

Czech and Slovak  
**Journal  
of Humanities**

**Philosophica**

1/2018

**Czech and Slovak Journal of Humanities (CSJH)** is a peer-reviewed scholarly journal established in 2011 at Palacký University, one of the oldest Central European universities. The journal is dedicated to various important fields of the humanities: history, philosophy, the visual arts, theatre & film (including TV and radio), music, and cultural anthropology, with interdisciplinary themes among these fields.

The journal is intended as a dialogue between the finest Czech and Slovak research and research abroad and as a forum where innovative approaches and current topics are discussed, as well as local themes and previously neglected research. *CSJH* is open to Czech, Slovak and international scholars and guarantees a fair and accurate reviewing process. In order to reach an international readership, *CSJH* publishes the majority of texts in English. Regular scholarly papers are particularly welcome, as well as book or conference reviews, notices, research projects reports and other kinds of academic chronicle. The Journal is indexed in ERIH PLUS and EBSCO database.

#### **Editorial Board**

George Arabatzis, University of Athens, Greece  
Michael Beckerman, New York University, USA  
Martin Baumann, University of Luzern, Switzerland  
Paul Richard Blum, Loyola University Maryland, USA  
Ian Christie, Birkbeck, University of London, United Kingdom  
Yvetta Kajanova, Komenský University, Bratislava, Slovakia  
Tatjana Lazorčáková, Palacký University, Olomouc, Czech Republic  
Marina Righetti, Università La Sapienza, Rome, Italy  
Rostislav Švácha, Palacký University, Olomouc / Academy of Sciences, Prague, Czech Republic

**Czech and Slovak Journal of Humanities** is published three times a year in the following sequence: *Philosophica*; *Historica*; *Historia artium*; *Theatralia et cinematographica*; *Musicologica*; *Anthropologica culturalis*.

#### **Contact:**

Jozef Matula  
Filozofická fakulta UP  
Křížkovského 12  
77180 Olomouc  
Czech Republic  
jozef.matula@upol.cz

<http://csjh.upol.cz>

Zpracování a vydání publikace bylo umožněno díky finanční podpoře udělené roku 2016 Ministerstvem školství, mládeže a tělovýchovy ČR v rámci Institucionálního rozvojového plánu, okruhu Strategický rozvoj, Filozofické fakultě Univerzity Palackého v Olomouci.

#### **Published and printed by:**

Univerzita Palackého v Olomouci (Palacký University Olomouc)  
Křížkovského 8, 771 47 Olomouc, Czech Republic  
[www.vydavatelstvi.upol.cz](http://www.vydavatelstvi.upol.cz)  
e-mail: [vup@upol.cz](mailto:vup@upol.cz)

Editor of this issue: Jakub Havlíček  
Language editor of this issue: David Livingstone  
Technical editor of this issue: Monika Pitnerová  
Responsible editor: Otakar Loutocký  
Technical editor: Anna Petříková  
Graphic Design: TAH & Jiří K. Jurečka  
© Palacký University in Olomouc, Czech Republic, 2018  
ISSN 1805-3742  
MK ČR E 19478

# Contents

## Articles

Philosophy of Life in Francesco Petrarca's Poetry.....	6
Paul Richard Blum	
“Oversized” Women: Alessandra Scala and Cassandra Fedele .....	18
Ludovica Radif	
<b>Sources in Zorzi's Concept of <i>Occulta Scientia Cabale</i>: A Little Encounter .....</b>	<b>26</b>
Jan Herúfek	
The Concept of “Ordo” in the Thought of Philip Melanchthon and the German Jurists of his Time: Christoph Hegendorf, Johann Oldendorp and Jakob Spiegel .....	36
Elisa Cuttini	
Perception, Sensitive Knowledge, and the Problem of the Independent Existence of the Material World in Lockean Empiricism.....	44
Olusola Victor Olanipekun	
Internal Negation and the Universe of Discourse: Kant and Boole.....	57
Karel Šebela	
Politics and Cultures in the Thought of Hannah Arendt .....	63
Vana Nicolaïdou-Kyrianidou	
A Precognitive Dream is a False Memory.....	79
Marek Petrů	
Reconstructing Thought Experiments in Personal Identity .....	89
Lasse Nielsen	



Articles|

## Paul Richard Blum

Loyola University, Maryland, USA

# Philosophy of Life in Francesco Petrarca's Poetry

**Abstract** | Francesco Petrarca (Petrarch; 1304–1374) composed poetry, most notably the collection known as *Canzoniere*, and numerous prose works that qualify as philosophy. Based on a select number of poems, this article suggests that Petrarch's poetry is also equivalent to his essays and letters in presenting a philosophy of life. The narrative elements of the poems, namely, the engagement with the audience and the love story, should be read with the metaphorical, symbolic, or allegorical meaning in mind that aims at the anthropological situation of self-assertion and irritation in the light of the transcendent.

**Keywords** | Francesco Petrarca – Poetry – Philosophy of Life – Augustine – Self-Reference

.....

You, you are sitting there waiting to hear me utter my incoherent thoughts. You expect to hear something about my personal intellectual experience, or maybe of the ways and delays over the span of my academic career.

You may wonder what troubles me; what I tried and failed to achieve and attempt to compare that with your experience, which will allow you to relate with me and understand. On the other hand, to my embarrassment, I may not be able to live up to your expectations. As such, I should be embarrassed by my hopes, which are nothing but a representation of my vanity, and I should admit that a successful lecture is nothing but a dream.

Ladies and Gentlemen, imagine I had started a lecture with such reflections on my role in public.<sup>1</sup> Well, this is my adaptation of the first sonnet of Petrarca's collection of poems, the so-called *Canzoniere*, to the situation of a public lecture today. While you probably will empathize with some of my concerns, most likely you will find it an embarrassing opening. And yet, that is the style Petrarca used in his book:

Voi ch'ascoltate in rime sparse il suono  
 di quei sospiri ond'io nudriva 'l core  
 in sul mio primo giovanile errore  
 quand'era in parte altr'uom da quel ch'ì sono,  
 del vario stile in ch'io piango et ragiono  
 fra le vane speranze e 'l van dolore,  
 ove sia chi per prova intenda amore,  
 spero trovar pietà, nonché perdono.

Ma ben veggio or sì come al popol tutto  
 favola fui gran tempo, onde sovente  
 di me mesdesmo meco mi vergogno;

---

<sup>1</sup> This study, based on a lecture at Loyola University Maryland, is a result of research funded by the Czech Science Foundation as the project GA ĀR 14-37038G *Between Renaissance and Baroque: Philosophy and Knowledge in the Czech Lands within the Wider European Context*.

et del mio vaneggiar vergogna è 'l frutto,  
e 'l pentersi, e 'l conoscer chiaramente  
che quanto piace al mondo è breve sogno.<sup>2</sup>

The most famous book of European poetry, Petrarca's *Canzoniere*, opens with a provocation. It speaks about the poetic "I" and addresses the audience squarely. This is a program. Why should a poet believe that any reader or listener could be interested in any way in his youthful days, in his changes? And what could make an audience feel "pity and forgiveness?" The answer is certainly not the final line of the poem: "that worldly joy is just a fleeting dream." Other people's illusions are not a matter of empathy.<sup>3</sup> Of course, love is what we all know, and mostly suffer from, but most importantly: *al popolo tutto favola fui gran tempo* "to be the talk of the town, big time" – that is what we all understand: it is an achievement and at the same time an embarrassment.<sup>4</sup> Francesco Petrarca opens his collected 366 poems by stating that he hopes to become famous and that he is embarrassed in nurturing this hope.<sup>5</sup>

I should be embarrassed to add yet another interpretation of this opening poem and a few others to the numerous readings of this work. However, my approach is to try out the idea that his *Canzoniere* is a philosophy of life in verse. This entails that the poems have a metaphorical, symbolic, or allegorical meaning that allows for being alert not only of the plot of the poems but also of the anthropological cues. It requires explaining why the poet might have chosen poetry – next to other literary forms – to develop his philosophy of life.<sup>6</sup>

As an exemplary challenge, let me quote the most realistic detail and therefore most narrative episode of the amorous plot of the *Canzoniere*, namely the 6th of April 1327, Good Friday,

---

<sup>2</sup> Quotations from the *Canzoniere* in Italian are from Francesco Petrarca, *Canzoniere*, ed. Marco Santagata (Milano: Mondadori, 2008). Quotations in English are from Francesco Petrarca, *The Canzoniere, or, Rerum Vulgarium Fragmenta*, trans. Mark Musa (Bloomington, Ind.: Indiana University Press, 1996), cited in both cases just with number of the poem (and line). However, in the course of the essay I take the liberty to translate in a way to support my interpretation:

O you who hear within these scattered verses / the sound of sighs with which I fed my heart / in my first errant youthful days when I / in part was not the man I am today; // for all the ways in which I weep and speak / between vain hopes, between vain suffering, / in anyone who knows love through its trials, / in them, may I find pity and forgiveness. // But now I see how I've become the talk / so long a time of people all around / (it often makes me feel so full of shame), // and from my vanities there comes shame's fruit, / and my repentance, and the clear awareness / that worldly joy is just a fleeting dream.

<sup>3</sup> It may be worth mentioning that, while the present-day interpretation reads "sparse" in the first line as "scattered" or "disorganized" (Francisco Rico, "Rime sparse, 'Rerum vulgarium fragmenta' para el título y el primer soneto del Canzoniere," *Medioevo Romano* 3 (1976): 101–138, 111; cf. p. 132 n. 105), Francesco Filelfo interpreted the word sparse as "publicized," which would emphasize the embarrassment of going public. See Francesco Petrarca, *Petrarcha con doi commenti sopra li sonetti et canzone. El primo del ingeniosissimo misser Francesco Philelpho. Laltro del sapientissimo misser Antonio da Tempo nouamente addito. Ac etiam com lo commento del eximio misser Nicolo Peranzone, ouero Riccio Marchesiano sopra li Triumpho, con infinite noue acute & eccellente expositi* (Venetia: Bernardino Stagnino, 1522), fol. IIIr: "[...] sparse et disseminate tra docti et indocti."

<sup>4</sup> On this line see Albert Russell Ascoli, "Favola Fui," *Petrarch Writes His Readers*, Bernardo Lecture Series 17 (Binghamton: Center for Medieval and Renaissance Studies, 2010), 5–6 and 15–16 (with further references). Ascoli, "Favola Fui," 5, calls the poem "the most concentrated self-referential frenzy in Western literature."

<sup>5</sup> On the political program of the *Canzoniere* see Jiří Špička, *Petrarca: homo politicus. Politika v životě a díle Francesca Petrarckého* (Praha: Argo, 2010), 45–50; cf. Jiří Špička, "Petrarca tra letteratura e potere politico," *Incontri. Rivista europea di studi italiani* 28, no. 2 (2013): 48–55, doi:10.18352/incontri.9323.

<sup>6</sup> Cf. Paul Richard Blum, "Unbestimmtheit und Selbstbestimmung des Menschen im Philosophieren der Renaissance," in *Person und Rechtsperson. Zur Ideengeschichte der Personalität*, eds. Rolf Gröschner, Stephan Kirste, and Oliver W. Lembcke (Tübingen: Mohr Siebeck, 2015), 57–80; 62–65.

when Petrarca met Laura, the object of his love poems. How do we know of that event? The poet says so (*Canzoniere* 3):

Era il giorno ch'âl sol si scolaro  
per la pietà del suo Factore i rai,  
quando i' fui preso, et non me ne guardai,  
ché i be' vostr'occhi, donna, mi legaro.

Tempo non mi pareo da far riparo  
contra' colpi d'Amor: però m'andai  
secur, senza sospetto; onde i miei guai  
nel commune dolor s'incominciaro.

Trovommi Amor del tutto disarmato  
et aperta la via per gli occhi al core,  
che di lagrime son fatti uscio et varco:  
però al mio parer non li fu honore  
ferir me de saetta in quello stato,  
a voi armata non mostrar pur l'arco.<sup>7</sup>

Are we to believe that? Obviously the punch line undoes what it says: Love did not even exhibit his weapon to the lady, who herself was armed, i.e., either well-protected or having the bow herself. But at the same time, in saying that, Petrarca is aiming his arrow at the object of his love. That is what we usually do on Good Friday, don't we? We go to church and fall in love.<sup>8</sup> I believe the main message is not in the punch line but in the center: *i miei guai nel commune dolor s'incominciaro* "all my misfortune began in midst of universal mourning." Petrarca's lovesickness is nothing but the expression of human suffering, of which the death of Christ is the epitome. We are very familiar with the trope that the sweetness of love is always combined with bitterness; Petrarca is taking up a tradition and reinforcing it. That, however, does not make a poet, nor a philosopher; what makes him a philosopher is that he takes love to be a metaphor for human existence. His poetry is a "hermeneutics of the self," for the benefit of the public.<sup>9</sup>

From the two poems I have quoted so far we may collect a number of essentials of human existence; and I will show that they are, indeed, treated as such by Petrarca in his prose: sighs and suffering; hopes, vanity, fame, and shame; itinerant and dreamy existence and youthfulness; forgiveness, self-confidence, personal vs. public troubles; and the unawareness of the essential underpinning of volatile time, as they appeared in the two sonnets, are obviously at the center of Petrarca's approach to humanity. The pivotal moment of the plot in Petrarca's reminiscences is marked by unintelligible time: *Era il giorno ch'âl sol si scolaro [...] i rai* "It was the day when in the sun the rays lost color": the exact day was that which was not a day; *Tempo non mi pareo da far riparo* "The time did not appear such to guard myself" – in slightly stretched paraphrase:

<sup>7</sup> It was the day the sun's ray had turned pale / with pity for the suffering of his Maker / when I was caught (and I put up no fight), / my lady, for your lovely eyes had bound me. // It seemed no time to be on guard against / Love's blows; therefore, I went my way / secure and fearless—so, all my misfortunes / began in midst of universal woe. // Love found me all unarmed and saw the way / was clear to reach my heart down through the eyes, / which have become the halls and doors of tears. // It seems to me it did him little honor / to wound me with his arrow in my state / and to you, armed, not show his bow at all.

<sup>8</sup> Cf. Marco Santagata, *Il poeta innamorato: Su Dante, Petrarca e la poesia amorosa medievale* (Parma: Guanda, 2017), chapter I 2: "Seduzione in chiesa;" Francisco Rico, "Venerdi del Petrarca," *Atti e Memorie dell'Accademia Galileiana di Scienze, Lettere ed Arti già dei Ricovrati e Patavina* 125 (2013–2012): 213–243.

<sup>9</sup> Gur Zak, *Petrarch's Humanism and the Care of the Self* (Cambridge, New York: Cambridge University Press, 2010), 96: "Petrarch's hermeneutics of self in Latin works such as the collections of letters and the *Secretum*, in sum, is based on the notion that 'self' is ultimately a state of mind from which we are exiled, or absent [...]."

time did not even appear to me (because it was a liturgical event and not a daily occurrence) and therefore I was caught off guard.<sup>10</sup> Petrarca was *del tutto disarmato, et aperta la via per gli occhi al core* “completely weaponless, and with open passage through the eyes to the heart,” that is, he was *non me ne guardai* “mindlessly unaware” and thus in love. We need not delve into the tears and public sorrows. The exact point in time, which scholars discovered to have been Good Friday 1327, is that very volatile moment that can be captured only when the time of life is over.

Nancy Struever in a 1993 paper has pointed to the importance of a late letter exchange between Petrarca and the doctor Giovanni Dondi of Padua (Sen. XII 1 and 2).<sup>11</sup> Her intention was to capture Petrarca’s position in the dispute about the value of medical arts as a kind of pragmatic philosophy under the guise of rhetoric. What made her adduce this late document was the opportunity to liberate Petrarca’s invective against a physician (*Invective contra medicum*) from its mudslinging mode and restore the philosopher’s quite serious contention that personal experience trumps rigid a medical regimen. The letter opens with the motif of joking in the face of death and soon meditates on the course of human life. What medical theory teaches matches the personal experience: elapsing time changes the person.<sup>12</sup> This insight prompts Petrarca to ponder the unfathomable course of life (*inextimabilis vite cursus*) and to endeavor an anthropological discourse on the *genus humanum*.<sup>13</sup> The experience of the passing of time is beyond sense observation, Petrarca explains. Life-time (*aetas*) “cannot rightly be compared to a bird’s flight, but to an arrow shot [...] by a cannon (*balista*).” This rather conventional metaphor, now, has an epistemological and existential twist: “If this were as well known to the young as it is to the old, life would be more honest and innocent in youth, and recollection more welcome and cheerful for the old.”<sup>14</sup> It is the perspective of old age that makes life decent, however, in retrospect only and counterfactually. Memory might be welcome and pleasant if the course of life could be perceived consciously, which is not the case. So, is juvenile life necessarily abject? Yes, it is: young age is blind and thoughtless and in its rapid flow it is driven by hope for an indeterminate long life, which enables it to throw oneself headlong regardless of good or evil. Awareness comes with age, which eventually wakes up to understand why it is so that human life is built upon belief in fallacious hopes.

