later have to be further explicated through 'detailed analysis'.

⁹⁰ Bataille, *TAS*, 24.

4.3 CONTRASTING EXCESS AND SCARCITY

One-third of all food produced went to waste while one-tenth of humanity starved, according to the United Nations (UN).⁹¹ It estimates that 10 percent of the world's population are living in extreme poverty, 'struggling to fulfil the most basic needs like health, education, and access to water and sanitation'.⁹² Some people die of thirst, while others flush their toilets with drinkable water. Such gross inequalities seem unfair and downright paradoxical, though in line with Bataille's idea of the dominance of scarcity from the perspective of the particular and a condition of excess from the perspective of the general. '*Particular* existence always risks succumbing for lack of resources. It contrasts with general existence whose resources are in excess and for which death has no meaning', he writes.⁹³ These varying states of scarcity and excess present their own unique sets of difficulties. However, according to Abbott, economists tend to ignore the problems of excess, treating it only as the flip-side of scarcity and hence not requiring separate analysis, given the economists' already elaborate study of scarcity. He calls this the identity argument and argues that such an identification of scarcity as the inverse of excess is a mistake since they are 'not necessarily conceptual contraries'.⁹⁴

To understand how this false opposition became a presupposition in economics, Abbott examines the historical development of economic thought. While contemporary economics is centred on scarcity, older seminal economic works have considered abundance and its problems. Bernard Mandeville's *Fable of the Bees* (1714), a text credited with inspiring Smith's conception of the invisible hand,⁹⁵ speaks about how individuals, by striving after excess, create social abundance.⁹⁶ However, by 1798, Thomas Malthus has laid the roots for the identity argument, ignoring the advantages of excess population such as military might and cheap labour, focusing instead on how it will create food scarcity.⁹⁷ David Ricardo later formalised Malthus's conception, producing the definitive 'theory of scarcity that has sustained subsequent economics'.⁹⁸

In Ricardo's theory, scarcity is a source of value while what is excessive is worthless in terms of exchange value. Since excess cannot be priced, the concept is discarded for theoretical parsimony. Marx likewise focuses on scarcity despite writing in an age of rapid economic expansion due to the industrial revolution in Britain. He views excess in the form of overproduction as a state of affairs common in capitalism, emphasising the resulting scarcity of work.⁹⁹ This idea became mainstream by the 19th century, with excess production seen as problematic since it led to low prices and unemployment.¹⁰⁰

⁹¹ UNDP, *United Nations Development Programme Annual Report 2019* (New York: UNDP, 2020), 19.

⁹² United Nations, "Ending Poverty", *United Nations*, accessed April 2, 2021, <https://www.un.org/en/global-issues/ending-poverty>.

⁹³ Bataille, *TAS*, 39.

⁹⁴ Andrew Abbott, "The Problem of Excess", *Sociological Theory* 32, no. 1 (2014): 8, 2.

⁹⁵ The invisible hand is described by Smith in *The Wealth of Nations* (1776).

⁹⁶ Abbott, "Problem of Excess", 3.

⁹⁷ Thomas Robert Malthus, *An Essay on the Principle of Population* (London: J. Johnson, 1798)

⁹⁸ Abbott, "Problem of Excess", 4.

⁹⁹ Karl Marx and Friedrich Engels, "Capital: A Critique of Political Economy, Volume 2, Book 2", in *Collected Works* (New York: International Publishers Co, 1997), 82–83; Karl Marx and Friedrich Engels, "The Communist Manifesto", in *The Marx-Engels Reader*, ed. Robert C. Tucker (New York: W. W. Norton & Company, 1978), 479.

¹⁰⁰ Abbott, "Problem of Excess", 4–5.

Keynes, the economist credited with bringing the world out of the Great Depression with his macroeconomic *General Theory of Employment, Interest and Money* (1936), did however conceive of a more optimistic future, predicting that his grandchildren will enjoy 15-hour workweeks because of a ‘new-found bounty of nature’ realised through technological innovation.¹⁰¹ He writes:

For the first time since his creation man will be faced with his real, his permanent problem—how to use his freedom from pressing economic cares, how to occupy the leisure, which science and compound interest will have won for him, to live wisely and agreeably and well.¹⁰²

However, the dismal science of economics manages to turn excess into scarcity ‘for purposes of analysis’ by economists more familiar with the theoretical framework of scarcity.¹⁰³ Even in such a world of excess and leisure as imagined by Keynes, there will be a scarcity of time to enjoy them, since there are only so few hours in a day to fill with so many competing pleasures, according to Nobel-Prize winning economist, Gary Becker.¹⁰⁴

The notion of excess as a precursor to the ‘better’ things in life pre-dates economic thought. Aristotle explains that only after our physical needs and desires are met, when there is a state of excess, could knowledge for its own sake then commence.¹⁰⁵ A popular modern rendition of Aristotle’s idea is Abraham Maslow’s hierarchy of needs, where Maslow argues that basic needs must first be met before higher-order needs and wants can be pursued:

The urge to write poetry, the desire to acquire an automobile, the interest in American history, the desire for a new pair of shoes are, in the extreme case, forgotten or become of secondary importance. For the man who is extremely and dangerously hungry, no other interests exist but food.¹⁰⁶

A state of excess is required for one to achieve the next tier in Maslow’s hierarchy, which finally culminates in the need for self-actualisation *after* the ‘satisfaction of physiological, safety, love and esteem needs’ respectively.¹⁰⁷

However, such accounts suggest an opposition between excess and scarcity, as if they are mutually exclusive and opposite concepts. Abbott objects to this translation of the problems of excess into problems of scarcity which in Becker’s case is the translation of excess goods into a lack of time to enjoy them.¹⁰⁸ This objection is important because such translation is what allows economists to ignore excess as a separate question. Abbott argues that scarcity and excess are on a spectrum rather than oppositional, becoming oppositional only in limit cases. Refuting Becker’s case, Abbott explains that treating time like a budget constraint is incorrect because the opportunity cost of time is not the same as the opportunity cost of money. Buying

¹⁰¹ John Maynard Keynes, *Essays in Persuasion* (New York: W. W. Norton & Company, 1963), 368.

¹⁰² Keynes, *Essays in Persuasion*, 367.

¹⁰³ Abbott, “Problem of Excess”, 5. The term ‘dismal science’ comes from 19th century Scottish historian, Thomas Carlyle.

¹⁰⁴ *Ibid.* Becker won the Nobel Memorial Prize in Economic Sciences in 1992.

¹⁰⁵ Aristotle, “Metaphysics, Book 1”, in *The Works of Aristotle*, ed. William David Ross (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1928), Chp. 1.

¹⁰⁶ A. H. Maslow, “A Theory of Human Motivation”, *Psychological Review* 50(4) (1943): 373–74.

¹⁰⁷ Maslow, “A Theory of Human Motivation”, 383.

¹⁰⁸ Abbott, “Problem of Excess”, 8.

one thing prevents the purchase of another with the same dollars. However, time does not behave like that since multiple utilities may be achieved in the same expenditure of time or even multiplied.¹⁰⁹

Prima facie, excess seems to be either a nice problem to have or a non-problem. Abbott considers the industrial production process. Production requires multiple inputs and if just one input is insufficient, the product cannot be produced. However, if all inputs are just sufficient or in excess, production can proceed with the excess posing no difficulty of production failure but perhaps posing a storage difficulty. Hence, if excess is problematic, it is problematic for different reasons than scarcity. ‘Excess is something fundamentally different from scarcity’ and therefore, the problems of excess need to be treated differently from the problems of scarcity.¹¹⁰

Bataille suggests that a disregard for the problems of excess, common among economists including those as renowned as Malthus and Becker, is due to the economy not being considered in its general sense. The mistake according to Bataille, is that economics adopts the methodology of the sciences, reducing phenomena into discrete operations based on an average individual. We then extend this understanding to the whole of society by aggregating the individual outcomes: ‘Economic science merely generalises the isolated situation; it restricts its object to operations carried out with a view to a limited end, that of economic man’.¹¹¹ However, we are not merely *homo economicus*, whose actions are only driven by economic considerations. Instead, we are destined to useless consumption and the choice we are confronted with is how excess is to be expended as *homo ecologicus*, human beings *qua* ‘living organisms’ interacting with others in the ‘entire domain of human activities’ including *non-economic* activities as far afield as religion, art and eroticism where ‘formidable energies are consumed for the celebration of the gods, the glory of the great or the dionysiac pleasure of the humble’.¹¹² Hence we need to reform our thinking altogether if we want to find a solution to economic problems and avoid catastrophe.

Abbott, drawing on Bataille’s general economy theory, tries to do this by understanding excess as a class of its own. He examines the causes of the problems of excess by distinguishing two types of excess on the levels of the individual and society: *surfeit*, an excess of one thing, and *welter*, an excess that arises from too many things.¹¹³ From this, he proposes two classes of strategies to deal with the problems of excess:

- 1) reduction strategies, which cut down the amount of excess. These have two subtypes:
 - a. defensive strategies, which ignores the excess, and

¹⁰⁹ Abbott, “Problem of Excess”, 9. Abbott gives an example of how the pleasure from watching a sports event *together* with a friend may be greater than the sum of the pleasures of both watching the event separately plus spending time with a friend *sans* event.

¹¹⁰ Abbott, “Problem of Excess”, 11.

¹¹¹ Bataille, *TAS*, 23.

¹¹² Nodoushani, “Postmodern Theory of General Economy”, 335; Goux, Ascheim, and Garelick, “General Economics and Postmodern Capitalism”, 207–8.

¹¹³ Abbott, “Problem of Excess”, 12–13. Surfeit creates problems in two ways: 1) overload, where the task is too large and complicated, and 2) habituation, where the routine of having excess decreases the perceived value of the object. Welter can lead to: 1) an overload of alternatives, where there are too many choices creating difficulties in selection, and 2) value contextuality, which is induced by the overload of alternatives. The value of each alternative changes in combination with the others chosen.

- b. reactive strategies, which simplifies excess by reducing it to more manageable terms.
- 2) rescaling strategies, which change the definition of desirability. These also have two subtypes:
- a. creative strategies, which accepts existing excess and increases it, by making excess and its enjoyment central to life, and
 - b. adaptive strategies, which make a virtue of the excess.¹¹⁴

Abbott's account supports and extends Bataille's theory by demonstrating the need for excess to be analysed as its own economic problem and by proposing a set of broad approaches to counter the problems of excess.

5. CONCLUSION

Has *TAS* accomplished the Copernican transformation Bataille had set out to achieve? The accursed share is the part of wealth that is cursed. For Bataille, this is the excess after man's needs are met. Actors in capitalistic societies attempt to control residual wealth by saving it and then subsequently unleashing these savings through investments. If profitable, such investments lead to an even greater amount of excess and diminishing returns, thus only delaying the inevitable expenditure. The choice we have is to expend the excess in a glorious or catastrophic way. It is a question of acceptability and not utility. Bataille presents his method as empirical, drawing from nature and history, with potlatch being an important example of the kind of sacrificial expenditure he advocates, away from the capitalism of thrift. However, Goux thinks that capitalism today has already taken the form of consumption, desire and pleasure that Bataille preaches. A possible Bataillean response is that while the masses may be consuming non-productively, the powerful are still accumulating wealth. In addition, such spending is still insufficient to solve the problem of excess. The problem of excess has been typically studied as the flip-side of scarcity since economists have a well-developed framework of scarcity to work from. However, excess and scarcity are fundamentally different requiring different treatment, leading Abbott to propose strategies specific to countering the problems of excess.

Despite the contestability of some details of Bataille's account, such as his solar cosmology and his conception of potlatch, his conception of general economy remains coherent, credible and is successful in challenging our understanding of economics, which currently has a restrictive rather than a general perspective. Which perspective is prevalent determines our behaviour since they lead to different ethical norms. A mindset of scarcity drives wealth accumulation and inequality, leaving the world open to catastrophe, while a mindset of superabundance drives generosity, leading to a raising of the overall living standards of the global population and glory for the generous. Which mindset is ideal for us will lie somewhere between the two perspectives since either extreme will be untenable or unsustainable. Given how much the global economy has tilted to the side of scarcity, Bataille's *TAS* can be viewed as a corrective to help us move to a more generous position.

¹¹⁴ Abbott, "Problem of Excess", 15–17.

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Descartes' Arguments for Cartesian Dualism

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ALTHOUGH INTUITIVELY ATTRACTIVE,¹ Cartesian dualism is ultimately deeply flawed. It is the view that mind and body are distinct substances,² and that they are 'joined and united' in the pineal gland,³ which is 'the principal seat of the soul'.⁴ This interactionist exegesis has been highly contested,¹ but this contest is not my purpose.

In terms of Descartes arguments for the 'real distinction' between mind and body, there are three: the argument from conceivability, the argument from divisibility, and the argument from doubt.⁵

Of the three, the argument from doubt stands out as the weakest. It runs vaguely thus: By virtue of the dreaming argument and the evil demon argument,⁶ matter and therefore our bodies (*res extensa*) can be doubted, but the mind (*res cogitans*) cannot be doubted because *cogito ergo sum*,⁷ so the mind is not the body. It is unclear whether Descartes even intended this argument: 'psychological predicates do not express properties sufficient to establish differences by Leibniz's Law',⁸ which is the fundament of all three Cartesian arguments, thereby committing the masked man fallacy. This is a significant error in reasoning which renders the argument invalid.

The other two arguments are at least internally consistent, but they are, nevertheless, both unsound. Descartes' primary metaphysical justification of the distinction of mind and body is arguably the argument from divisibility.⁹ Descartes explains it as follows:

Now my first observation here is that there is a great difference between a mind and a body in that a body, by its very nature, is always divisible. On the other hand, the mind is utterly indivisible. For when I consider the mind, that is, myself insofar as I am only a thinking thing, I cannot distinguish any parts within me; rather, I understand myself to be manifestly one complete thing. Although the entire mind seems to be united to the entire body, nevertheless, were a foot or an arm or any other bodily part to be amputated, I know that nothing has been taken away from the mind on that account.¹⁰

¹ Smith & Jones 1986. cp. Rosenthal 2000, 218.

² AT XI:119; CSM I:99; McCann 1996, 339; Hart 1996, 265; Rosenthal 2000, 217.

³ AT XI:119; CSM I:99

⁴ AT III:19–20; CSMK 143.

⁵ MFPV VI.

⁶ MFPV I.

⁷ MFPV II; PP pt. I sec. 7; AT X:535; DM pt. IV para. 1.

⁸ Hart 1996, 265.

⁹ Calef s.d.

¹⁰ MFPC VI.85-86.

This can be expressed thus:

- | | |
|---|-----------------------------------|
| 1 | All physical things are extended |
| 2 | All extended things are divisible |
| 3 | No minds are divisible |
| 4 | The mind is not physical |

And the argument from conceivability can be expressed similarly:

- | | |
|---|---|
| 1 | I can conceive myself existing without my body |
| 2 | If I can conceive x existing without y , then it is possible for x to exist without y |
| 3 | If it is possible for x to exist without y , then x and y are distinct |
| 4 | It is possible for me to exist without my body |
| 5 | I am distinct from my body |

Observe that both rely on a circular argument. The argument from conceivability has as its premiss the perception of the mind as discrete from the body, and the divisibility argument has as its premiss the perception of the body as divisible and the mind as indivisible. The veracity of clear and distinct perceptions (the Truth Rule) relies upon the existence of God,¹¹ who is ‘no deceiver’.¹² But Descartes’ proof of God presupposes that clear and distinct perceptions are veridical (the Truth Rule).¹³ The Truth Rule is in each argument an axiomatic premiss, so the Cartesian Circle is what these arguments are predicated upon, rather than the reasoning of the arguments themselves. This makes them internally consistent, if unsound,¹⁴ and therefore ‘better’ than the argument from doubt. But on account of Descartes method of global skepticism, and in the absence of a proper proof of these perception premisses, as we might call them, it follows that they are not truth-apt, for it cannot be said either way whether they are true or false, and the arguments which take these perception premisses as their fundament cannot be called sound.

This argument relies on a Cartesian skepticist epistemology which, however, is not necessary for the proof of Cartesian dualism. If it is accepted that clear and distinct perceptions are indeed veridical – i.e. if we accept the Truth Rule on separate grounds from the Cartesian Circle which it was grounded upon by Descartes – then it would appear that these perception premisses can be true, and indeed they seem generally unobjectionable. But contrary to appearances, it is neither the case that these perception premisses are true, nor that their truth entails a distinction between mind and body.

Consider first the divisibility argument. It does not seem true to say that mind is indivisible: not only is it divided into conscious, subconscious and unconscious parts, but when it is unconscious, and awareness is rendered discontinuous, it seems that what we call mind is also discontinuous, and therefore divided.¹⁵ Dualists might argue that the argument from divisibility seeks to show that bodies but not minds are spatially divisible, and that argument is not rebutted by pointing out that consciousness is *temporally* divisible.¹⁶ However, it remains

¹¹ cf. McCann 1996, 340.