We see at this point that the poetic first person of the *Canzoniere* is a purported old man who exercises the regretful look on his past false hopes and who engages the audience in this game of life to join him in regretting and forgiving juvenile vagaries.

The letter to Dondi probes further the paradox of being young: far reaching plans, complicated contrivances, and huge projects – they all are evidence of the mental state to project eternal

<sup>10</sup> Santagata comments, p. 20: “la ricorrenza liturgica non suggeriva di ‘premunirsi’ [...] contro sentimenti che non fossero di contrizione e di penitenza.”

<sup>11</sup> Nancy Struever, “Petrarch’s *Invective contra medicum*: An Early Confrontation of Rhetoric and Medicine,” *MLN* 108, 4, 659–679.

<sup>12</sup> Sen. XII 1, Francesco Petrarca, *Le senili*, eds. Ugo Dotti, Elvira Nota, and Felicita Audisio, trans. Ugo Dotti (Torino: Aragno, 2004), 1481: “etatem simulque naturam meam lapsu temporis immutatam, itaque me prorsus philosophico monitu respicere ad etatem iubes; in quo plane mecum sentis et id dicis verbo, quod ego rebus ipsis experior” (Opera 1581, II 898.); Francesco Petrarca, *Letters of Old Age. Rerum Senilium Libri I–XVIII*, trans. Aldo S. Bernardo, Reta A. Bernardo, and Saul Levin (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press, 1992), 440: “[...] my age and my nature have changed with the passage of time; and with a quite philosophical reminder you tell me to consider my age. In this you simply agree with me, and say in words what I am experiencing in reality.”

<sup>13</sup> For instance, Sen. XII 1, Petrarca, *Le senili*, 2, 1498: “Quomodo autem natura sic humanum genus illuderet, ut ubi plurimum oblectationis, et gratiae ponebat, ibi plurimum discriminis abderet?” Petrarca, *Letters of Old Age*, 445: “But how could Nature so fool mankind as to hide the most danger where she put the most delight and charm?”

<sup>14</sup> Petrarca, *Letters of Old Age*, 440; Petrarca, *Le senili*, 1481.

youth and happiness. The point is that youth is by nature incapable of seeing it that way, because only the external judgment of old age can achieve this consciousness. Since youth is equivalent to timeless happiness, senility is miserable – one should think. Petrarca has another twist on this, however, which leads back to the existential situation of being purely human: old age is miserable only if still captivated by youthful foolishness. The consciousness of the old wise man is blessed in disabusing his own youth of its delusions. And in attaining wisdom and insight the old wise man is not that miserable. Maturity is miserable only if it combines the ailments of age with the petulance of young people.

Although this might still appear as a collection of commonplace wisdom, we should not underrate its theoretical virulence. The philosophical and existential importance lies in Petrarca's ability to present the notions of youth and old age as dialectically intertwined. It is not the case that young people should be disabused and exhorted to modesty; on the contrary, "what would be off limits to them whom no one opposes, everyone befriends, and not only the multitude but the whole human race?"<sup>15</sup> Consequently, delusion, vagary, vanity, is the nature of being human. And all philosophy is busy analyzing and projecting human fallacies: "But let men deceive themselves as they please. The whole that we divide up, multiply, and stretch out is nothing."<sup>16</sup> Nevertheless all this ado about nothing is the very business and rush of life that only comes to an end when thinking and rethinking mark the end of life: life – as long as it is vigorous – is nonthinking and nonspeaking. Then, paradoxically, looking back on his exploits the wise man discovers that he had been dreaming all his life, rather than living.

As proof that these are not just musings of an aging thinker, we may quote his sonnet 81:

Io son sì stanco sotto 'l fascio antico  
de le mie colpe et de l'usanza ria  
ch'i' temo forte di mancar tra via,  
et di cader in man del mio nemico.

Ben venne a dilivrararmi un grande amico  
per somma et ineffabil cortesia;  
poi volò fuor de la veduta mia,  
sì ch'à mirarlo indarno m'affatico.

Ma la sua voce anchor qua giù rimbomba:  
O voi che travagliate, ecco 'l camino;  
venite a me, se 'l passo altri non serra.

Qual gratia, qual amore, o qual destino  
mi darà penne in guisa di colomba,  
ch'i' mi riposi, et levimi da terra?<sup>17</sup>

<sup>15</sup> Petrarca, *Letters of Old Age*, 441; Petrarca, *Le senili*, 1486: "Sed redeo ad errores iuvenum et spes vanas; quid his enim, queso, non liceat, quibus nemo obstat, omnes favent, non vulgus modo, sed humanum genus?"

<sup>16</sup> Petrarca, *Letters of Old Age*, 441; Petrarca, *Le senili*, 1486: "Ceterum fallant sese homines, ut libet: totum hoc quod distinguimus, quod multiplicamus, quod extendimus, nichil est."

<sup>17</sup> I am so weary under the old bundle / of all my sins as well as my bad habit / that I fear much to fail along the way / and fall into the hands of my great foe. // I know a mighty friend once came to free me / in His ineffable and highest kindness, / but then He flew beyond my mortal vision / so that I strive to see Him, but in vain. / But His voice still resounds down here: / 'O you who labor, look, here is the path; / now come to me, if no one blocks the way? // What grace, what love, and what predestination / will give me wings to fly, like those of doves, / that I may rest and raise myself from earth?

Strangely, there had been a savior friend, but he flew away and out of sight; looking after him proves to be fatiguing. A remedy would be to obtain “dove feathers” and fly after him. Such a flight would be an escape and rest at the same time (“mi riposi, et levimi”). How would that go together? Would it really be a solution? Probably not, since the “mighty friend” warns that someone could block the path to him. And who else could that be if not the sinner himself who probably is his own foe? The wings of the savior and those hoped for are, among other things, flying time that both eludes and grants grace, love and fate.

Petrarca’s life experience, his anthropology is this: human beings are always on the wrong side: while striving and struggling they are necessarily unaware of the elapsing of time; but as soon as they become aware of the fallibility of being human, they cease to be.

In order to prove my point further, I need to refer to the famous story of Petrarca’s ascent of Mont Ventoux, well conscious that I cannot compete with the plethora of interpretations that have been granted to this text. My only excuse is that it is, indeed, a multipurpose text, so that I may well read it again for my take on Petrarca’s anthropology.

Let us remember that Petrarca initiated the humanist tradition of publishing tractates in the form of letters. He even wrote a *Letter to Posterity* that describes homelessness, intimacy and alienation together with contradictory impulses as the general condition of being human that binds together antiquity, his own personality, and any human being distant over space and time. The letter in question here, inscribed “On My Personal Concerns” (*De curis propriis*), tells the following story:

Petrarca lives in southern France; one day he decides to climb a mountain, called The Windy Mountain. The purpose seems to be for physical exercise. He calls his brother to join him. The path is steep, Petrarca tries this way and that way; his younger more energetic brother goes the straight way up. Obviously the brother is the alter ego (who later will become an Augustinian Friar). Upon arrival on the mountaintop Petrarca thinks he can see the Mediterranean or maybe Greece. Well, not quite! Rather, having accomplished this physical exercise, he starts longing: for Greece, Italy, the past, and so on.<sup>18</sup> Sobering up he realizes his deep internal conflict:

I no longer love the things I used to love. No, I lie; I love them but more sparingly. Again I have lied: I love them but more bashfully and more sadly; now finally I have told the truth. That is how it goes: I love, but what I would love not to love (*quod non amare amem*) and long to hate; I still love but against my will, under compulsion, gloomy and grieving [...] <sup>19</sup>

At this point he pulls out of his pocket the book he happened to be reading: Augustine’s *Confessions*. He opens it randomly, of course, and reads from the 10th book: “And men go forth to marvel at the heights of mountains and the vast waves of the sea and the broad flow of rivers and the compass of the ocean and the cycles of the stars, and they leave themselves behind.”<sup>20</sup> In modern parlance, Augustine is chiding people for attention deficit disorder masked as inquiry and industriousness. At least that is Petrarca’s reading, who admits to having been “angry

---

Santagata, *Il poeta innamorato*, 417–418, reports doubts about the date of the poem (between 1338 and 1347), which means that it is yet much earlier than the letter to Dondi and speaks to the timelessness of Petrarca’s sorrows.

<sup>18</sup> Petrarca, *Familiare* 4.1; Francesco Petrarca, *Selected Letters*, trans. Elaine Fantham, The I Tatti Renaissance Library 76, 77 (Cambridge, Massachusetts: Harvard University Press, 2017), vol. 1, 53: “[...] and now Athos and Olympus seemed less incredible to me [...] Then I turned the beams of my eyes in the direction of Italy, to which my spirit inclines. [...] I admit I sighed toward the skies of Italy, more visible to my spirit [*animo*] than my eyes.”

<sup>19</sup> *Ibid.*, 55.

<sup>20</sup> *Ibid.*, 57; quoting Augustine, *Confessions*, 10.8.15. On Petrarca and Augustine see Riccardo Fubini, “Petrarca, S. Agostino e gli Agostiniani,” *Medioevo e Rinascimento* 16 (2005): 1–15.

with myself that even now I was still marveling at earthly things.”<sup>21</sup> While his brother took the straight way to the top, Francesco finds all sorts of shortcuts that turn out to be detours. With this frustration in his mind and heart, hating his impulses, he read that passage from the Church Father as telling him to focus more on his own persona.

Can it be assumed that Petrarca expected his readers *not* to check the reference? Augustine is not speaking about his little ego; instead, he evokes the immense capability of the human mind, particularly human memory. When people marvel at the world they forget the vastness of the human intellect. Petrarca turns this into his gesture of contempt for the beauty of the world that had attracted him to climb the mountain. But let us see what follows.

Immensely irritated, he rushes down the mountain to their shelter and hastily, short of breath, writes down this very letter that we are reading to that person who had lent him that copy of Augustine's *Confessions*. The problem is, as we know today, and Petrarca knew at his time, that the addressee, an Augustinian Friar, was already dead. Note the antinomy: the poet goes out into the world and is thrown back onto himself; he turns his internal disturbance into the urge to communicate it with a personal friend. And in the same way as it does not matter that the readers of *The Letter to Posterity* are not even born, it also does not matter that the intended reader of this letter is already dead. What is important is that as human beings we cannot do other than turn to the exterior, question the interior, and revert to other human beings.<sup>22</sup>

This is the theme of another poem (311):

Quel rosignol, che sì soave piagne,  
 forse suoi figli, o sua cara consorte,  
 di dolcezza empie il cielo et le campagne  
 con tante note sì pietose et scorte,  
 et tutta notte par che m'accompagne,  
 et mi rammente la mia dura sorte:  
 ch'altri che me non ò di ch'i' mi lagne,  
 ché 'n dee non credev'io regnasse Morte.  
 O che lieve è inganar chi s'assecura!  
 Que' duo bei lumi assai piú che 'l sol chiari  
 chi pensò mai veder far terra oscura?  
 Or cognosco io che mia fera ventura  
 vuol che vivendo et lagrimando impari  
 come nulla qua giú diletta, et dura.<sup>23</sup>

The Nightingale is out there; it embellishes the landscape with its sorrow. That is the poet's cue. It makes him reflect about his own destiny, he blames the object of his desire for that very desire; he realizes that suffering is learning and learning is living; and finally that in this life nothing is both pleasant and durable, even more: there is nothing at all in this world truly appealing or lasting.

<sup>21</sup> Petrarca, *Selected Letters*, 57–59.

<sup>22</sup> In the conclusion, the letter does not advertise “ascension of the self above the mundane wishes” as Andrei Bereschi, “Petrarch's Demarcation of Humanism,” *Philobiblon: Transylvanian Journal of Multidisciplinary Research in Humanities* 22, no. 1 (2017): 129–148; 142, suggests with good analyses that liberate Petrarca from modernizing readings.

<sup>23</sup> That nightingale so tenderly lamenting / perhaps his children or his cherished mate, / in sweetness fills the sky and countryside / with many notes of grief skillfully played, // and all night long he stays with me it seems, / reminding me of my harsh destiny; / I have no one to blame except myself / for thinking Death could not rule such a goddess. // How easy to deceive one who is sure! / Those two lights, lovely, brighter than the sun, / whoever thought would turn the earth so dark? // And now I know what this fierce fate of mine / would have me learn as I live on in tears: / that nothing here can please and also last.

And yet, isn't that a beautiful poem? Why is it that "diletta" and "dura" coexist in wonderful assonance and dissonance? It is the human condition to oscillate constantly and contradictorily between care for the other and being lost to the world and – in doing so – to be wavering between reflection, self-pity, self-motivation and self-neglect. Self-neglect is the precondition for turning outside. Assurance is the ultimate delusion. But without delusion there is no assurance: "Vivo del desir fuor di speranza," as he says elsewhere,<sup>24</sup> indicating that to be human amounts to feeding on that sort of desire that transcends (*fuor*) hope and falls short of hope. And again, sonnet 12 closes with the words: "et se 'l tempo è contrario ai be' desiri, / non fia ch'almen non giunga al mio dolore / alcun soccorso di tardi sospiri."<sup>25</sup> Humans consume their own outreach as the essence of life; and insofar as that is beyond or below a definable goal, life may well be defined as vanity.

The report about the hike on the mountain has a message hidden in its name: Mont Ventoux means the Windy Mountain, which in Italian is Ventoso and an expression for vanity used also by Petrarca.<sup>26</sup> The journey depicts the successful attempt at gaining fame and consequently shame. Therefore, Petrarca had to feign rushing; his moment of pause on the mountain top uncovered the vanity of his endeavor and yet he could not live on without sharing his insight with that person that was beyond the rush of the excitement, the true friend who was dead. As an additional fine point it should be noted that Petrarca included the story in his collected *Letters to Friends (Familiars)*, in the section that explains his run for the coronation as Poet Laureate, making it part of his campaign.<sup>27</sup> Therefore, what is the meaning of its conclusion? Petrarca confesses that all his thoughts were "wandering and restless," hoping "they may finally settle down and after tossing uselessly over many things, turn themselves to the one, good, [true], sure, and stable."<sup>28</sup> With the purported reader in mind, the Augustinian friar, we should clearly think of the eternal rest of the soul in the Lord; but for the time being, a settled position in the world hierarchy would also put some of the wandering to rest.

This motif, vain hopes and unsteadiness, opens the *Canzoniere*, as we saw, and is the central motif of the book "My Secret" (*Secretum*). The one, God, is an aim and nothing more. The full title of this book is "The Inner Conflict of My Concerns" (*De secreto conflictu curarum mearum*), thus repeating the motif of the letter on the ascent of Mount Ventoux, which was not a real communication. This title clarifies one problem from the outset: while staged as a conversation between St. Augustine and Petrarca (Francesco), it soon becomes obvious that Augustine is yet another alter ego of the poet, or his conscience.<sup>29</sup> For that reason there is no need to enclose Augustine and Petrarca in quotation marks when quoting from that dialogue – it is fictitious anyway and at the same time it is what the philosopher wants his readership to understand.<sup>30</sup>

<sup>24</sup> *Canzoniere* 73, line 78; Musa translates: "I live in desire beyond hope."

<sup>25</sup> The poem opens: *Se la mia vita da l'aspro tormento [...]* "If my life can resist the bitter anguish / [...] / and should time work against my sweet desires, / at least it will not stop my grief receiving / some comfort brought by late-arriving sighs."

<sup>26</sup> *Canzoniere* 264, line 69; cf. notes on p. 1063 with more citations.

<sup>27</sup> Karlheinz Stierle, *La vita e i tempi di Petrarca. Alle origini della moderna coscienza europea*, trans. Gabriella Pelloni (Venezia: Marsilio, 2007), 337.

<sup>28</sup> Petrarca, *Selected Letters*, 61. The word *verum* "true" is missing in the translation; also, it adds "thing" after "stable" which would preclude reference to the transcendent.

<sup>29</sup> For a sophisticated analysis of identity in this work see Karl A. E. Enekel, *Die Erfindung des Menschen: Die Autobiographik des frühneuzeitlichen Humanismus von Petrarca bis Lipsius* (Berlin: de Gruyter, 2008), 40–145.

<sup>30</sup> As an aside, this is not a biographical study, and details of the works are not read with Petrarca as the historic subject. See, for instance, recently Thomas E. Peterson, *Petrarch's Fragmenta: The Narrative and Theological Unity of Rerum Vulgarium Fragmenta* (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 2016), 39–46, on the opening of the *Canzoniere*, and 103–113, on the "Secretum." Rather, we are looking for the poet's philosophical insight. On *Secretum* cf. Francisco Rico, *Vida u obra de Petrarca* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina, Department

In an allegorical sense, Petrarca is conversing, through Augustine, with truth itself. For in the preface he has a vision of *Veritas* ("Truth") who puts a claim on one of Petrarca's works: she identifies herself as exactly that truth described by Petrarca in his poem "Africa," which she mentions as *Africa nostra* "our Africa." Surprisingly, *Veritas* does not feature in the main text of the work, whereas – after a short conversation in the preface between *Veritas* and the author without reporting its content – St. Augustine appears, unmistakably serving as the proxy for Truth, and is characterized with an African garb. "[Augustine] immediately led me, a few steps behind Truth [...] Truth, who passed silent judgment on every word." The wording "passed silent judgment" is paradoxical, since Truth is present but not heard. So, to be more precise, Truth is listening in while Petrarca converses with himself.<sup>31</sup> With an ironic twist, the poet makes the audience understand that, while the dialogue first and foremost contains "censures which are directed at myself," it nevertheless coincides with "criticism of contemporary customs" and was "less an indictment of me than of the human race at large," while that of his own person was the most impressive one.<sup>32</sup>

As early as 1330 Petrarca had admitted that both Augustine and Petrarca's love, Laura, might be fictitious (*Familiars* II 9). The name of the lady connotes laurel and invokes the aspirations of the Poet Laureate. Since Augustine reflects the poet's internal conflicts, he serves as a counter balance for the passion towards Laura. Therefore, the subject of the whole dialogue of Petrarca with himself is the same as that expressed in "Canzona 264": pity for himself.

I vo pensando, et nel penser m'assale  
 una pietà sì forte di me stesso,  
 che mi conduce spesso  
 ad altro lagrimar ch'i' non soleva:  
 ché, vedendo ogni giorno il fin più presso,  
 mille fiata ò chieste a Dio quell'ale  
 co le quai del mortale  
 carcer nostro intelletto al ciel si leva. [...] <sup>33</sup>

What is the problem, we need to ask, as Augustine asks the poet (that is, Petrarca asks himself): "What are you doing, wretched man [*homuncio*]? What are you dreaming about? What are you waiting for? Have you so completely forgotten your miseries? Do you not remember that you are mortal?" That is how the book begins. Later Augustine chides Petrarca:

You foolish little man [*homuncio*]! So you imagine that you have only to nod for all the pleasures of heaven and earth, and all the happiest events, to rain down on you on all sides. But this hope has deceived

---

of Romance Languages, 1974), 31: "Francesco' oscila entre ser trasunto de Petrarca de la realidad biografica y representante de la condicion humana."

<sup>31</sup> Francesco Petrarca, *My Secret Book*, trans. Nicholas Mann (Cambridge, Mass.: Harvard University Press, 2016), 7; Francesco Petrarca, *Secretum. Il mio segreto*, ed. Enrico Fenzi (Milano: Mursia, 1992), 96 and notes 288–289; *Ibid.*, 98: "Veritate praevia parumper adduxit [...] Illa de singulis in silentio iudicante." Cf. Joachim Küpper, *Petrarca: Das Schweigen der Veritas und die Worte des Dichters* (Berlin: De Gruyter, 2002), 52.

<sup>32</sup> Petrarca, *My Secret Book*, 7; Petrarca, *Secretum. Il mio segreto*, 98: "Ubi multa licet adversus seculi nostril mores, deque comunibus mortalium piaculis dicta sint, ut non tam michi quam toti humano generi fieri convitium viderentur, ea tamen, quibus ipse notatus sum, memorie altius impressi."

<sup>33</sup> "I go on thinking, and I'm seized in thought / by such abundant pity for myself / that often I am led / to weeping for a different kind of grief: / for seeing every day the end come closer, / a thousand times I've begged God for those wings / with which our intellect / can soar to Heaven from this mortal jail. [...]"

thousands of men. [...] While they thought they had one foot on earth and one in heaven, they could neither stand down here nor step up to there.<sup>34</sup>

The word *homuncio* appears 23 times in Petrarca's works (if I counted correctly). It is a key term to describe the *conditio humana*. For instance, in the above-mentioned letter to the doctor of Padua we read: the "earthly little man" is composed of contradictory moods and therefore perishable.<sup>35</sup> Obviously, Petrarca is reminding himself of eternal life and of true virtue. After all, who could argue against St. Augustine? But within all his conflict, Petrarca is constant, or rather stubborn:

I know that trite old tale peddled by philosophers: that the whole earth amounts to nothing more than a single tiny point, that a single year holds innumerable millennia within it, but a man's renown [*fama*] is not enough to fill the point or the year – and other things of that kind that are used to discourage people from desiring fame. [...] I have no aspirations to become a god, to gain eternal life and embrace the heavens and the earth. Human fame is enough for me: that's what I long for, and as a mortal I desire nothing other than mortal things.

And he recklessly continues:

I have testimony of my mind, which is aware of all my concerns [*curarum mearum mens conscia*], that I have always burned with love for what is eternal. [...] I treat mortal things as mortal, and do no violence to nature by bringing huge and immoderate desire to bear on it. Therefore I strive for fame among men, knowing that both I and the fame are mortal.<sup>36</sup>

"My conscious mind" – that is Augustine in this setting, and the claimed love for the eternal – that is the Augustinian part in Petrarca, while the other part of his ego is happy to indulge in earthly pursuits; and from that mortal perspective longing for the eternal is plainly immoderate. What then does it mean to admit that glory and the glorious are equally mortal? Let us say, this is a line that could have been attributed to Satan by John Milton.<sup>37</sup> In alluding to the very title of the work (on the inner conflict of his concerns) Petrarca highlights that we are at the core of his philosophy.

We now recognize that Francesco is not being reckless or headstrong: rather in dialectical unison with Augustine he forms that compound of contradiction that is the essence of man, namely, to condone the desires that wisdom has to condemn. Petrarca in this dialogue with himself acknowledges an extremely important fact about the human condition. Men can be stubborn and reckless in pursuing earthly goals; on the other hand, as long as they are conscious of being reckless and stubborn, "mortal" as Petrarca says, they open for themselves, by way of conscience, access to the transcendent realm, which, born out of the awareness of the human limitations, condemns all human activities as vain. Mortality and vanity become synonyms. I believe that is one reason why Petrarca says he fell in love on the day of Christ's passion.

<sup>34</sup> Petrarca, *Secretum. Il mio segreto*, lib. 1, 100, and lib. 3, 268. Petrarca, *My Secret Book*, 11 and 237. With *homuncio* we may associate *homunculus* and *mannequin*.

<sup>35</sup> Petrarca, *Le senili*, 1486: "Mutari autem cum aetate hominem, quis non sentit? [...] Adhuc quidem causam tuam munio, cedunt annis arces marmoreae, nedum terreus homuncio, ex contrariis compactus humoribus [...]" Petrarca, *Letters of Old Age*, 441: "Marble citadels yield to the years, let alone tiny earthen man, made of contrary humors [...]" *Humores* may mean the four elementary bodily fluids but also the psychological traits

<sup>36</sup> Petrarca, *My Secret Book*, lib. 3, 231; Petrarca, *Secretum. Il mio segreto*, 262–264.

<sup>37</sup> On Augustinian motifs, esp. glory, in Milton compared with Petrarca see J. Christopher Warner, *The Augustinian Epic, Petrarch to Milton* (Ann Arbor: University of Michigan Press, 2005), 169, <http://muse.jhu.edu.ezp.Indlib.org/chapter/162572>.

From this point of view, the letter of old age, *Senilium* XII 1, plays the same game with the physician as *Secretum* does with Augustine: the authority of the expert has only so much bearing on the individual, as this carves out a sphere of longing, pleasure, desire – and yes, play. When he seemingly dismisses the doctor's advice, in literary and philosophical reality, Petrarca the old man and poet, establishes his own realm of life:

I therefore live tolerant of life, not eager for it. But whatever sort of life could be prolonged if I obey the doctors, I certainly do not worry about this at all, nor do I know. [...] I have known many who have obeyed doctors, and even doctors themselves, to have brief, sickly lives while others, defying them [rebellantes], live longer and healthier.<sup>38</sup>

To be sure, these are not rants of a grumpy chap who does not take his medications. What Petrarca does to Augustine he does now to the physician friend. To look at life from the vantage point of the Church Father or with the concerned eye of a physician inevitably misses the first person perspective. The life of the living human person is not an object of exhortation, whether they come from the healer of the soul or of the body. The classic formula of the doctor who should heal himself is turned around in Petrarca's response: the doctor's advice is irrelevant to the doctor as a person; it does not depend on the expertise of the other whether a life is good or ill. Everything depends on the paradoxical stance of being human, namely, love and contempt of life at the same time. In a letter addressed two years later to another physician, Francesco Casini, Petrarca revisits his exchange with Dondi and says: "He [Dondi] says I would have lived longer, had I obeyed the doctors; I say I would have died sooner."<sup>39</sup> Note Petrarca's choice of words: "diutius victurum [...] maturius moriturum" – *mature* may mean "soon," and quite commonly so; and yet the association with maturity is not far away. And in saying that Petrarca is disclosing his willful immaturity, even in old age.

The human condition of wandering through life – pointlessly and aimlessly, from the external viewpoint – once understood, degrades all human achievements. Therefore, Petrarca dares to say, "while we are still on earth we should seek the fame [*gloria*] that we may reasonably expect here." Said this way it sounds modest, but then the mundane glory is outdone by "a greater glory to be enjoyed in heaven, and anyone who achieves it won't even think of the earthly kind."<sup>40</sup> Is he being relativistic? Petrarca states clearly about eternal life: "I'm not defecting, I am deferring."<sup>41</sup> From an Augustinian perspective, all human strife is impotence; and yet human beings cannot but keep struggling. So what the Petrarchan man can do is to keep all contradictory desires and wishes in check. Towards the end, we read a truly dialectic exchange: "I beg you both [Augustine and Veritas]<sup>42</sup> not to abandon me, even if I am far distant from you. Without you, dear Father, my life would be unpleasant, but without her it would be nothing." Augustine assures him, "as long as you don't abandon yourself;" to which Petrarca promises "I shall attend to myself as best I can, and will gather together the scattered fragments of my soul, and will dwell diligently upon myself."<sup>43</sup> Thus he repeats the concluding resolution of the letter on the ascent of Mount

<sup>38</sup> Petrarca, *Letters of Old Age*, 450; Petrarca, *Le senili*, 1516: "Vite ergo patiens, non vite cupidus, vivo. Qualiscunque autem, vita hec prolongari posset si medicis obedirem? Hoc ego certe nec curo penitus, nec scio [...] multos medicis obsequentes (quin et ipsos medicos) vite brevis et infirme, et rebellantes alios vite diuturnioris ac sanioris agnovi."

<sup>39</sup> Sen. XIII 3, Petrarca, *Letters of Old Age*, 615; Petrarca, *Le senili*, 2088.

<sup>40</sup> Petrarca, *My Secret Book*, 235; Petrarca, *Secretum. Il mio segreto*, 266.

<sup>41</sup> Petrarca, *Secretum. Il mio segreto*, 264: "Haud equidem destituo; sed fortassis differo." [My translation.]

<sup>42</sup> Veritas was alluded to as "the lady who has sat through our long discussions."

<sup>43</sup> Petrarca, *My Secret Book*, 255; Petrarca, *Secretum. Il mio segreto*, 280–282: "[...] obsecro ne me, licet magnis tractibus distantem, deseratis. Sine te enim, pater optime, vita mea inamena, sine hac autem nulla foret.

Ventoux.<sup>44</sup> “The scattered fragments of my soul” – that is the definitive formula. Petrarca gave the *Canzoniere* the title *Rerum vulgarium fragmenta* “Fragments in Italian,” and as we had heard at the beginning, it is his collection of his scattered thoughts.<sup>45</sup> Petrarca’s poetry is the disorder, laceration, and disorientation of humanity, all encapsulated in beauty.

Where does all this leave the speaker of this lecture and his audience? As professors and published scholars we are trained in elevating matters of urgency to the level of academic reasonability and in doing so we provide our students with means and models of rationalizing intimate concerns.

Paul Richard Blum  
 Department of Philosophy  
 Loyola University Maryland  
 4501 N. Charles Street  
 Baltimore, MD 21210  
 USA  
 e-mail: prblum@loyola.edu

---

A. Impetratum puta, modo te ipse non deseras; [...] F. Adero michi ipse quantum potero, et sparsa anime fragmenta recolligam, moraborque mecum sedulo.” On the motif of scattered thought, see the note to the Italian text on pages 417 and 418.

<sup>44</sup> On further parallels and sources see Rico, *Vida u obra de Petrarca*, 444–448.

<sup>45</sup> Rico, “Rime sparse,” 135.

# Ludovica Radif

Palacký University, Olomouc, Czech Republic

## “Outsized” Women: Alessandra Scala and Cassandra Fedele

**Abstract** | The purpose of this paper is to focus on philosophical aspects, specifically to examine how the philosophical tradition permeates certain considerations used by the Venetian poet and can shape her picture of woman “outside the category of women.” This paper is primarily focused on two renowned woman scholars, Cassandra Fedele and Alessandra Scala, who, during the period of the Italian Renaissance, achieved fame through their writing, oratorical abilities or their performances.

**Keywords** | Alessandra Scala – Cassandra Fedele – Women’s education during the Italian Renaissance – *Plato* and ancient philosophy in the *Italian Renaissance*

.....

Although Fedele is regarded as a well educated, literary cultured,<sup>1</sup> renowned woman for her leading figure and for the notoriety of people she met,<sup>2</sup> she has not receive much critical attention, especially over the last century. This situation has been noted by the scholar De Liso when reviewing Antonine Fedele’s book,<sup>3</sup> which collects new rare archival documents together with Fedele’s orations and letters, with Italian translations and a well-informed introduction and commentary.

She remains, however, a female icon of culture, or a before-the-term exponent of the Feminist movement, and has been mentioned in research concerning the cultural position of women during the Renaissance. She is often associated with other figures, such as Isotta Nogarola or Laura Cereta, in the landscape of Renaissance Venetian culture.<sup>4</sup>

---

<sup>1</sup> Nevertheless, despite her fame, she suffered from poverty, when she became a widow without children, see below.

<sup>2</sup> Some papers about her relationship with eminent figures include the following: Adriano Cappelli, “Cassandra Fedele in relazione con Ludovico il Moro,” *Archivio Storico Lombardo* 4 (1895): 386–394; Giovanni Pesenti, “Lettere inedite del Poliziano,” *Athenaeum* 3 (1915): 229–231; Vittore Branca, *Poliziano e l’umanesimo della parola* (Torino: Einaudi, 1983), 146–147.

<sup>3</sup> Daniela De Liso, *Review of Cassandra Fedele*; Antonino Fedele, *Orazioni ed epistole*, *Critica Letteraria* 156 (2012): 603–607. From that book by Antonino Fedele we quote letters with first italian translation (the latin text is reproduced from Tomasini’s edition).

<sup>4</sup> Cesira Cavazzana, “Cassandra Fedele erudita veneziana del Rinascimento,” *Ateneo veneto* 29 (1906): 74–91, 249–275, 361–397; Margaret Leah King, “Thwarted Ambitions: Six Learned Women of the Italian Renaissance,” *Soundings* 59 (1976): 280–305; Patricia H. Labalme, *Beyond Their Sex: Learned Women of the European Past* (New York: The University of Chicago Press, 1980); Patricia H. Labalme, “Venetian Women on Women: Three Early Modern Feminists,” *Archivio Veneto* 117 (1981): 81–109; Prudence Allen, *The Concept of Woman. II. The Early Humanist Reformation, 1250–1500* (Grand Rapids, MI, and Cambridge, UK: William B. Eerdmans Publishing, 2002); Virginia Cox, *Women Writing in Italy 1400–1650* (Baltimore: John Hopkins University, 2008).

Her correspondence with another, not so well-known, woman, who like her was highly cultured in the same social context (Alessandra Scala), seems to have been neglected, perhaps due to a lack of background material.

By reading those few letters and, by extension, the entire collection, we can discover the more fragile interior of these women, sheltered from prominent achievements and closely linked to existential questions about culture and one's calling in life, in a problematic position that characterizes their generation.

In the Florentine Neoplatonic climate,<sup>5</sup> with its enormous impulse toward revival of the Greek and Roman classics, we can find theatrical representations,<sup>6</sup> especially in the school context, which worked at achieving the rebirth of the classics. The politician, as well as Italian scholar and poet, Angelo Poliziano relates in this context (in the year 1493) of how his daughter Alessandra and son Giuliano performed the drama *Electra* by Sophocles in the ancient Greek at Bartolomeo Scala's home. The girl was eighteen and thanks to her talent and beauty had various interests and expectations, sentimental ones as well. Having been introduced to the erudite Cassandra Fedele by Poliziano, she decided to share with the Venetian poet her personal plans about the future.

In a short but significant correspondence of only three letters, a connection is apparent between two very erudite and, as we shall see, "outsider" women, in respect to their mental set up.