¹² MFPV V.15.

¹³ Newman 2019.

¹⁴ cp. Christofidou 2012, 219-220; Carriero 2010; Newman 2019; Frankfurt 2007; Williams 1978.

¹⁵ Locke 1959, bk. II ch. I sec. 10.

¹⁶ Calef s.d.

to be explained why we are *simultaneously* conscious of some one thought, and subconscious of a great many others; or how it can be doing two discrete things at once, like thinking and moving the body to walk, for it makes little sense to say of one body that it can have discrete or opposing predicates – just as one body of water cannot be both boiling and freezing at the same time, and if it were we would rather say of it that there were two bodies side-by-side rather than that there were a single body with these contradictory properties.

It follows from the position that the mind is indivisible that it must also be a simple unity. This seems unattractive, but observe an argument to this effect:¹⁷

- | | |
|---|---|
| 1 | The mind is not identical with the body |
| 2 | The mind is not composed by the body |
| 3 | <u>The mind can have no parts of which it is composed</u> |
| 4 | The mind is a simple substance |

The first premiss is supported by the argument that minds and bodies have different persistence conditions, but I, for one, have never seen a mind persisting without the body, or a (living) body persisting without the mind; nor is it uncommon to see that, as the body persists weakly, as does the mind, and when one’s mind is broken, their body often follows shortly after.

The second premiss is defended by the argument that there are no parts a mind can possess other than parts of the body, and if a person were to have as parts only parts of the body, then it would follow that the mind would be identical with the body, which contradicts the first premiss; hence the only possible conclusion is the third premiss, that the mind has no parts at all. However, it does not seem unreasonable to assume that there are parts the mind can possess separate from the body: the plausibility of the classic theological belief in a soul that goes to an afterlife would seem to count against this claim, for it would seem that the mind possesses a number of spiritual parts which are in communion with God which we cannot attribute to the body.

Furthermore, there are no independent reasons for assuming that the diversity of experiences constitute a unity. For David Hume, introspection reveals a multiplicity of experiences, but no subject in which they inhere. We can grant for the sake of argument that there is in fact a mind, but if introspection is to reveal the mind, and thereupon is discovered a multiplicity of experiences, then the mind itself cannot consist in anything other than this multiplicity. Or if there is something more, that it cannot unify this multiplicity, except relationally, hence we can say that the unity of mind consists in nothing more than ‘the irreducible and unanalyzable property of ‘mineness’’,¹⁸ which is a *relation*, and therefore necessitates a multiplicity of relata to be related. And what has multiple parts is divisible.

As for the conceivability argument, the first premiss is false. It states that it is possible to conceive of the self without the body viz. mind without matter. The justification for this is grounded in Cartesian metaphysics: the mind is a thinking thing (*res cogitans*) and matter is an extended thing (*res extensa*),¹⁹ and it is supposedly possible to conceive of a thinking thing unextended. I, however, cannot conceive of myself without extension; for even were I a thinking thing and nothing but a thinking thing, I should like to say that I am *somewhere*, even if I cannot be sure, by virtue of Cartesian skepticism, of where I am; and if I should say that I

¹⁷ Lowe 2000, 18-19.

¹⁸ Nagel 1986, p. 34 n. 5.

¹⁹ MFP II.8; PP pt. II secs. 1 and 2.

think of a thing that is somewhere, or an idea (ιδέα) or ideal (εἶδος) that is nowhere, I must surely say of myself that I am somewhere *else*, that I am therefore discrete from the object of thought – for it would not do to conceive of an idea separate from myself of which I am a particular, or to think of an idea itself external to myself when I am that idea itself, and contemplation thereupon should be called introspective. Hence Antoine Arnauld said:

Mightn't I also be wrong in thinking that nothing else belongs to my nature apart from my being a thinking thing? Perhaps my being an extended thing also belongs to my nature... in my knowledge of myself as a thinking thing I don't, after all, have a complete and adequate conception of myself, but only an inadequate conception reached through intellectual abstraction.²⁰

The second premiss – that the conceivability of some thing entails the possibility of that thing – we can grant quite readily, because it is generally accepted that conceivability entails possibility.²¹ Though there are questions surrounding the possibility of such conceivable events as time-travel,²² it is seldom that 'one can imagine that p (and tell less imaginative folk a story that enables them to imagine that p) plus a good argument that it is impossible that p'.²³

However, the possibility of some thing existing without some other thing does not entail the actuality of the existences of those things being discrete, which is what the third premiss is supposed to demonstrate. I can imagine myself lacking a hand, but 1) my possibly having no hand does not entail my actually having no hand, and 2) my hand is not *discrete* from my body i.e. unrelated to it; rather, they are *non-identical*, insofar as parts are distinct from wholes, but not really – for the hand is a *part* of the body. This is not a possibility permitted by Cartesian dualism, which denies that the mind is a part of the body, and asserts that the two are ontologically separate things.

All three arguments that Descartes put forth in defence of his dualism were unsound.

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²⁰ Arnauld 2007, 54.

²¹ Hart 1994, 265-267.

²² Robinson 2020.

²³ Hart 1994, 266.

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ⁱ Cartesian dualism has been considered interactionist (Copleston 1963, ch. 4), Scholastic-Aristotelean hylomorphic (Hoffman 1986; Skirry 2003), skeptical idealist (Kant 1787, 274), Platonic (Maritain 1944, 179; Voss 1994, 274), parallelist (Keeling 1963, 285), non-parallelist (Wilson 1978, 80; Cottingham 1986, 124; AT VII:358; CSM II:248), occasionalist (Reid 1895, vol. 2 p. 961), epiphenomenalist (Lyons 1980, 4–5), supervenientist (Clarke 2003, 157), behaviourist (Kneale 1963, 839), functionalist (Putnam 1975; Nussbaum

1978; Wilkes 1978), materialistic dual-aspect identity theoretical (Smith 1998, 70), and dualist categorical distinctive (Cottingham 1985; Cottingham 1986, ch. 5). It is also suggested he was a covert materialist who hid his opinion out of fear of the Church (La Mettrie 1748). These are just about all the positions from the history of the philosophy of mind.

DISCUSSION

FIDEISM AND (DIS)BELIEF*

BRYNNA GANG maintains that ‘fideism permits an attitude of tolerance towards the faithful and the unfaithful alike, without undermining faith’.¹ This is false: fideism undermines the epistemic foundations of faith. This is why it was rejected by the Catholic Church.² If it is accepted that faith is irrational then, in fact, there is an epistemic obligation to disbelieve.

Nor does fideism fully exculpate the disbeliever. If we accept the fideist premiss that faith is irrational, then it follows that there can be no epistemic obligation to believe. However, if we accept the religious principle, there remains a moral obligation thereupon. This is the essential problematic of fideism: faith is asserted as a transcendental requirement, and reason is asserted as an epistemic requirement, and fideism divides reason and faith into two opposite camps.

So the believer errs epistemically, insofar as faith is unjustifiable (at least in ordinary terms of epistemic justification – namely, the same way that we justify every other belief), but they are in keeping with their moral requirements. As for the unbeliever, they breach their moral requirement (insofar as the religious principle holds), but keep their epistemic ones. This is the kind of dichotomy that is set up when it is said that faith is irrational, and Ms. Gang makes no attempt to resolve this fundamental divide, despite her appeal to fideism.

There appear to me only two ways to defend the unbeliever and the believer alike vis-à-vis Ms. Gang’s path through fideism: firstly, it must be demonstrated that religious faith (x) is rational and that it is equally (rationally) justifiable (RJ) to believe (x) and to disbelieve ($\neg x$); alternatively, it must be demonstrated that religious faith (x), though irrational, is nevertheless (irrationally) justifiable (IJ), so it is rationally justifiable to disbelieve ($\neg x$) and irrationally justifiable to believe (x), and that rational and irrational justification are both legitimate forms of justification required for knowledge (K) as at least justified true belief (JTB) – hence: $RJ \vee IJ \wedge T \wedge B \rightarrow K$. Both ways, however, entail the joint satisfiability of contradictors ($x \wedge \neg x$): to be epistemically justified in some belief, that belief must be true, but it cannot be the case that both belief and disbelief are true: $\neg(x \wedge \neg x)$. This does not seem to me easily possible to resolve, and, in the absence of a resolution thereof, it ought to be said that the unbeliever cannot be defended by way of fideism whilst simultaneously maintaining the justifiability of the theistic position.