As concerns Fedele<sup>7</sup> we have access to an old but good biography written by Tomasini.<sup>8</sup> Additional data available about her family comes from the opening pages of the book of her descendant Antonino Fedele, where we find her letters. Certain fundamental traits of her life are of interest here, which help us understand the letters: when she was twelve, she had excellent familiarity with the Latin language and a knowledge of Greek, and she was entrusted to the astronomer Gasparino Borro, a theologian and Servite monk, to teach her philosophy and the sciences. She is depicted in her portraits with a severe aspect, a sample being provided by

<sup>5</sup> For the topic of Platonism, especially in its connections with the development of modern culture and the social situation in Florence, see: Alison Brown, "Platonism in Fifteenth Century Florence and its Contribution to Early Modern Political Thought," *Journal of Modern History* 58 (1986): 383–413; and Cesare Vasoli's considerations about politician and philosophical aspects in Medician thought, e.g., "Riflessioni sugli umanisti e il principe: il modello platonico dell'ottimo governante," in *Per Federico Chabod (1901–1960). Atti del Seminario Internazionale. Lo stato e il potere nel Rinascimento*, ed. Sergio Bertelli (Perugia: Università degli Studi di Perugia, 1981), 147–168.

<sup>6</sup> Speaking of the first representations in Florence, we can consider the figure of Pietro Domizi, who was also supported by Lorenzo de' Medici, as we can see in a letter: see Paolo Procaccioli "Pietro Domizi del Comandatore," in *Dizionario Biografico degli Italiani Ed. Istituto della Enciclopedia Italiana Giovanni Treccani* (Roma: Istituto della Enciclopedia Italiana, 1960), 701–702; Paolo Viti, "Per una ricerca sull'influenza savonaroliana sulla commedia dell'ultimo Quattrocento a Firenze: Pietro Domizi," in *Studi Savonaroliani. Verso il V Centenario, Atti del Seminario di studi savonaroliani*, ed. Gian Carlo Garfagnini (Firenze: Sismel-Edizioni del Galluzzo, 1996), 183–194; and Ludovica Radif "Gli adattamenti del Domizi e ipotesi per la perdita Licinia," in *Mecenati, artisti e pubblico nel Rinascimento*, ed. Luisa Secchi Tarugi (Firenze: Franco Cesati Editore, 2011), 109–118; Pietro Ghinzoni, "Alcune rappresentazioni in Italia nel secolo XV," *Archivio Storico Lombardo* 20 (1893): 958–967; Cesare Molinari, *Spettacoli fiorentini del Quattrocento* (Venezia: Neri Pozza, 1961); Angelo Poliziano, *La commedia antica e l'Andria di Terenzio*, ed. Rosetta Lattanzi Rosselli (Firenze: Sansoni, 1973); Raimondo Guarino, *Teatro e culture della rappresentazione. Lo spettacolo in Italia nel Quattrocento* (Bologna: Il Mulino, 1988); Paola Ventrone, "Riflessioni teoriche sul teatro nella Firenze dei primi Medici," *Interpres* 12 (1992): 150–196.

<sup>7</sup> A bibliographical collection can be found in my entry "Cassandra Fidelis" in *Compendium Auctorum Latinorum Medii Aevi cur. Michael Lapidge, Silvia Nocentini, Francesca Santi*, (Sismel, Edizioni del Galluzzo, II/5, 2008), 575.

<sup>8</sup> Giacomo Filippo Tomasini, *Elogia virorum literis et sapientia illustrium ad vivum expressis imaginibus exornata* (Padova: Sebastiano Sardi, 1644), 343–358; Girolamo Tiraboschi, *Storia della letteratura italiana, III* (Milano: Nicolò Bettoni, 1833), 171–172; Maria Petretini, *Vita di Cassandra Fedele veneziana* (Venezia: Ti di Giuseppe Grimaldo, 1852). More recently Diana Robin, *Letters and Orations* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2000); some references *passim* to "Cassandra and Feminism" in Sarah Gwyneth Ross, *The Birth of Feminism: Woman as Intellect in Renaissance Italy and England* (Cambridge, Mass.: Harvard University Press), 2010.

the presumed model that Giovanni Bellini realized for her when she was sixteen and probably lost (a marble reproduction of it is saved in the Ducal Palace of Venice, among the Venetian distinguished men).

She specifically achieved fame and growing consideration in the literary context with her public speech *Oratio pro Bertucio Lamberto* (presented at the University of Padova) in praise of the arts and sciences. She also asked to speak about education in the presence of doge Agostino Barbarigo. Not only did many prominent scholars consider her an extraordinary truly inspiring woman, but also relevant politicians were in contact with her, such as Wueen Isabella from Castiglia, the King of France Louis XII, or the Popes Leo X (John de Medici) and Paul III (Alessandro Farnese). The wedding choice (celebrated around the year 1499) was probably encouraged by her father, as well as the choice of the husband Gian Maria Mapelli, a doctor from Vicenza, whom she later lived with in Rétimno (Crete) for some years, up until the year 1520. They then returned to Venice, but unfortunately all their belongings were lost during their travels and soon after she also became a widow, without progeny. Due to poverty, she was forced to write and seek the support of the Pope, which only arrived many years later when the Pope appointed her as Superior of the San Domenico a Castello Hospital, where she remained until her death at 93. When in the presence of the Polish Queen Bona Sforza, she openly read a public speech; the queen was deeply moved and gave her her own necklace.

As regards Scala, she studied under the supervision of Andrea Giovanni Lascaris. He also courted her (we know that Angelus Politianus courted her as well), but she chose to marry (in 1497) the poet Michael Marullus (Mikel Maruli, born in Constantinople in 1453), who wrote some epigrams and the "Hymni naturales." After the sudden death of her beloved husband (he drowned in the river Cecina), Scala entered the Benedictine convent of San Pier Maggiore in Florence.

Their exchange of letters took place during a period in which the position of woman in society – especially when highly educated – was not easy. It is of interest to consider how Neoplatonic issues, that were going to spread through the Medici circle, contributed to defining the social role of women.

Although other women, such as Isabella Nogarola, excelled in rhetorical art and writing, the general impression is that for women of that time the path to self realization was very long.

Let us examine how developed the dialogue between the two women (we are using from Fedeli's book new Italian translations and the original texts taken from Tomasini's edition) where it is possible to find a dense reference network to Neoplatonism.

In letter number 90 it is clear how the Venetian Fedele admired the young Scala, just introduced to her, and how that feeling can be considered mutual. She strongly hoped that their friendship would deepen and promised to her the same praise that is granted to *a man*.<sup>9</sup>

---

<sup>9</sup> *Epistola 90, 310–313:*

*Lectis tuis literis lepore et elegantia refertis admirata sum; te quoque meas laudasse ni verere me non tam proferre de te iudicium quem tuis de me referre gratias viderer. Quae tamen nobis plurimumperiucunda fuere, ex is enim cognovimus te nos summa benevolentia prosequi hoc idem et multo magis a nobis fieri scias velim ac nobis carissimam esse, necnoc nomen tuum pro virili illustrabimus. Vale.* "Letta la tua lettera, sono rimasta ammirata per l'amabilità e la squisitezza di cui è ricolma; che a tua volta abbia elogiato la mia non mi darei pensiero per non riuscire ad esprimere un giudizio su di te tanto quanto mi sembrerebbe di doverti ringraziare per quanto scrivi di me nella tua. Pur tuttavia tale lettera è stata per me piacevolissima; infatti, grazie ad essa ho potuto fare la tua conoscenza. Continua nella tua grandissima benevolenza nei miei confronti; vorrei che tu sapessi che da parte mia sarà fatta la stessa cosa e molto di più, che mi sei molto cara e che il tuo nome da noi sarà celebrato al pari di quello di un uomo. Stammi bene."

Fedele seems to find herself in Scala's reflections in a game of praising and feeling praised without any pride but, on the contrary, with continuous surprising about themselves. What strikes us above all in the letter is the closing, which should be a compliment, but sounds completely different. When congratulating Scala for her successes, Fedele compares her to a man (!) and promises to celebrate her like a man.<sup>10</sup> The occurrence of the *vir* term in the entire collection, helps us understand how privileged a position men had. As a symbol for them in the literary landscape; the phrase *pro virili parte* provides only a glimpse of references to the male universe (in fact it considers absolutely *vir* as a person, woman or man)<sup>11</sup> in a conventional context, like the opening and closing salutations usually are, livened up by the special pun that comes from the Alex-andra name (which contains the "man" word inside). This is a matter of wishing, as in an onomastic-game epigram,<sup>12</sup> that she should have a name corresponding to her destiny. There is a similar concept in the letter 18, where who is speaking is a 17-year old girl who is surprised at Fedele's fame and recognition, that she is ennobling the female generation.<sup>13</sup>

In letter 93 (more interesting than the others, at least from our point of view) Fedele informed Scala about how uncommon their friendship was and their strictest confidence. Scala asked her for advice about her personal life choice, if it would be better to devote entirely herself to the Muses or to a man (she in all probability considered the two paths, the cultural one and the familiar one, incompatible). She answered her suggesting she adopt the kind of life for which she naturally felt herself more inclined to, because, in accordance with Plato, what one is forced to do does not last long.<sup>14</sup>

This reference to Plato leads us meaningfully to reconsidering the collection with respect to Neoplatonism and philosophical motions.

<sup>10</sup> That is A. Fedele's interpretation: "al pari di quello di un uomo."

<sup>11</sup> Ludovica Radif, "La virale presenza del vir nel carteggio di Cassandra Fedele," in *Género y expresiones artísticas interculturales*, ed. Eva Maria Moreno Lago (Sevilla: Benilde, 2017), 399–413.

<sup>12</sup> Many allusions are more or less sarcastic, to famous poets and humanists, also in a parodic key in texts such as *Antologia Greca*; you can read my "No More, please: Il 'pazzo' Moro di Germano Brixio (AP XI 127)," *Humanistica Lovaniensia. Journal of Neo-Latin Studies* 66 (2017): 487–92.

<sup>13</sup> *Epistola* 18, 396–397:

*Alexandra Scala Cassandreae Fideli s[alutem dicit]: Quicumque istinc huc ad nos proficiscunt virtutem tuam praedicant ut apud hos quoque iam nomen tuum summa in admiratione sit. De ingenio tuo, doctrina, de moribus nobis admiranda quaedam et fere incredibilia afferuntur. Quare tibi gratulor, agoque gratias quod non nostrum modo sexum sed hanc quoque aetatem illustraveris. Vale. Ex Florentia, pridie Non. Octobris MCCCCLXXXII.* "Chiunque da costà venga qui da noi parla della tua virtù sicché anche da loro il tuo nome ormai è ammirato moltissimo. Del tuo ingegno, della tua cultura e dei tuoi costumi ci vengono riferite cose ammirevoli e quasi incredibili, per cui mi congratulo con te e ti ringrazio per avere nobilitato non solo il nostro sesso ma anche il nostro secolo. Stammi bene. Firenze, 6 ottobre 1492."

<sup>14</sup> *Epistola* 93, 318–319 (18 gennaio 1492):

*Ex tuis ornatissimis literis id perspeximus quod nobis fuit perriucundum te nostram haud vulgarem benevolentiam iudicasse cum tua omnia me non modo cognoscere voluisti verum me de iisdem consulere. Mea itaque Alexandra utrum Musis an Viro te dedas accipitem esse. Id tibi de hac re eligendum censeo ad quod te magis proclivem natura constituit. Nam omne consilium quod recipitur pro recipientis facilitate recipi asserit Plato. Quod quidem tibi erit perfacile factu, cum violentum perpetuum nullum. Vale.* "Dalla tua elegantissima lettera ho notato chiaramente che non hai giudicato comune la nostra amicizia, cosa che ci ha fatto molto piacere, dal momento che hai voluto che io sapessi tutto di te e che in merito ti dessi dei consigli. Alessandra mia, dunque vuoi sapere se è più rischioso che tu ti dedichi alle Muse anziché ad un uomo? Su questo argomento io penso che tu debba scegliere ciò a cui la natura ti ha fatto più incline. Infatti, Platone sostiene che ogni decisione che si prende va presa per il piacere di chi la prende. Evidentemente per te ciò sarà molto facile a farsi, mentre se la stessa cosa viene imposta sarà di nessun valore. Stammi bene. [...] 18 gennaio 1492."

In letter 91, addressed to Scala's father, the renowned Florentine Chancellor Bartholomeus, we find a description of the extraordinary cultural zeal for her studying classics. She wants to congratulate him on Scala's hard work in her studies and also her personal virtue.<sup>15</sup>

Additional references to Scala's family occur in other letters, for example, in letter 89 from the 1st of April 1494, writing to the same Poliziano, she states that she got to know how he, Alessandra Scala and her father,<sup>16</sup> cared for her. She asked Poliziano to recommend hers to Marsilio Ficino, Bartolomeo Scala and to the excellent Scala: she viewed Bartolomeo as a father and Scala as a sister.

In Fedele's letters, when speaking with important people of that time, there are some references to Platonic and also Aristotelian theories (such as, for example, in letter 92), which is a reflection of her special attention to classics as the source of inspiration for living. Here, starting with the Aristotelian concept of man as "rational animal," a creature distinguished by a rational principle, she considers man similar to god, and thus relies on the Platonic view of man as a god restricted by mortal nature.<sup>17</sup> In that perspective, her addressee Bartholomeo, a male and a scholar, was not surprised that it is still possible to compete against the classical authors, because the human state is the same as the position of the planetary bodies or alternated changing of day and night. Fedele and Scala are moving forward in the same direction, like two sisters (ten years coming between them) with one father, Bartholomeo. At that time the competition with classical authors was a humanist principle, in the general Aristotelian revival.

In a speech in honor of literary studies, she supports the liberal arts, based on the Aristotelian observation according to which man is distinguished from animals because of rational behavior; if man does not believe in his head, he believes in fate. And there is a reference to Plato, in par-

---

<sup>15</sup> *Epistola 91*, 314–315:

*Te vir, macte virtute, summopere laudo gratulorque tibi filiam tuam tamquam facem virtutis literarum studio dedicasse. Et quid? Ex eius literis fomenta arida igni praeuisse cognovi, ex quo ea sunt praemia vobis proposita quae omnibus facilis et perspicacis ingenii a Diis quidem immortalibus optari solent, et quae nomen aeternae virtutis vobis inferunt tum famam celebrem, vobis me obnoxiam esse fateor, quantum virtutis vestra cumulus exigit atque expostulas. Vale.* "Ti apprezzo moltissimo per le tue ottime qualità e mi congratulo con te per il fatto che tua figlia si sia dedicata allo studio delle lettere come un fuoco ardente di virtù. E che? Da una sua lettera ho saputo che al fuoco ha fornito materiale infiammabile; da ciò consegue che la ricompensa cui vi troverete davanti è di sapere che queste sono le cose che chiunque abbia un ingegno agile e perspicace suole chiedere agli dei immortali e che comportano la causa dell'eterno prodigio e la gloria della celebrità. Mi dico vostra affezionatissima quanto esige e pretende l'insieme delle vostre buone qualità. Stammi bene."

<sup>16</sup> About the politician, see Alison Brown, *Bartolomeo Scala: Humanistic and Political Writings* (Tempe: Medieval and Renaissance Texts and Studies [MRTS], 1997) as regards Alessandra, cf. 235–236, 245–250; Mario Martelli, "Narrazione e ideologia nella *Historia Florentinorum* di Bartolomeo Scala," *Interpres* 4 (1981–1982): 7–57.

<sup>17</sup> *Epistola 92*, 316–317:

Genus hominum a nostro Peripatetico definiri fatemur "animal esse rationale," nam ratione caeteris praestamus animantibus, itaque Dii similes efficitur ac solum mortalitate nos ab ipsis differre apud Platonem legimus. Non mirum itaque est ipsa duce veteribus quos tantopere extollis te aequasse. Si ea enim adhuc in nobis ratio viget quae antiquos floruisse accepimus facillime iis quoque assiduo studio annumerari poterimus neque sunt hoc tempore ortus et occasus nec non poli sidera denique mutata. Non igitur antiquitatem imitari pro mea virili desistam ut si priscorum virtutesd minime assequi poterō, veri saltem boni cupiditate ardeam. Nobis postremo periuicundum extitisse teneas idipsum de Alexandra nostra ex tuis percepisse literis quod coram ex Matheo tibi deditissimo cognoveram qua de re maxima perfrui laetitia video. Quae mihi quidem pro meo in te incredibili amore communis est. Me dein in tui amantiorem reddidit magni me abs te fieri nedum amari ex tuis intellexisse. Me itaque te uti patrem amare nunquam defuturam scias velim. Vale – XV Kalendas Februarias MCCCCLXXXII.

ticular to the *Republic* and the special form of government advocated by Plato in the *Republic* under the reign of a philosopher king.<sup>18</sup>

From that dialogue we can deduce how important the idea of justice was and the relevant role of philosophy in the educational learning path of the future rulers.<sup>19</sup>

Fedele adds a personal commentary, stating that material good can deprave people while spiritual qualities, natural gifts, like raw unprocessed material, have to be sharpened, and modelled over a long period of study.