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¹ Brynna Gang, (2020), “In Defense of the Unbeliever,” *Aporia*, vol. 30, no. 2, pp. 11-22, page 12.

² Pius X, *Sacrorum antistitum*; Pius XII, *Humani Generis*, 561; John Paul II, *Fides et Ratio*; Peter Abelard, *Sic et Non*; Lord Herbert, *De Veritate, prout distinguitur a revelatione, a verisimili, a possibili, et a falso*; *Catechism of the Catholic Church*, 37; Denzinger-Schonmetzer, *Enchiridion Symbolorum, definitionum et declarationum de rebus fidei et morum*, 3875; Romans i. 20.

* Gang, Brynna. (2020). “In Defense of the Unbeliever.” *Aporia*, vol. 30, no. 2, pp. 11-22.

REVIEWS

PHILOSOPHY OF RELIGION: A VERY SHORT INTRODUCTION

TIM BAYNE

Oxford, Oxford University Press, 2018, xxii + 133 pp., bibliography and index

MANY INTRODUCTIONS to the philosophy of religion do not bother addressing the question of what the philosophy of religion actually is. Some do; Tim Bayne's *Philosophy of Religion: A Very Short Introduction* is one of them.

The philosophy of religion is concerned not with religion as a social, cultural, or political phenomenon, but with philosophical questions that are prompted by religious faith and experience.¹

This definition is not controversial, but neither is it especially revealing. This, however, seems to be a hallmark of philosophers of religion trying to define their subject.² Observe a few:

Philosophy of religion combines [metaphysics, epistemology and ethics] in offering philosophically accessible accounts of religious traditions and assessing those traditions. Nothing very complex is involved in offering philosophically accessible accounts of religious traditions; the idea is simply to offer clear and literal expressions of key doctrines.³

A philosophy of religion is not a theology. It is not a careful analysis and synthesis of the basic doctrines of any one religious faith or denomination. It is the attempt to understand the fundamental issues with which any religious belief is involved... in the philosophy of religion we confine our study to systematic criticism of the essential claims of all religions.⁴

We may best understand what philosophy of religion is by beginning with what it is not. First, philosophy of religion must not be confused with the study of the history of the major religions by which human beings have lived... Second, philosophy of religion is not to be confused with theology... We may best characterize philosophy of religion as *the critical examination of basic religious beliefs and concepts*.⁵

Likewise, Mr. Bayne asserts an intimate relationship between theology and philosophy of religion, but ultimately denies that the two are indistinguishable: 'Theological discussions occur *within* the context of a particular religious tradition, whereas philosophical discussions aim to *transcend* the boundaries between traditions'.⁶ This, too, is perfectly in keeping with popular academic consensus.

On the other end of the spectrum is the view that, rather than philosophy and theology being the same, they are instead completely incompatible, and there cannot therefore be such a thing as 'philosophy of religion'. Mr. Bayne denies this too, however.

He begins the book with a discussion of the concept of God; he only considers classical theism, the god of which he categorizes in terms of perfect being theology, creation, knowledge and worship. These ways of conceptualization are abundant in proponents, almost none of

whom Mr. Bayne engages with, especially with regard to perfect being theology, for which he could have mentioned any number of theologians, and ought to have properly detailed the theology of Anselm and Augustine at least, rather than merely mentioning their names in passing. Likewise, a more sophisticated categorization would have been preferred, such as the following:⁷

1. Godhood defined vis-à-vis the godhead
 - i. Equally attributive
 - ii. Primarily omnificent and graceful
 - iii. Fundamentally perfect
2. Godhood defined vis-à-vis ultimate reality
 - i. As over-reality
 - ii. As under-reality

The natural progression from a discussion of concepts of God is a discussion of the arguments for and against His existence. For the latter, Mr. Bayne considers the divine hiddenness objection and the problem of evil. As for the former, he picks the cosmological argument, the design argument and the argument from religious experience. This is, to me, an odd selection. Certainly, if he were to be selective about it, the ontological argument would have been a subject more fit for consideration than the argument from religious experience. I can only fathom that his choice has been based upon a desire to establish a natural theological theme and, to therefore avoid matters of *a priority*, he did not give the ontological argument the consideration that its prominence within intellectual history deserves.

He does not offer a brilliant discussion of these arguments, missing out many famous and obvious criticisms, and those he mentioned he does not attribute to the famous names associated with them. In his discussion of the cosmological argument, he focusses too much on too few points of discussion, and chooses badly what to talk about – he fails to mention Hume, or any of his extremely popular criticisms, either for the cosmological argument or the design argument. Nor does he mention any of the numerous logical fallacies which plague both arguments, and which certainly ought to be mentioned as initial objections in an introduction to the topics. Regarding the design argument, he makes it seem, in its embryonic form, a biological argument, and then rushes too quickly into the fine-tuning argument and the multiverse hypothesis – which, in a sense, is well, since much contemporary discussion of the design argument is focused thereupon, but it hardly gives an accurate introductory impression of the essential characteristics of the design argument. And, as for the argument from religious experience, it is quite necessary to first describe the other problematics of religious experience – namely, whether they are veridical or not – before they can be used as evidence for the existence of God.

The nature of faith is considered in virtue of the divine hiddenness objection. Rather than an objection to the existence of God, Mr. Bayne maintains, divine hiddenness is an important component of faith, as it creates the epistemic distance which is a necessary condition of properly *religious* faith.

Another objection to faith is its possible immorality (irresponsibility): whether it is wrong to believe anything upon insufficient evidence.

As I see it, in order to show that theism is ethically suspect one would need to show that it is clearly less reasonable than belief in the kinds of claims that are the focus of

ethical, political, and philosophical disagreement. Can such a case be made? Perhaps. But my own view is that it hasn't yet been made, and I see no reason to suppose that it can be made.⁸

The other (supposed) objection to the existence of God that Mr. Bayne considers is the problem of evil. 'The philosophical problem of evil is whether pain, suffering, and affliction can be reconciled with the very *existence* of God', he says.⁹ But this is not true: the problem of evil entails the non-existence of an omnipotent-benevolent god.¹⁰ Presumably he means that evil is incompatible with the existence of the god of classical theism, which is *necessarily* omnipotent-benevolent, but he does not make this clear – in an introductory book, this is probably an issue.

In response to the problem of evil, Mr. Bayne considers the soul-making theodicy, natural law theodicy, the free will defence and skeptical theism – which he is unpersuaded by: 'the challenges that face the sceptical response to the problem of evil are no less pressing than those that confront other versions of the greater good strategy'.¹¹ This is, again, a slightly bizarre selection: why he omitted the Augustinian theodicy, I do not know.

Mr. Bayne also discusses the history of religion in the context of the challenge that it can be explained naturalistically. Mr. Bayne, however, asserts that 'few contemporary theorists endorse this 'wish-fulfilment' account of the roots of religion'.¹² Instead of the superstitious fear account, current accounts of religious belief emphasize three other factors: the activity of a hypersensitive agency detection device; the intuitive pull of teleological explanations; and the need to ensure that the members of a society comply with its norms.¹³ This is what he calls the 'standard model' of religious belief.

The standard model seems to lend itself to a naturalistic theory of religion. Mr. Bayne considers the byproduct argument, the argument from explanatory absence and the argument from unreliability in favour of this claim. The first maintains that religious belief is an incidental byproduct of mechanisms that have been selected by evolution to serve other purposes; the second, that God plays no role in explaining why people have religious beliefs; and the third, that religious beliefs are accidents derived from the unreliability of the activity of a hypersensitive agency detection device, the intuitive pull of teleological explanations and the need to ensure that the members of a society comply with its norms. Discussion of all three end in disfavour of a natural history of religion, but neither does Mr. Bayne provide arguments in favour of understanding religious history as scripture asserts it. Instead, his position is that 'the plausibility of the destabilizing thesis depends on the perspective that one adopts'.¹⁴

Mr. Bayne's discussion of religious language is divided into three dichotomies: realism or anti-realism; descriptivism or the causal view of reference; univocal or analogical predication. The only type of anti-realism he mentions is emotivism, and not by name. His only criticism of realism is verificationism, which is dismissed with the classic, but ultimately weak, argument that 'verificationism appears to dissolve in its own acids (as the theologian Janet Soskice once put it), for it is not easy to specify verification conditions for the theory itself'.¹⁵ Mr. Bayne establishes himself as a realist:

The philosopher Roger Trigg seems to me to get things exactly right: 'Religions are typically making claims about the nature of reality, and pretending that they are something quite different is to misrepresent their nature'.¹⁶

His discussion of religious reference is, of course, in realist terms. Descriptivists hold that a name latches on to an object in virtue of the fact that that object uniquely satisfies the description associated with it. Causal theorists hold that names latch on to their referents in virtue of a certain kind of causal chain between the referent and the use of the name. He also establishes himself as a causal view theorist: ‘Although descriptivism might be true of some names... most philosophers are convinced that ordinary names are best understood in terms of the causal account’.¹⁷

Religious predication is used to make claims *about* God rather than referring *to* Him. Language used univocally is dismissed. Analogical language is spoken of favourably, but he briefly mentions some problems. He passes no ultimate judgement. It is unfortunate he did not speak a little about religious language as symbolic, mythological, imperative etc. in order to create a complete, if brief, overview of the problematics of religious language.