On that occasion, Fedele proved to be not only relating a Platonic passage, but also trying to understand and demonstrate the reasons why a god-like philosopher-king should be selected. The qualities are kinds of varieties of seeds in the earth, and need to be planted and cultivated in order to become fruitful (as was done in classical times by the enlightened Alexander the Great).

In a laudatory letter to Prince Francesco Gonzaga, she admitted having abandoned the usual feminine or womanly pursuits in order to achieve immortality, following the Platonic precept to live well and die well,<sup>20</sup> in which, conveniently noted by Diana Robin, we can recognize a link between beauty and goodness, according to the moral grounds of the Neoplatonic system.

Additionally in letter 34, when she tries to comfort the King of Spain for the loss of his dear son, she supports a key concept of the philosophy of Plato, declaring that life is the sum total of continuous unhappy events, while death is regrettable only if it happens shamefully, when a person becomes the victim of irrational bestiality (and in this situation she also recalls the Platonic precept “to live well and die well”).

As regards the other very important philosopher Aristotle, in some sporadic occasional considerations in her writings, a solid reception of basic Aristotelian thought can be found, and it is often impossible to individualize the various ancient philosophical lines. We can therefore deduce high tolerance in a period during which Aristotelianism is considered together with the Neoplatonic tradition.

The poet confides to her friend Filomuso [7], concerning the complexity of Aristotelian concepts (I do not have enough capacity to appreciate Aristotle’s works, she admits);<sup>21</sup> in an other passage she says that in the silence of the night she devotes herself to the Peripatetics,<sup>22</sup> and speaking another time with Filomuso [39] she deplores the fact that “her Aristotle” abandoned and despised her. In the same way, at the beginning of letter 45 addressed to an unknown friend, Fedele relates an Aristotelian concept, according to which whoever does something does it with some purpose and it is absurd, once something is done, to say that we were not thinking about it.<sup>23</sup>

Through a broader vision, we can identify additional sporadic references to philosophers in the Fedele collection, such as, for example, the Presocratic Empedocles. She claims (letter

<sup>18</sup> *De laudibus literarum oratio* 2, 66–67: “Hinc Plato vir prope divinus eas tum respublicas fore beatas scripsit, cum aut qui eas administrarent philosophati fuerint aut philosophantes earum administrationem susceperint.”

<sup>19</sup> *De laudibus literarum oratio* 2, 66–67: “Animadvertit, ut opinor, ille corporis fortunae bonorum igitur locuples multo magis ad vitia invitari.”

<sup>20</sup> Cf. Robin, *Letters*, 60.

<sup>21</sup> *Epistola* 7, 98–99: “Quoniam aristotelea dogmata a me percepisti nolunt [...] aristotelea facultate me indigere plurimum [...] I concetti aristotelici non vogliono lasciarsi afferrare da me [...] io non dispongo affatto delle capacità necessarie per capire le opere di Aristotele.”

<sup>22</sup> *Ibid.*: “Nostin miro silentio et tenebris, ac assidua diligentia morem meum, studiis Peripateticorum adeo addictam ut me macerem totam? Non sai che nel meraviglioso silenzio della notte mi dedico allo studio dei Peripatetici con un’applicazione talmente assidua da macerarmi tutta quanta?”

<sup>23</sup> *Epistola* 45, 198–199: “Omnis agens ob aliquem finem agere ab Aristotele habetur [...] ‘re facta insipientis est dicere: non putaram.’ Da Aristotele apprendiamo che chiunque faccia qualcosa lo fa per qualche scopo [...]”

at page 320) that she cannot disprove Empedocles' opinion about friendship: how is natural a principle it is and how from which beings can receive food and life.

The reference is, obviously, to the Empedoclean theory according to which, on the basis of the four roots, two principles are active, the first of which can be considered the Greek Φιλότης "love," as opposed to the Νείκος "hate;" love leads the joining process, while hate the splitting one, as phenomena that people usually call the succession of iterative generations.

Epicurus turns up in 47, about the same topic of consolation that was dealt with in 34; when she was saying that for us not only happiness but also serenity is out of reach in life, she quoted Epicurus, who considered it impossible to reach it.<sup>24</sup> The Epicurean topic was there simplified, but the fact that the heart of Epicurean philosophy could be suggested in a sentence or proverbial phrase addressed to friends is important.

Undefined references to philosophy also compare here, for example, in a letter to Sigismondo Gonzaga, which contains a prediction about his future dignity of cardinal, and shows an appreciation for rhetorical science, which Plato considered very important together with philosophy. Fedele relates us that at night she devotes herself to the reading of a book about paragons in the art of oratory. In a quite amusing letter [5] she shares with a friend, not known to us, but probably a philosopher, the problems arising through deepening her knowledge of philosophical studies.

Reading Fedele's letters we can argue Platonic and Neoplatonian lines, as they could be taken and transposed into daily life, and her personal perspectives about her future. We read the Ficinian concept of *homo copula mundi*, where destiny like a harmonic fusion between intellectual heritage and natural giftedness is believed in (in other words, in the face of Hyperuranic essence and raw materials, people could choose rising or degrading); love and beauty are relevant for ascending to the divine, and intellectual activities and contemplation are more important than civic and political living. The revival of mythological themes is not the least element, but also turned up with the allegorical function – she often mentions the Muses; for example, in the verses edited by Petrettini,<sup>25</sup> or writing to Camusio's son [16], she considers his father as the ancient hero Achilles;<sup>26</sup> or in the letter to Giacomo Ponzano [17], she wishes him as many years as had the famous Homeric Nestor.<sup>27</sup> In the letter addressed to Francesco Gonzaga, she expresses at the end some appreciation for the aesthetic look of the Prince, establishing a comparison to Achilles, Hercules, and Paris.<sup>28</sup> A reference to the myth of Cassandra is made in a letter to Sigismondo Gonzaga, when she remembers how the ancient admirable prophetess Cassandra was not believed.<sup>29</sup>

She was not indifferent to theological debates in which, however, she also expresses opinions. Writing to the Pope (100), she speaks of an almost divine inspiration, when she heard an inner voice inviting her to fetch a pen and ask for help.

<sup>24</sup> *Epistola* 47, 202–203: "Epicurum veritatem attigisse fateamur, beatitudinem nullo pacto in hoc seculo reperiri posse asserentem. Epicuro giustamente affermava il vero quando asseriva che in questa vita non è possibile procurarsi in alcun modo la felicità."

<sup>25</sup> Cf. Fedele's Introductory pages, 37: "Dant tibi, Rhamnusi, Musae de nomine nomen [...] Cum tibi Thespiades dulcia dona ferunt."

<sup>26</sup> *Epistola* 16, 124–125: "Ut Achillem intueri videamus; ci sembra di potervi intravedere Achille."

<sup>27</sup> *Epistola* 17, 126–127: "Ut te in nestoreos annos conservet; che ti conservi per tanti anni quanti sono stati quelli di Nestore."

<sup>28</sup> *Epistola* 1, 82–83: "Nonne dexteritate Achillem, robore Herculem, formositate Paridem antecellis? Forse nell'abilità non siete superiore ad Achille, nella forza ad Ercole e nella bellezza a Paride?"

<sup>29</sup> *Epistola* 2, 84–85: "Nec haec quidem irrita Cassandra vaticinatur, cui maior fides quam Priamidi exhibenda est. D'altronde Cassandra, alla quale bisogna prestar fede più che a Priamo, non vaticinava senza successo?"

## Conclusions

Neoplatonic culture, supported by the Ficinian Academy financed by Medici, pervaded society and intellectual courtiers.

Scala and Fedele seem to be thinking that they can be *faber fortunae suae*, they can build their own future, also making use of classical traditional patterns. These included freedom, freedom of choice and self-determination.

The social situation appears to have fallen behind at this time and they were unable to realize their aspirations, with undoubtedly the *pater familias* playing a major part, above all in their decisions for their future personal lives.<sup>30</sup>

Fedele could not go out, as we can understand reading her letter to a relative, whom she liked but could not visit (40), because he was in Monza. The situation for women was changing but in the middle of the 16th century (we can see the future Visconti, Este, Borgia families etc.).

In that interesting cultural context, Neoplatonic lines provide an interesting contribution to the planning of female style in culture.

In spite of troubles and reversals of fortune, which lead them to a retired life of contemplation, both women consigned to history and society a bright portrait in harmony with beauty, culture, and sensitivity. The dialogue with Scala might have given Fedele the opportunity to express some workings of the soul, that philosophy articulated in a verbal form.

In conclusion, we can take the splendid symbolic image used by Eleonor from Aragon, Duchess of Ferrara, to celebrate Fedele, where she says [16] that she had sucked with the milk the honey that the bees, following the legend, instilled drop by drop on Plato's lips,<sup>31</sup> where in addition to propensity to poetry we can also recognize a particular reference to Plato and platonic thought.<sup>32</sup>

Ludovica Radif  
 Department of Classics  
 Palacký University  
 Na Hradě 245/5  
 779 00 Olomouc  
 Czech Republic  
 e-mail: ludovica.radif@upol.cz

---

<sup>30</sup> As regards female figures of that time: Lisa Jardine, "O decus italiane virgo or the Myth of the Learned Lady in the Renaissance," *The Historical Journal* 28 (1895): 799–819; Stefano Pittaluga, "Donne e letteratura nel 400," *Nuova Secondaria* 5 (1992): 35–37, p. 35; Elisabeth Göransson, "Defining a subgenre. Aspects of imitation and intertextuality in the correspondence of learned women in early modern times," in *Acta Conventus Neo-Latini Upsaliensis* II, ed. Astrid Steiner-Weber (Leiden, Boston: Brill, 2012), 415–427.

<sup>31</sup> *Epistola* 16, 392–393: "Ex iis quae te lactaverunt uberibus, dulce suxisti lac, et illud praeclarum mel quod ferunt apes Platonis labellis. Dalle mammelle che ti hanno allattato hai succhiato il caro latte e quello stesso miele che, come si tramanda, le api hanno instillato goccia a goccia sulle labbra di Platone."

<sup>32</sup> Cf. Alice Swift Riginos, *Platonica. The Anecdotes Concerning the Life and Writings of Plato* (Leiden: Brill, 1976), 17–21.

## Jan Herufek

Department of Philosophy, University of Ostrava, Ostrava, Czech Republic

# Sources in Zorzi's Concept of *Occulta Scientia Cabale*: A Little Encounter

**Abstract** | The paper focuses on Francesco Zorzi's concept of "scientia cabale", as it is described in his work *De harmonia mundi totius mundi cantica tria* and later in his *In scripturam sacram Problemata*. In both works he gradually reveals his secret philosophy and presents the sources that enabled him to create such a concept. One can speak in this context of the Hermetic-Platonic-Pythagorean tradition (influenced by Ficino's view), which is, however, combined with originally Jewish mystical teaching (called Kabbalah). It is therefore not surprising that Zorzi's concept is closely associated with Giovanni Pico della Mirandola's kabbalistic doctrine (expressed in his *Conclusiones*, *Apologia* and *Heptaplus*, as well as with Reuchlin's project (included in his *De verbo mirifico* and *De arte cabalistica* in particular).

**Keywords** | Francesco Zorzi – Marsilio Ficino – Giovanni Pico della Mirandola – Johannes Reuchlin – *Prisca theologia* – Christian Kabbalah

.....

## Introduction

The Franciscan scholar Francesco Zorzi (in Latin *Franciscus Georgius Venetus*; in Italian *Francesco Giorgio*; 1466–1540)<sup>1</sup> can be rightly regarded as a prominent representative of Italian Humanism at the turn of the 16th century, whose interests included not only disciplines such as architecture or musicology, but also philosophy (*philosophia catholica*) as divine science (*divina scientia*). He referred to its conception both in the work *De harmonia mundi totius cantica tria* (1525), which is divided into three songs and is dedicated to Pope Clement VII, and eleven years later in his work *In scripturam sacram Problemata* (1536), which is dedicated to Pope Paul III.<sup>2</sup>

In both works he gradually reveals his secret kabbalistic philosophy (*occulta scientia cabale*) and presents the sources that have actually enabled him to create such a concept. In one source, Zorzi apparently turns to the Platonic-Pythagorean tradition to follow up on the teachings of the fifteenth-century Florentine Platonists, which he, however, does within the framework of *prisca*

---

\* The article is dedicated to Radim Herufek.

<sup>1</sup> For a report on Zorzi's life, see Giulio Busi, "Francesco Zorzi. A Methodical Dreamer," in *The Christian Kabbalah. Jewish Mystical Books: Their Christians Interpreters*, ed. Joseph Dan (Cambridge, Mass.: Harvard College Library, 1997), 97–125; Cesare Vasoli, *Filosofia e religione nella cultura del Rinascimento* (Napoli: Guida, 1988), 257–277; Ulderico Vicentini, "Francesco Zorzi OFM teologo cabbalista (1453–1540)," *Le Venezie francescane* 21, 3 (1954): 121–164.

<sup>2</sup> See Francesco Zorzi, *De harmonia mundi/Larmonia del mondo*, ed. Saverio Campanini (Milano: Bompiani, 2010); *Lelegante poema e Commento sopra il Poema*, ed. Jean-Francois Maillard (Milano: Arché, 1992); *Francisci Georgi Veneti Minoritani in Scripturam sacram Problemata* (Venetiis: Bernardinus Vitalis, 1536).

*theologia*.<sup>3</sup> The other source is supposed to continue and elaborate on the first one in many ways. It is in fact based on the originally Jewish mystical teaching called Kabbalah.<sup>4</sup> It must be said that Zorzi in all probability follows Christian kabbalists such as Giovanni Pico della Mirandola (1463–1494) and Johannes Reuchlin (1455–1522).<sup>5</sup> Attention will therefore be focused on two main topics. Firstly, we will consider the relationship between the concept of *prisca theologia* and the Christian Kabbalah in Zorzi's philosophical system. Secondly, we will deal with Zorzi's concept of the true God's names, which will be confronted with Pico's view expressed primarily in his *Conclusiones* (1486), *Apologia* (1487), and *Heptaplus* (1489).

## The Christian Kabbalah in the Context of *Prisca Theologia*

The concept of *prisca theologia* “the ancient theology” is closely associated with Marsilio Ficino (1433–1499), head of the Florentine Academy, who had achieved fame not only as a translator of Plato's works, but also as the creator of a new philosophy, an equator between Platonism and the *doctrina christiana* “Christian doctrine.”<sup>6</sup> In this context, one can contemplate his concept of *docta religio*, in which he assumed that Hermes Trismegistos was the first to draw wisdom from the Old Testament prophet and philosopher Moses. This figure played an important role in Ficino's concept from as early as the 1450s and 1460s, when this Renaissance scholar believed that Hermes was the wisest of all Egyptians. This is because Hermes allegedly came to the understanding that God is the highest source of wisdom and a light in which the archetypes of all things (ideas) are involved. It was Hermes who also initiated Plato into his teachings. In the introduction to the *Corpus Hermeticum*, which Ficino had been systematically working on since 1464, he later states that Hermes was the first theologian and expert in divine science. Orpheus, Pythagoras, and Plato had also drawn on his wisdom.

Under the influence, however, of the Byzantine philosopher Georgios Gemisthos Plethon (1360–1452), Ficino changed the series of figures who inspired Plato and placed Zoroaster from

<sup>3</sup> Cf. Walter Andreas Euler, *Pia philosophia et docta religio. Theologie und Religion bei Marsilio Ficino und Giovanni Pico della Mirandola* (München: Fink, 1998), 210–224; Charles B. Schmitt, “Perennial Philosophy: From Agostino Steuco to Leibniz,” *Journal of the History of Ideas* 27 (1966): 505–532.

<sup>4</sup> Kabbalah is Jewish mystical teaching, characterized as the reception of tradition by oral transmission, involving two main parts. The first one is speculative, which is dominated by the doctrine of Sefirot (from *safar* “calculate”), the other is practical Kabbalah with the doctrine of names (Semot). Sefirot as lower worlds are funded and united by Eyn-Sof (Infinity). There are ten Sefirot, represented by the number ten: Keter, Hochmah, Binah, Din, Hesed, Tiferet, Hod, Nezach, Yesod, Malkhut. For more information see Joseph Blau, *The Christian Interpretation of the Cabala in the Renaissance* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1944); Moshe Idel, “The Magical and Neoplatonic Interpretations of the Kabbalah in the Renaissance,” in *Essential Papers in Jewish Culture in Renaissance and Baroque Italy*, ed. David B. Ruderman (New York, London: New York University Press, 1992), 107–169; Moshe Idel, *Kabbalah in Italy 1280–1510* (New Heaven, London: Yale University Press, 2011); François Secret, *I Cabbalisti Cristiani del Rinascimento* (orig. *Les Kabbalistes Chrétiens de la Renaissance* [Milano: Archè 1985]) (Roma: Arkeios, 2001); Gershom Scholem, *Kabbalah* (New York: Penguin Books, 1978).