From religious language, Mr. Bayne moves to the afterlife, which does not seem the most natural movement. He does not bother considering the arguments surrounding the existence of the afterlife. This means there is no real discussion of heaven, hell and purgatory, and the various problematics associated therewith.

Instead, he considers the substance dualistic theory of the soul. He says that contemporary philosophers are unenthusiastic about it. One reason he gives is that ‘dualism is alien to the Abrahamic faiths’.¹⁸ I am not sure that he has this correct: the Abrahamic theory of the soul was influenced by Platonism which is psychosomatically dualistic, unlike Aristotelianism, which is not. Bodily resurrection is metaphorical, or refers to the resurrection of the soul in a material body, but seldom is it taken seriously that resurrection of *the* body is maintained in the dogma. On the contrary, ‘in the resurrection, they neither marry nor are given in marriage, but are like the angels of God in heaven’,¹⁹ ‘so also is the resurrection of the dead: the body... is sown a natural body; it is raised a spiritual body’.²⁰ According to the Catechism of the Catholic Church, the body after resurrection is changed into a spiritual, imperishable body:

Christ is raised with his own body: "See my hands and my feet, that it is I myself"; but he did not return to an earthly life. So, in him, "all of them will rise again with their own bodies which they now bear," but Christ "will change our lowly body to be like his glorious body," into a "spiritual body".²¹

Mr. Bayne, however, takes the resurrection of the body quite literally:

From the perspective of the Abrahamic religions, belief in a bodily resurrection isn't an optional ‘add-on’ to belief in the afterlife—it is what belief in the afterlife amounts to, and for the adherents of these religions questions about the intelligibility of the afterlife are questions about the intelligibility of bodily resurrection.²²

This causes him to take seriously the reassembly, body-snatchers and falling elevator models of resurrection.

It would have been good to have considered the problems of salvation as well as of resurrection; it is an equally pressing matter as to who will make it to heaven and hell as to what state their residence will take. Instead, the problem of heaven is discussed (the problem of hell is not). Mr. Bayne seems to agree with Schopenhauer that heaven is not desirable.

The book will suffice as an introduction to those totally ignorant of the philosophy of religion, but will not do at all for anybody seeking to learn anything about any of the specific topics within the book. If one were to seek an introduction to, say, the problem of evil, then they will not find themselves well introduced by reading the chapter on “The problem of evil” in *Philosophy of Religion: A Very Short Introduction*. This is the real complaint. The selection of topics is simply bizarre sometimes, and what he includes and excludes is not what might be expected for certain topics.

Another complaint is that citations are given in the “References” in the backmatter. This is inconvenient – I am a proponent of footnotes – but is probably the fault of Oxford University Press more so than Mr. Bayne (other *very short introductions* have the same style of referencing).

Finally, Mr. Bayne makes a somewhat outdated choice to focus on classical theism.²³ Certainly, most of the problematics of the philosophy of religion are most suitably discussed within the paradigm of Abrahamic religion, and I could not fault him if the book after the second chapter had been Abrahamic – but in the second chapter on “The concept of God” he certainly ought to have offered at least a cursory overview of the ways in which different religions conceive of godhood and the godhead. This shortsightedness is probably the cause of the lack of sophistication in his delineation of the different ways of conception of the divine.

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¹ Tim Bayne, *Philosophy of Religion: A Very Short Introduction*, page 1.

² This is with the exception of T. J. Mawson, (2005), *Belief in God: An Introduction to the Philosophy of Religion*, Oxford: Oxford University Press, page 15:

It's the essence of books about the philosophy of religion that they address the issue of what reasons we have for believing physicalism true or false; addressing this issue is what makes a book be a book about the philosophy of religion. Therefore, while a book about the philosophy of religion may or may not be humourless, it cannot—of conceptual necessity—fail to address this issue.

³ Keith E. Yandell, (1999), *Philosophy of Religion: A Contemporary Introduction*, London: Routledge, page 18.

⁴ Peter Anthony Bertocci, (1951), *Introduction to the Philosophy of Religion*, Englewood Cliffs: Prentice-Hall, Inc., page 8.

⁵ William L. Rowe, (2007), *Philosophy of Religion: An Introduction* (4th ed.), London: Wadsworth, pages 1-2.

⁶ Tim Bayne, op. cit., page 2.

⁷ Neminemus, *The Hypothetical God*, Volume I, Chapter 1.

⁸ Tim Bayne, op. cit., page 60.

⁹ Ibid. page 64.

¹⁰ Neminemus, (2022), “What the Problem of Evil Properly Entails,” *Philosophy of Religion eJournal*, vol. 15, no. 3, page 4.

¹¹ Tim Bayne, op. cit., page 77.

¹² Ibid. page 81.

¹³ Ibid.

¹⁴ Ibid. page 91.

¹⁵ Ibid. page 95.

¹⁶ Roger Trigg, (1998), *Rationality and Religion*, Oxford: Blackwell, page 49 in Tim Bayne, loc. cit.

¹⁷ Tim Bayne, op. cit., pages 97-98.

¹⁸ Ibid. page 106.

¹⁹ Matthew xxii. 30.

²⁰ 1 Colossians xv. 42-44.

²¹ *Catechism of the Catholic Church*, Part 1, Section 2, Chapter 3, Article 11.

²² Tim Bayne, op. cit., page 107.

²³ Ibid. page 6.

THE RIGHT TO SEX

AMIA SRINIVASA

London, Bloomsbury, 2021, 304 pp., bibliography and index

KARL MARX once criticised the idealism of his time by remarking: the point is not to understand the world but to change it.¹ Amia Srinivasan echoes in *The Right to Sex*, as a poignant reminder to contemporary feminism that risks becoming increasingly abstract and theoretical:

At its best, feminist theory discloses the possibilities for women's lives that are latent in women's struggles, drawing those possibilities closer. But, too often, feminist theory prescind from the particulars of women's lives, only to tell them, from on high, what their lives really mean. Most women have little use for such pretensions. They have too much work to do.²

This remark, as I see it, makes clear the background relative to which Srinivasan's philosophising takes place, and without an understanding of which objections can easily be misplaced. Among the mixed reception of the book, there are concrete criticisms on the more substantial points, like Rae Langton's concern for Srinivasan's distrust of legal powers,³ and Sally Haslanger's reservations about Srinivasan's neglect of social theories (both will be discussed in more detail later).⁴ But a more common criticism stems from a general dissatisfaction towards the lack of answers, of theoretical unity, and thus of comfort, which Srinivasan explicitly rejects the need to provide. For her, *The Right to Sex* is a book that points out intricacies in our social practices, raises a plethora of problems, and questions any ready-to-hand, once-for-all solutions. It attempts to 'dwell, where necessary, in discomfort and ambivalence', and to confess, where necessary, her confusion and hesitation. 'These essays do not offer a home', she writes in the preface, anticipating dissatisfactions, 'But I hope they do offer, for some, a place of recognition'.⁵

The book is composed of six essays, interconnected but also relatively independent. The first addresses the issue of rape, and calls on the notion of intersectionality to explicate the myths behind it. The second essay is concerned with pornography and the increasing (mis-)educational effect pornography has on the younger generations. It also touches on the topic of a political critique of desire, which is extended in the third and fourth essay. These two interconnected essays begin with the case of Elliot Rodger (who, being desperately sexually frustrated, killed 6 people and injured 14 others during a misogynistic terror attack), and go on to discuss the ways in which our (sexual) desires are shaped by problematic social, political and cultural forces, and how we could free ourselves from them. The fifth essay shifts the focus to student-teacher relationships, and argues that the wrongness of them is not (as is traditionally conceived) rooted in a failure of consent, but rather a pedagogical failure. The end of the essay questions the effectiveness of stricter university regulations, which blossoms into the sixth essay, likely the most controversial one in the book. There she objects to what she calls 'carceral feminism' – feminism that appeals to the power of the state in order to achieve gender justice – based on the observation that it often harms the most vulnerable group of women.

In this review I pick up and discuss three relatively distinct themes in this book. The first is anti-carceralism rooted in the recognition of intersectionality; the second is a political critique of desire; the third is the lack of theories and the emphasis on practical reason. All of

them are controversial among feminists. This review aims to explicate these themes and discuss some objections and concerns without settling the question either way.

ANTI-CARCERALISM AND INTERSECTIONALITY

It would be best to start backwards, with the last essay where she offers the most systematic critique of carceralism. There she begins by contrasting two feminist approaches to prostitution: one advocates for its abolition because it sees prostitution as a ‘distillation of women’s condition under patriarchy’,⁶ a perfect symbol for patriarchal inequality and oppression; the other proposes to decriminalise prostitution because it is the best way to concretely protect the prostitutes, seen as a particularly poor and vulnerable group of women. Srinivasan sides resolutely with the latter group: she agrees that symbols sometimes matter, but argues that when the demands of symbolism stand in tension with that of the real women, we should never ‘mess over people in the name of politics’.⁷

For clarity of discussion, here I reconstruct her argument for anti-carceralism (about prostitution) as an argument with three premises:

P1: Criminalising prostitution can neither abolish nor reduce prostitution.

P2: *Ceteris paribus*, the lives of prostitutes would be better if prostitution is legal.

C1: Given P1&2, criminalising prostitution generally makes the lives of prostitutes worse without making other lives better.

P3: The wellbeing of real people is more important than symbolic value of politics.

C2: We should decriminalise prostitution.

P2 and P3 are straightforward. P2 is a relatively uncontroversial fact, and P3 is treated just as an assertion. P1 is supported by two reasons: first, historical and empirical evidence suggests that criminalisation does not work: ‘The criminalisation... of sex work has never, in practice, got rid of prostitution. Sex work has thrived under every legal regime; what has varied are the conditions under which sex is bought and sold...’.⁸ Second, there is an underlying explanation of why this is so: ‘under current economic conditions many women will be compelled to sell sex, and... under current ideological conditions many men will buy it’.⁹ Wealth inequality on the one hand, patriarchal ideology on the other; the law, as Srinivasan sees it, is impotent compared to these two deeply entrenched socio-economic powers.

This draws on a broader discussion of intersectionality, which, as Srinivasan points out, is not the mere addition of two orthogonal forms of oppression; rather, it says that ‘any liberation movement... that focuses only on what all members of the relevant group... have in common is a movement that will best serve those members of the group who are least oppressed’.¹⁰ There (Chapter 1) her example is: only to stress ‘believe women’ (which, as she notes, carries the implicit injunction ‘don’t believe men’) is likely to make black men more vulnerable to false accusations. In the second essay, the example is that attempts ‘to legislate

against porn... invariably harm the women who financially depend on it the most.¹¹ Here, in the context of prostitution, the intersection between sex and class means that abolitionism – the doctrine that focuses on what the oppression of women have *in common* – will only serve the women that are least oppressed, while harming those in the lowest social class, those that are forced into prostitution.

This argument can be challenged on two fronts, and both have been done by Haslanger and Langton. On P3: sometimes symbols are more important than Srinivasan seems to assume. Sometimes symbolic victory is precisely what we want because it will have more profound, long-term impacts: it might help to transform social consciousness. Langton refers to the Hart-Devlin debate on homosexuality to illustrate the fact that legal consciousness may precede and lead social consciousness.¹² Haslanger concurs: ‘the relationship between law and culture is complicated and variable, and feminist legal theorists and critical race theorists have been developing social theory for decades to address the very question she [Srinivasan] poses.’ Langton also points out that the symbolic value of the law is probably its main function: the point of having a legal system is more about its deterring power than the actual punishment of the criminals. On P1: while it is true that prostitution cannot be wiped out by legal changes, it is also an exaggeration to say that the law is completely impotent against prostitution. It might still effectively control the scale of prostitution. Haslanger adds: ‘The law may not be our friend, but it can be useful, and we surely don’t want it to be our enemy.’

It is noteworthy that both the argument and objections are made on pragmatic grounds. Srinivasan criticises carceralism as being unrealistic: it does not attend to the actual lives of prostitutes. Langton and Haslanger retort that Srinivasan is actually the one being unrealistic: yes, changing the law is probably not the best way, and certainly not the most fundamental way, to address the problem of patriarchy; nonetheless, it is our most practical way to redress imminent injustices. Social consciousness is our end goal, but usually it takes much longer for it to change.

A POLITICAL CRITIQUE OF DESIRE

We can criticise our beliefs for failing to fit the world, says traditional epistemology, since it is in the nature of our beliefs that they aim to correspond to the world. However, it continues, a parallel critique cannot be made for desires, because it has a different ‘direction of fit’: desires aim to change the world to fit our desires. They were used to be taken as given, and not quite susceptible to criticism (for either political or epistemological reasons). So how is it possible for us to offer a political critique of desire?

The first step is to notice that our desires are mostly not innate, not something that we naturally have and are born with; they are largely shaped by socio-cultural powers. The desire to eat is biological, but the desire to eat certain kinds of food and not others is socio-cultural; the desire to have sex is biological, but the desire to have sex with certain kinds of people and not others is even more socio-cultural. And these structural powers can be oppressive, hierarchical, and thus, susceptible to political critique.¹³

Take the case of Elliot Rodger. His misogynist terror attack was largely due to his desperation with being an ‘incel’ (involuntary celibate) and deemed ‘unfuckable’ (Srinivasan’s term). But by whom? Not by any woman simpliciter; but by the ‘hot sorority blondes’, as he writes in his manifesto.¹⁴ Implicitly he is appealing to a ‘hierarchy of fuckability’, which is ‘a racialised hierarchy that places the white woman above the brown or black woman, the light-skinned brown or black woman above the dark-skinned brown or black woman, and so on’.¹⁵

It is indubitably a social construction, and a highly problematic one. To criticise that hierarchy is, to a large extent already, a political critique of sexual desires.

Similarly, pornography is one of the major forces that shape our sexual desire (given the fact that a majority of people receive their chief sex education through watching it), and commonly subjected to feminists' criticism. Pornography commonly depicts women as submissive, depicts them as enjoying being submissive, and depicts submissive women as attractive. Through the lens of pornography, women's resistance is commonly interpreted as consent. Pornography inculcates – often subconsciously – a desire for a certain kind of women, which, as Srinivasan and many other feminists argue,¹⁶ cannot simply be treated as a matter of personal preference. The desire is shaped by patriarchal powers, reinforces the subordinate status of women, and encourages us to see rapes as consented sex. It can, and should, be subjected to a political critique.

However, it might be worried that a political critique of desires also carries political dangers and undesirable consequences. People often have the natural and understandable desire to be left alone, especially when facing the coercive power of communities or governments. If my desires are to be criticised, and, further, to be disciplined, who will do the disciplining? We have seen in history, repetitively, the disastrous consequences of governments or communities telling people what they should or should not desire, or what are the right things to feel.¹⁷

Srinivasan, given her anti-carceralism, is well aware of that danger. She warns against using governmental powers, and sometimes against 'telling people to change their desires' as well. Instead, she suggests that we ask ourselves 'what we want, why we want it, and what it is that we want to want',¹⁸ and that through self-reflection and consciousness-raising, the critique of desire could be truly emancipatory rather than disciplinary. But then a further worry arises: feminism targets at a structural evil (patriarchy) rather than specific individuals; putting too much personal responsibility on individuals risks obscuring the fundamental need for a structural solution. To this worry Srinivasan responds: 'to say that a problem is structural does not absolve us from thinking about how we, as individuals, are implicated in it, or what we should do about it... What does it mean to say that we want to transform the political world – but that we ourselves will remain unchanged?'¹⁹

In summary, I see three dimensions on which we need to walk a fine middle way. First, between taking our desires as given and disciplining them politically, we need to find a middle way of an emancipatory critique of desire, which might consist of a blend of consciousness-raising, self-reflection and a political *ideologiekritik*. Second, between treating sexual preferences as undiscussable and the misogynistic logic of 'sexual entitlement' (that is, seeing 'fuckability' as a social good that should be fairly distributed), we need to 'dwell in the ambivalent space where we acknowledge that no one is obligated to desire anyone else, that no one has a right to be desired, but also that who is desired and who isn't is a political question'.²⁰ Third, between replacing a political and structural struggle with a personal one and absolving the individuals the responsibility of self-reflection, we need a balanced blend of self-critique and recognition of the structural nature of the feminist project. How to tread this middle way is a delicate question answerable only, in her (and my) view, by practical reasons. 'We do not know [the answer]', she writes at the very beginning of the book, 'let us try and see'.²¹

PRACTICAL REASONS

As is noticed from the start, the book does not contain much argumentation or theorising. This is probably to be expected given that it is not strictly a book of academic philosophy; it also aims at the general public, calling for actions and demonstrating what Haslanger calls the ‘feminist critical consciousness’. And this is doubly expected because the wrongness of most instances in the book is so apparent that we can easily condemn them without needing an overarching normative theory. However, Haslanger notes that while normative theories are not necessary or even relevant, social theories are crucial for Srinivasan’s end. For without a ‘theory that offers an account of how societies – or at least the societies we are interested in – work’, what concrete actions should we take to make the world a better place for women?