<sup>5</sup> See Giulio Busi, “Toward a New Evaluation of Pico's Kabbalistic Sources,” *Rinascimento* 48 (2008): 165–183; Saverio Campanini, “I cabbalisti cristiani del Rinascimento,” in *La cultura ebraica*, ed. Patrizia Reinach Sabbadini (Torino: Einaudi, 2000), 149–165; Chaim Wirszubski, *Pico della Mirandola's Encounter with Jewish Mysticism* (Cambridge, Mass., London: Harvard University Press, 1989); Elliot R. Wolfson, “Language, Secrecy, and the Mysteries of Law: Theurgy and the Christian Kabbalah of Johannes Reuchlin,” in *Invoking Angels. Theurgic Ideas and Practices, Thirteenth to Sixteenth Centuries*, ed. Claire Fanger (University of Park: Penn State Press, 2005), 313–330.

<sup>6</sup> James Hankins, *Plato in the Italian Renaissance*, Vol. 1. (Leiden: Brill, 1990), 29–81; Jörg Lauster, “Marsilio Ficino as a Christian thinker: Theological Aspects of His Platonism,” in *Marsilio Ficino, His Theology, His Philosophy, His Legacy*, eds. Michael J. B. Allen and Valery Rees (Leiden, Boston, Köln: Brill, 2001), 45–69.

Ancient Persia in first place instead of Hermes Trismegistos. These ancient theologians also played a major role in Ficino's efforts to defend the immortality of the individual human soul (as is evidenced mainly by his two works, the first of which is *De religione Christiana* [1474] and his later work *Theologia platonica*, whose subtitle is about the immortality of the human soul). It can be consequently deduced that in his concept, Ficino attempted to consolidate the old pagan wisdom with "Christian" philosophy and theology (*docta religio*).<sup>7</sup>

In his own way, Francesco Zorzi also followed up on his concept, and according to the maxim of Renaissance intellectuals, *ad fontes*, he also turned to ancient "authentic" sources.<sup>8</sup> It should be noted that he had Ficino's translation *corpus hermeticum*, which he also used in *De harmonia mundi*, as follows from his statement "Horum primus magnus Trismegistus fuit, qui in tantum Mosi sequutus est disciplinam, ut Moseus a priscis illis sapientibus appellaretur."<sup>9</sup> Zorzi combines, however, these Neoplatonic-Hermetic motifs with Pythagoreanism and Kabbalah – "[...] adeo cum Mose consentit, ut Numenius Pythagoraeus dicat Platonem nil aliud esse, nisi Mosen Attica lingua loquentem."<sup>10</sup> He consequently creates a syncretic philosophy, for which the tendencies to harmonize philosophical and theological aspects into one whole are also characteristic. It is therefore not surprising that he finds other inspirational channels in Giovanni Pico, more specifically in his above-mentioned *Conclusiones* and in *Oratio* (1486), where a similar dictum appears as that in the case of Zorzi.<sup>11</sup> Moreover, the Venetian scholar draws upon the concept of the German humanist J. Reuchlin, which is concretely presented in his greatest work *De arte cabalistica* (1517).<sup>12</sup>

Why was Zorzi so fascinated by esoteric teaching? If in the context of *prisca theologia*, Ficino primarily favoured the ancient Greek sources, which in his opinion are the only sources that could contribute to the revival and development of the Christian doctrine (philosophy and theology), Zorzi, along with Pico and Reuchlin, believed that such a concept should be extended

<sup>7</sup> Marsilio Ficino, *De religione christiana* (Pisa: Lorenzo e Agnolo Fiorentini, 1484), 25: "Prisca theologia in qua Zoroaster, Mercurius, Orpheus, Aglaophemus, Pythagoras consererunt." See *Theologia platonica*, vol. 6, 7: "In rebus his quae ad theologiam pertinent, sex olim summi theologi consenserunt, quorum primus fuisse traditur Zoroaster, Magorum caput, secundum Mercurius Trismegistus, principes sacerdotum Aegyptiorum. Mercurio Pythagoras, Pythagorae Plato, qui universam eorum sapientiam suis litteris comprehendit, audit, illustravit." Cf. Christopher S. Celenza, "Late Antiquity and Florentine Platonism: The 'Post-Plotinian' Ficino," in *Marsilio Ficino*, 87; Michael J. B. Allen, *Synoptic Art. Marsilio Ficino on the History of Platonic Interpretation* (Firenze: Olschki, 1998), 31–99.

<sup>8</sup> See Cesare Vasoli, "Marsilio Ficino e Giorgio Veneto," in *Marsilio e il ritorno di Platone: studi e documenti*, ed. Gian Carlo Garfagnini (Firenze: Olschki, 1986), 533–554.

<sup>9</sup> Zorzi, *De harmonia mundi* I, 1, 28.

<sup>10</sup> *Ibid.*, 30.

<sup>11</sup> Giovanni Pico della Mirandola, *O důstojnosti člověka*, trans. David Sanetrník (Praha: Oikoymenh, 2005), 112: "In his vero quae spectant ad philosophiam, Pythagoram prorsus audias et Platonem, quorum decreta ita sunt fidei Christianae affinia, ut Augustinus noster immensas Deo gratias agat quod ad eius manus pervenerint libri Platoniorum." Compare it with Reuchlin's opinion: Johannes Reuchlin, "De arte cabalistica," in Pico della Mirandola, Giovanni-Pico della Mirandola, Giovanni Francesco, *Opera omnia* (Basileae [reprint Hildesheim]: Olms, 1969), 835:

[...] et mox in ipsa prora sentimus Cabalam aliud nihil esse, nisi, ut Pythagorice loquar, symbolicam theologiam, in qua non modo literae ac nomina sunt rerum signa, verum res etiam rerum. Quo animadvertimus Pythagorae philosophiam fere omnem esse a Cabaleis ortam, qui pari modo symbolicum tradendi morem ad Graecos transtulit [...] praeter admodum pauca quae annis superioribus Ioannes Picus Mirandulae Comes, et Paulus Ricius quondam noster ediderunt, etiam usque ad hodiernum latinis nos satis intellecta.

For more information see Christiane L. Joost-Gaugier, *Pythagoras and Renaissance Europe: Finding Heaven* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2009), 42–45 and 122–127.

<sup>12</sup> See Saverio Campanini, "Le fonti ebraiche del *De Harmonia mundi* di Francesco Zorzi," *Annali di Ca'Foscari: Rivista della Facoltà di Lingue e Letterature straniere dell'Università di Ca'Foscari* 38, 3 (1999): 47.

to include the Jewish sources as well, because it was Moses who was the first to draw on the unknown sources of ancient wisdom (*prisca sapientia*). Even before, however, *haec sapientia* became known among Hermes Trismegistos, the Persian prophet Zoroaster, Egyptian priests, and the Greek philosophers (Plato, Pythagoras, Orpheus, and Plotinos), Moses entrusted it to seventy chosen Jewish sages, to whom he passed it on orally. In fact, in addition to its written version, these experts in God's law could transfer hidden mysteries (*occulta scientia cabalae*) in continuous sequence, which were not put into the form of Kabbalah books until the days of Ezra. With this act, they were to be made available to other interested people (e.g., Christian intellectuals). This is a mere fabulation, however, of Clement of Alexandria, Eusebius of Caesarea, and Origen that was to serve Zorzi, and after all his predecessors before him, as a means to penetrate into these inaccessible Jewish sacred mysteries.<sup>13</sup>

It can be argued that Zorzi's project emphasizes an apologetic aspect that is also clearly directed against the Jewish doctrine. The Venetian scholar thus relies on his predecessors (Pico and Reuchlin) when he offers a distinction between the two schools involving different levels of knowledge, namely the Talmudic and Kabbalistic schools. Zorzi draws here on the assumption recorded in the *Sefer Yetzirah* that God created the world according to his thirty-two paths of wisdom. The first one corresponds to the twenty-two letters of the Hebrew alphabet; the second powerful instrument is the ten sephirot. The Venetian scholar regards them more as Neoplatonic ideas.<sup>14</sup> In reality, God created two worlds: the work of the Creation (*ma'aseh bereshit*) and the work of the Chariot (*ma'aseh merkabah*). The first one is comparable to *olam ha-zet* and involves a knowledge of nature. This means that God made the world *ex nihilo*. The work of the Chariot is comparable to *olam ha-ba* and signifies the higher intellectual world.<sup>15</sup> The work of the Creation, in contrast, represents the lower (physical) world. Based on this, the Venetian scholar comes to the conclusion that the Talmudists (Jews) belong to the physical world, while the cabbalists (Christians) already belong to the intellectual world.<sup>16</sup>

<sup>13</sup> Zorzi, *De harmia mundi III*, 8, 5, 1. Compare with Pico's "Apologia" in Giovanni Pico della Mirandola, "Apologia (Ioannis Pico Mirandulae de Magia naturali et Cabala disputatio)," in Pico della Mirandola, Giovanni-Pico della Mirandola, Giovanni Francesco, *Opera omnia* (Basileae [reprint Hildesheim]: Olms, 1969), 180:

Cum volunt approbare quod dicunt, Eusebius maxime, Origenes et Clemens, et quamplures alii, ad Hebraeos se semper referunt [...] Talmuticos allegari ab antiquis doctoribus nostris non est credendum, tum quia Clemens et multi alii qui Hebraeos allegant fuerint ante compositionem ipsius Talmut, quae fuit post Christi mortem plus quam per CL annos, tum quia doctrina Talmutica est totaliter contra nos conflictata ab ipsis Hebraeis iam contra Christianos pugnantibus; quare illi doctrine talem honorem non detulissent nostri, ut tunc maxime aliquid dictum ab eis firmum putarent, cum Iudeorum testimonio corroboratur. Philosophos pariter certum est non allegare, quia et isti, qui scilicet secundum philosophiam exponere ceperunt Bibliam, ceperunt a modico tempore. Primus enim fuit rabi Moyses de Egypto, quo adhuc vivente floruit Averrois Cordubensis [...] Relinquit ergo ut hec Hebraeorum doctrina cui doctores catholici ex Hieronymi testimonio tantum deferunt et quam adeo aprobant.

<sup>14</sup> Zorzi, *De harmonia mundi I*, 5, 17:

Et quia omnia emanant, et incrementa suscipiunt a supramundanis fontibus, ab ipsisque semper dependent, voluerunt etiam per accentus suprapositos literis illis designare fontes, canales, et influxus illos a denis numinibus, vel fontibus procedentes. Qui denarius numerus, si iungatur cum illis vigintiduobus, trigintaduo constituit. Hinc Abraham docens de mundi genitura, atque de concinna formatione, et compositione ipsius inquit: In trigintaduobus semitis sapientiae Deus benedictus suum mundum creavit, quamvis hoc dictum interpretari possimus de trigintaduobus gradibus intellectualibus.

<sup>15</sup> See Gershom Scholem, *Il Nome di Dio e la teoria cabbalistica del linguaggio*, trans. Adriano Fabris (Milano: Adelphi, 1998), 29–35.

<sup>16</sup> Zorzi, *De harmonia mundi I*, 2, 7:

Plurimi succentores in his cantionibus Hebraei fuere, et hi geminum apprehenderunt iter. Alii declarantes, et exponentes scripturam, et legem, quatenus ad hunc mundum sensibilem, et inferiorem, et activam vitam attinet, Talmudistae dicti sunt [...] Cabalistsae autem, qui a vero oraculo acceperunt (nam cabala ore receptio dicitur)

In Zorzi's argumentation strategy, there is a similar statement that had also been used by Pico and Reuchlin when they view the Kabbalistic school more favourably. In confrontation with the opinions of Jewish scholars, he believed that the Kabbalistic doctrine is completely consistent with the fundamental elements of the Christian faith (for example, the Incarnation and teaching about the Holy Trinity). The Jews (*vetus Israel*) had interpreted, however, all the facts in a literal sense only (*littera*), while Christian scholars (*verus Israel*) should already be able to see its more truthful, and therefore, deeper interpretation. For this reason, Zorzi makes a distinction between Moses' *lex mortis*,<sup>17</sup> and its revitalized spiritual sense (*spiritus vivificans*) which can be reached with the highest anagogical (i.e., Kabbalistic) method.<sup>18</sup>

## The True God's Name

What purpose is such an exegesis supposed to serve? Zorzi believes that it has two functions. First, it helps the adept to penetrate even deeper into the book of the law (*liber legis*). It plays an important role in revealing all the laws of nature (*liber naturae*), and in the final stage, scholars are able to attain the highest knowledge, i.e., the name of God (*nomen ineffabile*). There is a need to find the right interpretive key. The Venetian scholar is convinced that it can be nothing other than the Hebrew language (*sacra hebraica*) which can unlock these two encoded books with its wholeness and integrity in an allegorical way: "Tum quia est mysteriosissima lingua in figuris, punctis, accentibus, et numeris per illas litteras importatis adeo ut secretiores theologi ex revolutione litterarum omnia promittant explicare."<sup>19</sup>

---

vel ab edoctis ab huiusmodi didicerunt, secretiora legis sensa prosequentes, de multis qui scripserunt, ii sunt, primus Hanoc, de quo meminit Thadaeus in epistola, et Origenes in Periarchon [...]

Compare with Reuchlin, "De arte cabalistica," 762:

Quod opus de Beresith est sapientia naturae, et opus de Mercava est sapientia divinitatis [...] Estque Tal-  
mudistarum et Cabalistarum ea in re unanimes arbitratum, quod duo sint mundi. Primus intellectualis [...] id  
est mundus ille venturus scilicet quo ad nos. Et secundus sensibilis [...] id est, mundus iste praesens, quo ex verbis  
sapientum nostrorum recepimus [...] Iccirco dividuntur Thalmudici et Cabalistsae secedentes in duas facultates,  
tametsi ex creditis receptionibus. Ambe similiter oriuntur et emanant [...] Sed hac distinguuntur deputationis  
ordinatione, quod omne studium, omne operam, omne consilium, laborem et diligentiam, universam quoque  
mentis suae intentionem Cabalista felix, ille et beatus a mundo sensibili finaliter ad mundum intellectualem  
transfert et traducit. Thalmudista vero in mundo sensibili permanet, ac animam universi huius mundi non tran-  
scendit, quod si quandoque licenter ad Deum, et beatos spiritus pergat, non tamen Deum ipsum immanentem  
et absolutum accedit.

Giovanni Pico della Mirandola, "Apologia," 180:

Anagogicus dicitur Cabala, et hoc quia illa expositio quae dicitur ore Dei tradita Moysi, et accepta per succes-  
sionem, modo predicto, quali semper sensum sequitur Anagogicum, qui etiam inter omnes est sublimior et  
divinior, sursum nos ducens a terrenis ad coelestia, a sensibilibus ad intelligibilia, a temporalibus ad aeterna,  
ab infimis ad suprema, ab humanis ad divina, a corporalibus ad spiritualia, et hinc est quod valdissima inde  
argumenta habentur contra Iudaeos, quia discordia quae est inter eos et nos, ut maxime patet ex epistolis Pauli,  
hinc tota praecipue dependet, quod ipsi sequuntur literam occidentem, nos autem spiritum vivificantem [...]

See Saverio Campanini, "Annotazioni sulla qabbalah cristiana e la nascita della giudaismo visto dai cristiani," in *Chiesa e sinagoga. Il giudaismo visto dai Cristiani*, ed. Frank E. Manuel (Genova: Ecig, 1998), 7–29.

<sup>17</sup> Zorzi, *De harmonia mundi III*, 2, 11: "Legem mortis vocabat legem scriptam, quae expiabat hominem ani-  
malem, et mori-/turum, sed lex Christi, immo ipse Christus sanctificat hominem spiritualem, semper victurum."

<sup>18</sup> rancesco Zorzi, Yah. MS Var. 24, fol. 48, in Chaim Wirszubski, "Francesco Giorgio's Commentary on Giovanni  
Pico's Kabbalistic Theses," *Journal of the Warburg and Courtauld Institutes* 37 (1974): 146: "Ita a simili Cabala,  
quando docet sensum literalem dicitur philosophia naturalis; quando docet sensum moralem historiae, dicitur  
moralis; quando vero applicat historiam ad Deum dicitur divina philosophia, seu sensus anagogicus."

<sup>19</sup> Zorzi, *De harmonia mundi III*, 8, 11.