Haslanger focuses, again, on Srinivasan’s anti-carceralism and emphasis on social and cultural changes. The recognition that we need fundamental cultural reforms is not a new message; it has been made by feminists over and over again. The crux is to point out what to do and where to go next. As Haslanger notes, probably most feminists agree that ‘the work of social reproduction must be the work of society’,²² or that ‘the law [cannot] transform the most basic terms of engagement between women and men’,²³ but how helpful is that observation? We need, Haslanger argues, an understanding of how societies (what a complex institution!) work and how societal changes are possible to know what to do next. She asks: ‘I fully embrace the idea that we begin with a feminist critical consciousness, but where do we take it? Or where does it take us?’

This is not a call for theoretical unity or comfort. Haslanger fully agrees with Srinivasan’s point that feminist politics should not provide a home for comfort. Her point is, again, pragmatic: what is the best way to use feminist movements? Is it helpful to have a social theory that guides us? Would we be lost without it? In defence of Srinivasan, she need not deny the usefulness of social theories altogether. She might point out that this is more of a difference of emphasis than a substantial disagreement: she might be content if the book helps to raise the social critical consciousness, and it need not provide a step-to-step guide for action.

But there might be more to a mere difference of emphasis. Srinivasan’s emphasis of know-how suggests that she might have some doubts about the guiding effect of social theories. Here is an indicative passage: ‘The answer to the question, I take it, is a practical one – a matter, as philosophers like to say, not of knowing-*that*, but of knowing-*how*. Know-how is to be found not through theoretical investigation but through experiments of living.’²⁴ Here she might be suggesting that, in this messy and ever-changing reality, theoretical rationality cannot provide much help; rather what we need is the Aristotelian *phronesis*, the practical rationality: we need to try and see what works, keeping a flexible and open mindset. Because of idiosyncratic contexts, practical knowledge is often a kind of ‘tacit knowledge’, to borrow the term from Michael Polanyi,²⁵ that is ‘suggestive and illuminative rather than explicit and determinate’.²⁶ In these cases theories cannot guide action; we can only do piecemeal theorising as we go along. If this is the right interpretation, then the difference between Srinivasan and Haslanger is a profound disagreement on the relation between theoretical and practical rationality, a disagreement which goes back for more than two thousand years and which I, for sure, cannot seek to resolve here. But hopefully somewhere else...

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¹ Marx, Karl, (1888), “Theses on Feuerbach”, *Marx/Engels Selected Works*, Progress Publisher, Vol. 1, pp. 13 – 15.

² Srinivasan, Amia, (2021), *The Right to Sex*, Bloomsbury Publishing PLC, p. xvi.

³ Remarks made by Rae Langton during sessions of a feminist discussion group. Same for all references to Langton below.

⁴ Haslanger, Sally, (2021), “Feminism and the Question of Theory”, *The Raven* (Fall 2021).

<https://ravenmagazine.org/magazine/feminist-critical-consciousness-and-the-question-of-theory/> Same for all references to Haslanger below.

⁵ Srinivasan, *op. cit.*, p. xv.

⁶ *Ibid.*, p. 151.

⁷ *Ibid.*, p. 159.

⁸ *Ibid.*, p. 154.

⁹ *Ibid.*, p. 151.

¹⁰ *Ibid.*, p. 17.

¹¹ *Ibid.*, p. 60.

¹² The debate centred around the issue of decriminalising homosexual behaviour in a time where homosexuality is still regarded as morally wrong by the majority of people in the society. For an illustrative discussion, see Cane, Peter, (2006), “Taking Law Seriously: Starting Points of the Hart/Devlin Debate.” *The Journal of Ethics*, 10(1/2), 21–51.

¹³ As a sidenote, Langton argues that we can also criticise and transform the more innate desires. Xenophobia, as her example goes, is probably a natural disposition given our tribal evolutionary history, but we might wish to change that.

¹⁴ See ‘Elliot Rodger Manifesto: My Twisted World’, contributed by Lauren Johnston, at

<https://www.documentcloud.org/documents/1173808-elliott-rodger-manifesto>

¹⁵ Srinivasan, *op. cit.*, p. 103.

¹⁶ For example, see MacKinnon, Catharine, (1993), *Only Words*. Harvard University Press.

¹⁷ Kundera’s novels provide some great illustrations for this point.

¹⁸ Srinivasan, *op. cit.*, p. 100.

¹⁹ *Ibid.*, p. 101.

²⁰ *Ibid.*, p. 90.

²¹ *Ibid.*, p. xi.

²² *Ibid.*, p. 175-6.

²³ *Ibid.*, p. 178.

²⁴ *Ibid.*, p. 102.

²⁵ Polanyi, Michael, (1966), *The Tacit Dimension*. Doubleday & Co.

²⁶ Gadamer, Hans-Georg, (1989), *Truth and Method* (2nd edition). Sheed and Ward.

FRENCH PHILOSOPHY: A VERY SHORT INTRODUCTION

STEPHEN GAUKROGER, KNOX PEDEN

Oxford, Oxford University Press, 2020, 132 pp., bibliography and index

FRENCH PHILOSOPHY as a historical term unites different philosophers who wrote in the French language or lived in French states. *French Philosophy: A Very Short Introduction* aims to introduce the reader to key thinkers and ideas that define the phenomenon of French philosophy.¹ The book, however, approached the question with little attention to female authors and female-related questions. This review criticises this aspect of the book. I begin the discussion by showing what authors could have been included or at least mentioned in the book. I proceed by showing that female-related discourse in the works of male authors who are covered in the book is also missing. Then I explain why the discussion of feminist authors that is present in the book is insufficient. The review concludes that the book undervalues female authors and female-related questions in French philosophy and does not provide readers with a comprehensive view on the topic.

French Philosophy: A Very Short Introduction is split into historical periods and then between intellectual streams and personalities. The authors break down philosophical debates

into smaller topics and events. In so doing, the book meets the promises of its heading. It briefly introduces the reader to the surface of French philosophy and emphasizes authors and publications that would help the reader to navigate their way farther. It seems correct to claim that every project that deals with such a great time range in a format of a short introduction will suffer from oversimplification. It is not possible to reduce lengthy detailed philosophical discussions without some loss of depth. Some authors had to be removed from the book. However, the decision to ignore all female authors and female-related discussions before the 20th century seems unreasonable. By neglecting the importance of this question, *French Philosophy: A Very Short Introduction* gives readers an incomplete impression of French philosophy. This statement can be supported by the reference to works that are recognised by the authors as correct overviews of French philosophy. Chapters on early modern female philosophy, the social status of female citizens, the conflict of sexes, and feminism are present in overviews by Desmond Clarke,² Jeremy Jennings and Michael Moriarty,³ and Lawrence Kritzman.⁴ These publications are much lengthier than *French Philosophy: A Very Short Introduction*. Nonetheless, the presence of female-related topics in these highly regarded works at least provides one with a justification to raise the question of their absence in the reviewed book.