Zorzi now relies on several sources. First, he invokes Reuchlin's contemplation that the holy names of Hebrews are more sacred and have great power, because they are the first formed by God. He then also turns to Avraham Abulafia (1240–1292), a representative of the Spanish ecstatic branch of Kabbalah of the 13th century, in whose concept there is a similar division of the schools, i.e., into Talmudic and Kabbalistic, of which the last is considered the highest form of wisdom.<sup>20</sup> Zorzi also appreciates Abulafia's *ars combinandi*, which means that "it contains the revolving of law or the sphere of the law (*revolutionem legis seu sphaeram legis*)."<sup>21</sup> Abulafia further explains his art leading us to reach the knowledge of the prophecy and to perceive the Divine Names, if we use the seventh exegetic method in his epistle *Sheva 'Netivot ha-Torah*:

[...] which includes all the other methods. It is the holiest of the holy, appropriate only for the prophets. It is the sphere that encompasses every thing, and with the apprehension of it, the speech (*dibbur*) that issues from agency of the Active Intellect by the power of speech will be perceived. For it is effluence that issues from the Blessed Name through the meditation of the Active Intellect upon the power of speech, as the Master (i.e., Maimonides) stated in the *Guide of the Perplexed* II, 36.<sup>21</sup>

The Venetian scholar therefore identifies his *ars* as *philosophia catholica* that is comparable to metaphysics: "[...] dicit ergo Doctor iste quod doctrina revolutionis Alphabeticae corespondet philosophiae catholicae id est universali hoc est Methaphysicae pertractat de quidditatibus rerum, ita revolutio alphabetaria ut dixi."<sup>22</sup>

The purpose of Abulafia's method was to discover the secret holy name of God (*nomen ineffabile*). This was at least the vision of the Sicilian scholar Flavius Mithridates (1450–1490?), who not only initiated his disciple Pico into the Hebrew language, but also mediated to him translations of medieval Hebrew mystical texts that later circulated in Italy.<sup>23</sup> These translations were also known to Zorzi, who also mentions Abulafia's name in his work *De harmonia mundi* in a list of medieval Kabbalistic authorities.<sup>24</sup> But can we deduce from this that the Venetian scholar, just like Pico, used the technique of an ecstatic kabbalist to prove the fundamental Christian dogma – the teaching of the Holy Trinity?

<sup>20</sup> Avraham Abulafia, *Summa Brevis Cabale Que Intitulatur Rabi Ieude*, f. 122v, in Wirszubski, *Pico della Mirandola's*, 134:

Dico igitur nunc quod hec sapientia cabale occulta quidem est a multitudine doctorum nostrorum qui exercentur in sapientia alia nostra que dicitur Talmud. Et dividitur quidem in duas partes, in universali que sunt scientia nominis dei tetragrammaton per modum decem numerationum que vocantur plante inter quasi qui separat dicitur trancare plantas, et hi sunt qui revelant secretum unitatis. Secunda pars est scientia magni nominis per viam viginti harum licterarum a quibus et ab earum punctis et ab earum accentibus composita sunt nomina et characteres seu sigilla que nomina invocata sunq que locuntur cum prophetis, insomniis et per hurim et tummim, et per spiritum sanctum et per prophetias.

<sup>21</sup> Avraham Abulafia, *Sheva Netivot Ha-Torah/The Seven Paths of Torah*, ed. Fabrizio Lanza (Montefalcone: Providence University Press, 2006), 8.

<sup>22</sup> Francesco Zorzi, Yah. MS Var. 24, fol. 48, in Wirszubski, "Francesco Giorgio's Commentary," 147.

<sup>23</sup> For more information see Giacomo Corrazol, "L'influsso di Mitridate sulla concezione pichiana di cabala," in *Flavio Mitridate mediatore fra culture nel contesto dell'ebraismo siciliano del XV secolo*, eds. Mauro Perani and Giacomo Corazzol (Palermo: Officina di Studi Medievali, 2012), 149–200; Fabrizio Lelli, "Pico tra filosofia ebraica e 'qabbala,'" in *Pico, Poliziano e l'Umanesimo di fine Quattrocento*, ed. Paolo Viti (Firenze: Olschki, 1994), 198–203; François Secret, "Nouvelle precisions sur Flavius Mithridates maitre de Pic de la Mirandole et traducteur de commentaires de kabbale," in *L'opera e il pensiero di Giovanni Pico nella storia dell'Umanesimo*, Vol. 2. (Firenze: Istituto nazionale di Studi sul Rinascimento, 1965), 169–187; Shlomo Simonsohn, "Guglielmo Raimondo Moncada: Un converso alla convergenza di tre culture: ebraica, cristiana e islamica," in *Guglielmo Raimondo Moncada alias Flavio Mitridate. Un ebreo converso siciliano*, ed. Mauro Perani (Palermo: Officina di Studi Medievali, 2008), 23–31.

<sup>24</sup> Zorzi, *De harmonia mundi* 1, 2, 7.

Let us begin by saying that there is a passage in *De harmonia mundi* in which Zorzi reflects on a holy name (*nomen ineffabile*) whose power is fully manifested in a combination of four Hebrew letters, YHWH. The letter *yod* (י) has a numerical value of ten, the next letter *he* (ה) represents the number five, and the letter *vav* (ו) represents the number six. The letters *yod* and *he* form and close the divine name YHWH, as follows from the commentary on *Sefer Yetzirah*: “Et hic mundus creatus est cum litera he, que est quinarium, et iam indicavimus secretum denarii ideo indicatur nunc secretum quinarium quia cum denario et quinario dominus formavit secula.”<sup>25</sup> Zorzi believes that this name is no longer hidden but is revealed in all its beauty in the figure of Jesus of Nazareth in the form of three Hebrew letters: *yod* (י), *shin* (ש), and *vav* (ו), which correspond to the name of Jesus (ישו) and which have a nominal value of three hundred and sixteen (10 + 300 + 6).<sup>26</sup> The Venetian scholar applies here the Abulafian technique of gematria,<sup>27</sup> which is mediated to him not only by Flavius Mithridates in the form of his christological interpolations, but also by Felice del Prato in his Latin translations.<sup>28</sup> Zorzi also combines this art with Pythagoreanism (tetractys corresponding to the Hebrew letter *yod*: 1 + 2 + 3 + 4 = 10) and with Reuchlin's contemplation about the meaning of the letter *shin* in Jesus' (alias the Messiah's) name.<sup>29</sup> The Venetian scholar was not entirely satisfied, however, with the Hebrew version of YHSWH (יהשוה) provided by the German humanist. He therefore tried to improve it with the above-mentioned version IESU.<sup>30</sup>

Jesus is also called the Tree of Life (*arbor vite*) and the generous life giver (*ego sum vita*) whose power was already manifested at the beginning of the creation of the world (*in principio*), which he, as wisdom, created together with his father (*dominus formavit secula*). Zorzi turns therefore to Pico's thesis, in which the letter beth, representing wisdom, plays an important role:

<sup>25</sup> *Comentum Sepher Iesire*, Cod. Vat. Ebr. 191, fol. 23r, in Wirszubski, *Pico della Mirandola's*, 36. Compare with Menahem Recanati, *Commentary on the Daily Prayers. Flavius Mithridates' Latin Translation, the Hebrew Text, and an English Version*, ed. and trans. Giacomo Corazzol (Torino: Nino Aragno, 2008), 249: “Et hoc est indicium eius quod dixerunt sapientes nostri, quod hoc seculum creatum est cum littera he, seculum vero venturum creatum est cum littera iod. Verum tamen <n> expositio huius rei est quod leticia tiphareth, que est hassamaim, idest celi, cum iod he est, quod indicat diadema.”

<sup>26</sup> Francesco Zorzi, *Problemata* IV 45, S. 210<sup>v</sup>:

Nonne prima ipsius nominis littera est י Jod, quae decem praestat: et denarium illum celeberrimum innuit, quae est finis omnium numerorum: Et cui debent decimae tanquam causae finali et beatificanti? Ultima vero littera est ו Vau: Quae se reddit, numerorum quidem perfectum: quo (ut Augu. disseruit) creatus est mundus: et quae arborem vitae significant: illam videlicet arborem, de qua scriptum est. Ego sum vita. Media autem littera est ש sin: quae tercentum praestat. Et haec innuit remunerationem, quae fit per centenarium ter complicatum: tres divinitatis personae innuens: quae fit per centenarium ter complicatum: tres divinitatis personae innuens: quarum visio est merces nostra.

<sup>27</sup> Gematria – one of the kabalistic mystical techniques (*notarikon*, *themurah*), where the letters of the Hebrew alphabet are represented as numbers: “the sum of the numerical equivalents of the letters of two or more words was the same, the words might be considered identical and used interchangeably.” See Blau, *The Christian Interpretation of the Cabala*, 8–9.

<sup>28</sup> See François Secret, “Aegidiana Hebraice,” *Revue des études juives* 121 (1962): 409–416.

<sup>29</sup> Johannes Reuchlin, “De arte cabalistica,” 752 and 892.

<sup>30</sup> Zorzi, *De harmonia mundi* II, 6, 8:

Nec apponendum est secundum sin dicendo JESUS quamvis Latine dicatur, sic exquirente ordine declinationis grammaticalis, de quo non multum curandum est quia mysteria non sunt in idiomate Latino, sed Hebraeo, ubi attendendum est, ne aliquid addatur, vel miniatur, quia multa destruerentur mysteria, quae tam in significatis literarum illius nominis, quam in numeris earum, et etiam in vaticiniis correspondentibus continentur, ex quibus aliqua vel pauca percurreremus. Habent pro constanti secretiores theologi, quod oracula multoties continent nomina illorum, de quibus prophetatur, in principio, fine, vel medio dictionum, secundum quem modum nomen Messiaeh saepius reperitur, ut in versiculo psalmi septuagesimi primi: Ante solem permanet nomen eius, et beneficentur in ipso omnes tribus terrae. Nomen enim ישו Jesu continentur in capitibus horum verborum [...]

“Ex precedenti conclusione potest contemplativus homo intelligere, cur lex Dei a Beth incipit, de qua scribitur, quod est immaculata, quod erat cum eo cuncta componens, quod est convertens animas, quod facit dare fructum in tempore suo.”<sup>31</sup> The Venetian scholar agrees here with Pico’s trinitarian interpretation. It is understood that by combining the first letter in the law beth with the letter aleph (*cum prima littera*), the name of the father (EHIEH – *unio*) is formed, the name of the son (YHWH – *processio*) is formed with the letter nun (*cum media*), and with the last letter (*cum ultimis*), the word shabbat (*reversio et beatifica reunio*).<sup>32</sup> He alters his thesis, however, to fit his own conception, when he argues that beth also represents the house of all divine ideas and the wisdom of the father. Zorzi also returns to the same subject in *De harmonia mundi*, where the “house” again represents higher wisdom (*superior sapientia*): “Quia Bet significat domum, et indicat sapientiam superiorem: in qua omnia collacata erant prius, quae in proprias formas educerentur et per ipsam producta sunt omnia iuxta illud Psalmographi: omnia sapientia fecisti.” This wisdom corresponds to the sephiroth *Hokhmah*, and on the symbolic plane, represents the second Person of God – the Son.<sup>33</sup>

This name of Jesus is extremely powerful. It can even be said that it holds a magical power within it. According to Zorzi, it is thus not surprising that every knee must kneel in heaven, on earth, and in hell when his name is uttered, as follows from his *Problemata*: “Quod nomen aut numen invocari debet? Nonne illud nomen, quod teste Paulo (Phil. 2, 10) est super omne nomen et cui flectitur omne genu coelestium, terrestrium, et inferiorum? Quod nomen acquisivit sibi Christus virtute Crucis: ut ipse Paulus testatur.”<sup>34</sup> Here, the motif of St. Paul is merged with this thesis of Pico:

Ex praecedenti conclusione intelligi potest cur dixerit Paulus datum esse Iesu nomen quod est super omne nomen, et cur in nomine Iesu dictum sit: Omne genua flecti caelestium, terrestrium, et infernorum, quod etiam est maxime cabalisticum, et potest ex se intelligere, qui est profundus in cabala.<sup>35</sup>

The power of God’s word is also supposed to be substantiated by the term “AMEN,” as it confirms with definitive validity that the Father’s wisdom really became the body (*incarnatio verbi*) and dwells among us. On this occasion, Zorzi uses gematria to determine the numerical value of AMEN – the principle of everything (it is composed of two parts: YHWH – the Son: 26 and ADONAI – the Holy Spirit: 65 = 91).<sup>36</sup>

<sup>31</sup> Giovanni Pico della Mirandola, “Conclusiones (Ioannis Pici Mirandulae, V C. Conclusiones DCCCC. quas olim Romae disputandas exhibuit),” in Pico della Mirandola, Giovanni-Pico della Mirandola, Giovanni Francesco, *Opera omnia* (Basileae [reprint Hildesheim]: Olms, 1969), conclusio 60, 112. See *The Book of Bair. Flavius Mithridates’ Latin Translation, the Hebrew Text, and an English Version*, ed. and trans. Saverio Campanini (Torino: Nino Aragno, 2005), 3–7: “Quare incipit cum litera beth? Velut qui incipit benedictionem et unde habetur quod lex vocetur benedictio? Ex eo quod scribitur et plenum est benedictione domini mare. Mare quidem non est nisi lex ut scribitur et latior est quam mare.”

<sup>32</sup> Francesco Zorzi, Yah. MSVar. 24, fol. 120<sup>v</sup>, in Wirszubski, “Francesco Giorgio’s Commentary,” 147: Nota quod haec littera ׁ (ut saepius diximus) est sigillum filii, littera ׂ aleph patris, ׃ he vero Spiritus Sancti quod autem sit vero Spiritus Sancti quod autem sit verum probat Elchana vir apud Hebraeos celeberrimus dicens quod bet et bait idem sunt et ambo significant domum et ipsum ׁ bet est sigillum ipsius filii qui est domus omnium idearum quae sunt in divinis [...]

<sup>33</sup> Zorzi, *De harmonia mundi* II, 4, 4.

<sup>34</sup> Zorzi, *Problemata* VI 302, S. 388v.

<sup>35</sup> Steve A. Farmer, *Syncretism in the West: Pico’s 900 Theses (1486). The Evolution of Traditional Religious and Philosophical Systems* (Tempe: Medieval and Renaissance Texts and Studies, 1998 [2008<sup>2</sup>]), 8/522. Compare with Phil 2: 9–10.

<sup>36</sup> Zorzi, *Problemata*, VI, 305, S. 389: “Si vero altius conscendere voluerimus, et secretiores Theologos consulere libuerit: nonne idem importat Amen, quod coniunctio duorum principiorum et fontium, a quibus omnia

Although Jesus' name holds great power within it, the Jews did not honour him or have any reverence for him, and they eventually had Jesus killed. Now Zorzi helps himself with Greek sources, identifying the Son of God with the Greek god Pan (*quod totum significat*).<sup>37</sup> Such a motif is nothing new. It can be found, for example, in Eusebius of Caesarea or Isidore of Seville. Nevertheless, it is also captured by Renaissance authors.<sup>38</sup> According to Campani, Zorzi draws his inspiration from Ficino (*De religione christiana*) and characterizes it as *sphaera intelligibilis*, which is the beginning and the end of all things.<sup>39</sup> Apart from Ficino's "hermetic" dictum, the same motif appears in Mithridates' *Sermo de passione Domini*. This means that Pan, i.e., God/God's Son, which is all-encompassing, dies.<sup>40</sup> It is thus not surprising that this model is later placed

---

diffiunduntur in nobis? Quorum unius nomen est יהוה alterius אדני. Quarum literarum numerus utriusque nominis importat nonagintaunum quod praecise reddit אָמָן."

<sup>37</sup> Zorzi, *De harmonia mundi* I, 1, 5:

Sed quem poetae Pan id est totum, omniaque continentem dicebant, philosophi causam primam et omnium causarum principium vocavere dans omnibus causis, ut influant, quia quicquid agit causa secunda, agit in virtute primae magis influentis quam secunda, inquit Proclus [...] Et cum nihil sit extra sphaeram mundi, sic nihil extra divinum ambitum, qui omnia complectitur, cui est illud inexplicabile nomen, ubi literae omnes numeros circulares continent, decem videlicet, quinque, et sex, attestantes singulae verissimam esse sphaeram, quod nominant, omnia ambitu suo continentem. Quarum etiam literarum significata idem inuunt [...] Quod unum, et antiquissimum nemo ambigit Deum esse, qui antequam peculiarem unitatem rebus inferioribus communicaret, in primum numerum se diffudit. Et hinc in denarium (si Hebraeorum theologiam admittimus) tamquam in decem ideas, et mensuras omnium numerorum et rerum omnium faciendarum [...]

See Gustav Adolf Gerhard, "Zum Tod des grossen Pan," *Wiener Studien* 27 (1915): 323–352; Moshe Idel, *Ben: Sonship and Jewish Mysticism* (London, New York, Jerusalem: Continuum Shalom Hartmann Institute, 2007), 507–509.