First, one can remark the near absence of female philosophers. While the book gives an insight into the feminist philosophy of Simone de Beauvoir, discusses the works of Catherine Malabou and briefly mentions *écriture féminine* of the 1970s, there is little attention to female participation in French philosophy before the 20th century. It would be incorrect, however, to say that female philosophers were absent from the philosophical scene in the 16th through 19th centuries. Rebecca Wilkin discusses in depth how the '*querelle des femmes*' ('the woman question') developed as a philosophical stream.⁵ This term unites works of a wide range of authors on the questions of female social status, education, and the distinction between genders. The discussion of the *querelle des femmes* evolved from the declamation of female superiority in the 16th century to the egalitarianism of the Enlightenment. The absence of these works in an old-fashion account of French philosophy can be explained by the deliberate disenfranchisement of women in early modern and modern periods.⁶ In the intellectual field, women were excluded from universities and scholarly institutions. The sole question of education for women has been a topic of immense philosophical discourse. However, even in this climate, some female philosophers such as Marie de Gournay, Laura Bassi and Emilie du Chatelet have received popular recognition. There is no mention of any of these figures or philosophical streams in *French Philosophy: A Very Short Introduction*. Princess Elizabeth is the only female philosopher to appear in the text before Simone de Beauvoir. The question of whether her works strictly speaking belong to French philosophy is a matter of a separate discussion. Her treatment in the book is insightful for our purposes. Princess Elizabeth is cited solely to demonstrate a certain aspect of Descartes' philosophy. The book portrays Princess Elizabeth as a complementary figure, not as an independent philosopher. Hence, it is safe to say the discussion of the works of any female authors before the 20th century is absent in the reviewed book.

The historical presence of female philosophers is of course not in itself a substantial proof of their importance. It may well be that the marginal contribution of these authors has been insignificant in the long run. There is, however, a difference between a moderate statement of this kind and the mere absence of any mention of female authors apart from Princess Elizabeth before the 20th century. The former is a question of a more sophisticated

historical and philosophical investigation that goes beyond the scope of this review. The latter is a rather radical reductionist approach that limits the discussion. It is important to stress that the non-inclusion of female philosophers is not a consensus approach to the period. We have seen it from the presence of the discussion of female authors in other prominent overviews of French philosophy. Hence the non-inclusion is the decision that had to be taken by the authors of *French Philosophy: A Very Short Introduction*.

Although I do not attempt to address the importance of women in French philosophy in great detail, there is, however, one aspect that I wish to clarify. Even if we accept the view that female authors are insignificant it is still unclear why female-related topics are ignored in the works of male philosophers who are covered in the book. For instance, there is no mention of female-related topics in the works of Jean-Jacques Rousseau. Although his philosophical contributions are discussed in detail in chapter 3 of the book, there is no mention of his stance on the question of female social participation. We can contrast it with the way the same issue is treated in *The Cambridge History of French Thought* that the authors of the reviewed book cite as a guideline. Judith Still provides a discussion of the question of gender in the works of Rousseau.⁷ We see the description of structures of male dominance in French society in Rousseau's writings. However, in his *Social Contract*, women are devoted to a complementary role. In Rousseau's system, the right of the husband over his wife is a necessary condition for the civil order. He sees the origin of this right in the natural differences of sexes. It would be incorrect to argue that this is not an important insight for the coherent understanding of the philosophy of Rousseau. The enlightenment movement was filled with contradictions of this kind: philosophical justification of natural rights and political equality went along with the oppression of the female half of society. We find further evidence of female-related discussion in the works of Denis Diderot, Nicolas de Condorcet, Pierre-Joseph Proudhon and other male philosophers who are mentioned in the book. There is, however, no mention of any female-related topic in any male authors before the 20th century in *French Philosophy: A Very Short Introduction*. For the sake of coherence, it has to be said that the entrance to chapter 4 mentions the Marquis de Condorcet that 'his commitment to a liberal economy, equal rights for women, and constitutionalism made him the prototype of the Enlightenment thinker'.⁸ This is as far as this insight goes. We can see how the issue that occurs with the representation of female philosophers repeats here with the discussion of female-related questions in the works of male philosophers. This review does not question the volume of the discussion but points at its mere absence.

Lastly, all this critique could have been withdrawn if the feminist philosophy was properly addressed in the section on Simone de Beauvoir. The essence of the discussion that I have briefly sketched in this review could have been logically incorporated in this part of the book. However, this is not the case. While some key elements of her philosophy are mentioned and elaborated, her feminist struggle is not placed in a historical context. This does not allow the reader to coherently understand her philosophy. From the narrative of the book, it follows that Simone de Beauvoir was the first author in the history of French philosophy to raise a female-related question (with the exception of Nicolas de Condorcet). It creates a misleading impression that before the 20th century the place of female citizens in society and the difference between sexes was not a topic of philosophical discussion. Deprivation of the rights of female citizens is absent in the overview of the early modern period. Missing too is the question of female liberation and the internal contradiction of the Enlightenment. The achievements of universal rights are not discussed contextually with their limited application to half of French

society. At the same time, Simone de Beauvoir's most famous work *The Second Sex* contains all these discussions and her main conclusions are based on these historical conditions.⁹ *French Philosophy: A Very Short Introduction* does not elaborate on these central historical topics in her writing. Some ideas such as the concept of 'history dominated by men' are postulated but the base for the emergence of these ideas is not internally justified. Again, similar to the previous critique, what is problematic is not the mistreatment of certain facts and authors but the absence of any discussion at all. When female-related questions begin to appear in the last two chapters, with no outlined background, feminist discourse emerges from out of nowhere and disappears quickly.

Diana Holmes begins her discussion of the 20th-century feminist movement in *The Cambridge History of French Thought* with this insightful passage: 'Feminism is grounded in the recognition of the historical inequality of the sexes, the belief that this can change and the will to improve women's situation as a sex'.¹⁰ The reviewed book does not talk about these historical inequalities. Neither does it contextualise what were the improvements French feminists were willing to achieve. This is why I do not think that the section on Simone de Beauvoir and the occasional mentioning of feminist philosophy and female authors in the last two chapters of the book fulfil the purpose of providing the reader with a coherent introductory account of female-related questions in French philosophy. The reader is left with no explanation of why feminist philosophers have criticised French society. According to the reviewed book, French philosophers did not engage with any female-related problems before Simone de Beauvoir elaborated her feminist critique in the early 20th century.

It must be said that this review is concerned with a very specific aspect of *French Philosophy: A Very Short Introduction*. Here I have not questioned the treatment of other authors and ideas and the overall quality of the book. Neither do I think that issues that have been raised in this review should be interpreted as an allegation. My position is that the selection of topics and authors is a matter of a debate and my critique contributes to this debate. The short length of the book creates hitches, inevitably entailing reduction and simplification. In *French Philosophy: A Very Short Introduction*, female authors and female-related questions suffered from this. I believe I have shown, that female authors and the discussion of female-related questions have been present in French philosophy throughout the ages. We find it in the works of both female and male philosophers. I have further stressed the point that when the book talks about feminism, it fails to place the feminist philosophy in the historical context. The discussion of Simone de Beauvoir is in this way incomplete. The part of her writings that deals with details of historical mistreatment and disenfranchisement of women and gives the basis for her feminist insight is omitted. I think that *French Philosophy: A Very Short Introduction* would benefit from giving more attention to female authors and female-related topics. In so doing it would give a more complete introductory picture of French philosophy.

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¹ Gaukroger, S. and Peden, K., (2020), *French Philosophy: A Very Short Introduction*, Oxford: Oxford University Press, p. xx.

² Clarke, D., (2016), *French Philosophy, 1572-1675*, Oxford: Oxford University Press, pp. 220-248.

³ Moriarty, M. and Jennings, J., (2019), *The Cambridge History of French Thought*, Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, pp. 190-197, 263-270, 426-435.

⁴ Conley, V. A., (2007). Feminism. In Kritzman, L. D. (Ed.), *The Columbia History of Twentieth-Century French Thought*, New York: Columbia University Press, pp. 39-47.

⁵ Wilkin, R., (2019), *The Querelle des Femmes*. In M. Moriarty and J. Jennings (Eds.), *The Cambridge History of French Thought*, Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, pp. 190-197.

⁶ O'Neill, E., (1998), *Disappearing ink: Early modern women philosophers and their fate in history. Philosophy in a feminist voice: Critiques and reconstructions*. In J. A. Kourany (Ed.), *Philosophy in a Feminist Voice: Critiques and Reconstructions*, Princeton: Princeton University Press, pp. 17-62.

⁷ Still, J., (2019), *The Enlightenment and Gender*. In M. Moriarty and J. Jennings (Eds.), *The Cambridge History of French Thought*, Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, pp. 263-270.

⁸ *Ibid.* p. 41.

⁹ Beauvoir, S., (1956), *The Second Sex* (Pashley, H., Trans.), London: Lowe and Brydone Ltd, pp. 120-158.

¹⁰ Holmes, D., (2019), *French Feminist Thought in the Twentieth Century*. In M. Moriarty and J. Jennings (Eds.), *The Cambridge History of French Thought*, Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, pp. 426-435.

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