<sup>38</sup> Isidorus Hispalensis, "Etymologiae," in *Patrologia Latina* 82, ed. Jacques-Paul Migne (Paris, 1850), 8, 11:

Pan dicunt Graeci, Latini Silvanum, deum rusticorum, quem in naturae similitudinem formaverunt; unde et Pan dictus est, id est omne. Fingunt enim eum ex universali elementorum specie. Habet enim cornua in similitudine radorum solis et lunae. Distinctam maculis habet pellem, propter caeli sidera. Rubet eius facies ad similitudinem aetheris. Fistulam septem discrimina vocum, propter harmoniam caeli, in qua septem sunt soni et septem discrimina vocum. Villosus est, quia tellus convestita est /agituentibus/. Pars eius inferior foeda est, propter arbores et feras ut pecudes. Caprinas ungulas habet, ut soliditatem terrae ostendat, quem volunt rerum et totius naturae deum; unde Pan quasi omnia dicunt.

Eusebius, *Praeparatio Evangelica*, ed. Thomas Gaisford (Oxford: Oxonii et typographeo academico, 1843), 3,11,43: "Universi symbolum Pana esse affirmant, cui cornua dederunt propter solem et luna, variam Pantherae pellem propter varietatem caelestium;" Boccaccio, *Genealogiae Deorum Gentilium Libri*, ed. Vincenzo Romano (Bari: G. Laterza, 1951), 1, 4:

Alii vero sensere aliter: solem scilicet per hanc imaginem designari, quem rerum patrem dominumque credidere. Quos inter fuit Macrobius. Et sic eius cornua volunt lunae renascenti indicium, per purpuream aeris mane seroque rubescentis aspectum, per prolixam barbam ipsius solis in terram usque radios descendentes. Per maculosam pellem caeli ornatum a solis luce derivantem. Per baculum seu virgam rerum potentiam atque moderamen. Per fistulam caeli armoniam a motu solis cognitam prout supra. [...] eumque dixere Pana a pan, quod totum latine sonat.

<sup>39</sup> Zorzi, *Problemata* f. 322v, 5,3, 296:

Cur Deus ab Hermete dicitur sphaera intelligibilis cuius centrum est ubique, circumferentia vero nusquam? Nonne quia ipse Deus vera sphaera est, in ipsum terminans a quo et principium habet? Nam ipse est principium et finis omnium. Hinc omnia creata quae Dei vestigium gerunt, ad rotunditatem tendunt, ut de coelis, terra caeterisque elementis manifeste patet. Et hoc idem est de aliis. Quamvis id non ita clare appareat. Centrum autem sphaerae huius, quod est tota haec mundana machina, est ubique, quia omnem locum occupat, cum ultra mundum non sit locus. Circumferentia vero, quae est ipse Deus omnia ambiens, nusquam est, quia a loco non capitur, sed ipse omnia capit.

Compare with Marsilio Ficino, *Opera* (Basilea, 1576), 1309. See Saverio Campanini, "Saggio introduttivo," in Zorzi, *De harmonia mundi*, LXIV. Compare with Reuchlin's "De arte cabalistica," 52v–53r.

<sup>40</sup> Flavius Mithridates, *Sermo de passione domini*, ed. and trans. Chaim Wirszubski (Jerusalem: The Israel Academy of Sciences and Humanities, 1963), 125–126:

into Pico's,<sup>41</sup> and even Zorzi's, concept. Pan is considered here as a boy (*puer*),<sup>42</sup> perceived to be the Son of God, entering human history again as the wisdom of the father. He uses his power as the incorporated word to overcome death and lead man out of the darkness of evil (*peccatum originale*) to the new eternal life (*felicitas supernaturalis*). This word enables the purified sage to unite with God (Jesus) for eternity through *mors osculi*.<sup>43</sup>

In conclusion, it can be said that Zorzi combines both the tradition of so-called *prisca theologia* represented by Ficino and the tradition dominated by Kabbalistic motifs. He thus creates a syncretic philosophy (*philosophia catholica*) which has many common features with Pico's and Reuchlin's concept of the Christian Kabbalah. In this context, we can underline his efforts to harmonize Greek philosophy and religion (mostly the Neoplatonic-Pythagorean provenience) with Jewish philosophy and Mysticism. In Zorzi's model, there is also apparent an apologetic aspect characteristic of the Christian milieu of the 15th to 16th centuries which is emphasized by his desire to prove fundamental Catholic dogma with the use of so-called "authentic" Jewish sources.

Jan Herúfek  
Department of Philosophy  
Faculty of Arts  
University of Ostrava  
Realni 5  
701 03 Ostrava  
e-mail: jan.herufek@osu.cz

---

Tunc iussus est cum ad paludem veniret nunciaret Magnum Pana interiisse. cum ventum est ad locum Thamnus magna voce in clamavit, interijt Pan. statim ululatus et gemitus auditus est. hec etiam relata Tyberio Cesari fidem habuere, cuius iussu perquisitus quisnam esset iste Pan, responsum est eum fuisse qui fuit filius Mercuij ex Penelope. Pan igitur deus qui omnia quae sunt in mundo comprehendit: unde nomen habet [...]

Plato, "Cratyl," 408 b–d. in Plato, *Platonis Opera*, ed. John Burnet (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1903).

<sup>41</sup> Giovanni Pico della Mirandola, *Conclusiones*, conclusio 44, 83: "Cum anima comprehenderit quidquid poterit comprehendere et coniungetur animae superiori, expoliabit indumentum terrenum a se, et exstirpatur de loco suo, et coniungetur cum divinitate." See also Giovanni Pico della Mirandola, *De hominis dignitate, Heptaplus, De ente et uno e scriptis vari*, ed. Eugenio Garin (Firenze: Vallecchi, 1942), 332–334:

Vera autem et consummata felicitas ad Dei faciem contuendam, quae est omne bonnum ut ipse dixit, et ad perfectam cum eo principio a quo emanavimus unionem nos revehit ad adducit. Ad hanc angeli atolli quidem possunt, sed non possunt ascendere. Quare peccavit Lucifer dicens: Ascendam in caelum. Ad hanc ire homo non potest, trahi potest; unde Christus de se, qui est ipsa felicitas.

<sup>42</sup> Giovanni Pico della Mirandola, *Conclusiones*, conclusio 13, 104: "Per puerum apud interpretes nihil aliud intelligibile quam intellectum," and 28, 107: "Frustra adit naturam et Protheum, qui Pana non attraxerit."

<sup>43</sup> *Mors osculi see (Song of Songs 1:2)*. "Another Interpretation:" "Let him kiss with the kisses of his mouth." Compare with the *Zohar*:

What did King Salomon mean by introducing words of love between the upper world (*sefira Tiferet*) and the lower world (*sefira Malkut*), and by beginning the praise of love, which he has introduced between them, with "let him kiss me?" They have already given an explanation for this, and it is that inseparable love of spirit for spirit can be [expressed] only by a kiss, and a kiss is with the mouth, for that is the source and outlet of the spirit. And when they kiss one another, the spirits cling to each other, and they are one, and then love is one.

*The Wisdom of the Zohar*, Vol. I., ed. Isaiah Tishby and trans. David Goldstein (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1989), 364–365. See Zorzi, *De harmonia mundi* 1, 5, 15; 1, 7, 24; 3, 7, 18. See also *Problemata* 1, 6, 372: "Quam mortem Propheta vocat sanctorum mortem et preciosam in conspectu Domini. Hebraei vero vocant ipsam osculi mortem. Et haec mors est excessus aut raptus quidam mentis, per separationem animae a corpore non autem corporis ab anima." Compare with Pico's thesis: Giovanni Pico della Mirandola, *Conclusiones*, conclusio 11, 108–109: "Modus quo rationales animae per archangelum deo sacrificantur, qui a Cabalistic non exprimitur, non est nisi per separationem animi a corpore, non corporis ab anima nisi per accidens, ut contingit in morte osculi, de quo scribitur: praeciosa in conspectu domini mors sanctorum eius."

## Elisa Cuttini

FISPPA Department, University of Padua, Italy

Liceo Guarino Veronese, San Bonifacio, Verona, Italy

# The Concept of “Ordo” in the Thought of Philip Melanchthon and the German Jurists of his Time: Christoph Hegendorf, Johann Oldendorp and Jakob Spiegel

**Abstract** | Melanchthon referred to the concept of *ordo* regarding both the natural order of the world and the moral order infused in each person, which enables one to distinguish good from evil. The insistence on the presence of natural law in the mind of man and on the possibility of it being rationally understood links Melanchthon to the tradition represented by Cicero and Thomas Aquinas, despite the fact that intellectuals of the Reformation refused to accept Scholastics. Melanchthon is also in tune with some of the most influential Protestant and Catholic German jurists, who revitalised the reflection on natural law and its relationship with the moral and positive law. Melanchthon believed that the natural order and the moral order had a common origin in the mind of God, thus they are connected to one other in a superior harmony, within which man retains the freedom to choose whether to respect it or not.

**Keywords** | *Ius gentium* – Civil law – Moral order – Natural law – *Ordo* – Positive law

.....

Melanchthon viewed Nature as a magnificent theatre<sup>1</sup> where the heavenly bodies and their movements as well as all the various beings exist and are held, not in a purely random fashion, but rather contained within a complex order established by the architectural mind of God.<sup>2</sup> It is

---

<sup>1</sup> Philip Melanchthon, *Oratio de vita Avicennae*, in *Opera quae supersunt omnia*, ed. C. G. Bretschneider, [dal vol. 16: post Bretschneider, ed. H. E. Bindseil], 28 vol., *Corpus Reformatorum* I–XXVIII (New York: Johnson Reprint Corporation, 1963). Reprint: edition Halis Saxonum 1834–1860. [Hereafter, this edition will be referred to by the abbreviation CR followed by a Roman numeral indicating the volume and a number which refers to the column.] CR XI, 826: “Universa haec rerum natura *mirandum theatrum* est, in quo se Deo conspici, et expressa testimonia suae presentiae, sapientiae, bonitatis, considerari voluit.” [Emphasis is mine.] The image of the theatre representing nature can also be found in Philip Melanchthon, *Initia doctrinae physicae*, CR XIII, 189: “Tota natura rerum velut theatrum est humani ingenii, quod Deus vult aspici, ideo indidit hominum mentibus cupiditatem considerandarum rerum, et voluptatem, quae agnitionem comitatur.”

<sup>2</sup> Philip Melanchthon, *Oratio de legibus*, CR XI, 908: “Multa sunt testimonia de Deo huic toti machinae coelesti, et omnibus mundi corporibus impressa, quae testantur hunc mundum non casu extitisse, sed a mente architectatrice mira arte conditum esse et conservari.”

only thanks to the concept of *ordo*<sup>3</sup> that one can fully comprehend the beauty and the perfection of this disposition. Each Man possesses this concept from birth and it is equivalent to the initial basic principles such as the notion of numbers and the logical principle. The truth underlying these principles can never be doubted as they are directly instilled into the mind of mankind by God, who is the guarantor of Man's relationship with reality.<sup>4</sup>

Apart from the natural order in which all things have been organised, the concept of *ordo* offers Man the opportunity of understanding the moral order present in his own *mens* in the form of natural law which allows him to distinguish good from evil in the sphere of action.<sup>5</sup> Melanchthon's work consists of rethinking the Ciceronian definition of the law as the highest standard inherent in Nature, which indicates what one must do and at the same time forbids that which should be avoided.<sup>6</sup> Taking up Cicero's ideas, Melanchthon adds that natural law is transmitted to Man by God. It would therefore seem possible to find the Thomistic conception infused with the natural law as the "participation of the eternal law in rational creatures."<sup>7</sup> Any such reference, even if it is implicit, could be considered surprising because of the aversion the intellectuals of the Reform felt towards scholastic culture, as this was seen as being linked to the Catholic Church. This is, in fact, not surprising when one considers that Melanchthon studied the works of Thomas Aquinas at the University of Heidelberg where he was trained following the *Via antiqua*.<sup>8</sup>

## The Law of Nature and Moral Principles

The Ciceronian definition and reference to God as the source of natural law are elements that Melanchthon shares with the German jurists who were his contemporaries, and who were from a Protestant background such as Christoph Hegendorf<sup>9</sup> and Johann Oldendorp,<sup>10</sup> and from a Catholic background such as Jakob Spiegel.<sup>11</sup> From the relationships between Melanchthon

<sup>3</sup> Philip Melanchton, *Enarrationes aliquot librorum ethicorum Aristotelis*, CR XVI, 386: "[...] *pulcherrimus ordo naturae*, qui sine mente et consilio aliquo existere non potuit, et physica ratio ostendit in serie causarum necessario perveniri ad unam primam causam, intelligentem, immensae potentiae." [Emphasis is mine.]

<sup>4</sup> Wilhelm Dilthey, *Weltanschauung und analyse des Menschen seit Renaissance und Reformation (Gesammelte Schriften, Band II)*, hrsg. Georg Misch (Stuttgart: Teubner, 1964), 170–171; Günter Frank, *Die Theologische Philosophie Philipp Melanchthons (1497–1560)* (Leipzig: Benno, 1995), 140–144.

<sup>5</sup> Philip Melanchton, *Oratio de legibus*, CR XI, 908–909.

<sup>6</sup> Marci Tullii Ciceronis, *De legibus*, in *De re publica, De legibus, Cato maior De senectute, Laelius De amicitia*, recognovit brevique adnotatione critica instruxit J. G. F. Powell (Oxford: Clarendon, 2006), I, 6, 19, pp. 166–167 and II, 4, 9, p. 197; Elisa Cuttini, "Diritto naturale, dovere e persona in Filippo Melantone interprete del *De officiis* di Cicerone," *Verifiche* XXXIV (2005): 167–168.

<sup>7</sup> Sancti Thomae Aquinatis, *Summa theologiae*, cum testo ex recensione Leonina, cura Peter Caramello, 3 vol. (Romae: Marietti Editori, 1952–1956), vol. I, pars I–II, q. 91, a. 2, p. 414: "[...] lumen rationis naturalis, quo discernimus quid sit bonum et malum, quod pertinet ad naturalem legem, nihil aliud sit quam impressio divini luminis in nobis. Unde patet quod lex naturalis nihil aliud est quam participatio legis aeternae in rationali creatura."

<sup>8</sup> Heinz Scheible, *Melanchthon. Vermittler der Reformation. Eine Biographie* (München: Beck Verlag, 2016), 18–19.

<sup>9</sup> Christoph Hegendorf, *Dialectica legalis* (Lugduni: apud Seb. Gryphium, 1545), 11: "Ius naturae est cognitio earum sententiarum quas Deus omnium hominum animis natura impressit."

<sup>10</sup> Johann Oldendorp, *Lexicon iuris* (Venetiis: apud Cominum de Tridino Montisferrati, 1555), 56v: "Lex naturae, secundum Ciceronem, proprie sic recte diffinitur: est ratio summa insita in natura [...] Ergo est in homine lex [...] a Deo insculptam ad formandos mores;" Johann Oldendorp, *Lexicon iuris*, 52v.

<sup>11</sup> Jakob Spiegel, *Lexicon iuris civilis* (Basileae: apud Ioan. Heruagium, 1549), 355a: "Lex naturae in hominibus est illa notitia de Deo et de Dei voluntate, quae conditis nobis menti nostrae per Deum est indita;" Jakob Spiegel, *Lexicon iuris civilis*, 350b.

and these jurists, which were often very close,<sup>12</sup> there would seem to emerge certain possible mutual influences which would bear witness to the widespread attention paid to the concept of natural law. Oldendorp, in particular, who was considered the first Protestant jurist to have brought positive law back to natural law,<sup>13</sup> states that the latter, by virtue of its divine derivation, is always stable and unchangeable,<sup>14</sup> and is carved into Man by God in order to permanently instil moral principles in him.<sup>15</sup> Melanchthon carefully examines the question of whether the natural law is unchangeable or not and concludes that, just as the basic common principles of science are stable, then one can say the same for all the natural notions instilled in Man.<sup>16</sup> For this reason, the moral principles which derive from natural law are unalterable, while that which can change is Man's ability to follow such principles depending on his own state of depravation.<sup>17</sup> In fact, while the order of natural law remains constant, the application of these laws differs from subject to subject depending on whether their nature is pure or corrupt.<sup>18</sup>

Hegendorf clarifies by arguing that law is well-known because it has been instilled by God, but once it is known any individual can demonstrate, in an autonomous rational way, that it is true.<sup>19</sup> Following this line of thought, Melanchthon defines moral philosophy as explicit rationality and distinguishes it from opinions and other views one might have, but which are not supported by valid demonstrations. Philosophy teaches those things that reason can understand about the law instilled by God, thus Melanchthon affirms that philosophy is God's law as far as it can be comprehended rationally.<sup>20</sup>

In this sense, moral precepts, which are part of natural law instilled in each man's mind, can be demonstrated rationally by the use of particular syllogisms.<sup>21</sup> Assuming as a major premise, for

---

<sup>12</sup> Melanchthon exchanged various letters with Hegendorf, who was one of the most influential figures in the teaching of law in the Protestant area, and wrote the widely used manual entitled *Dialectica legalis*, first published in 1531. Moreover, Melanchthon attended the University of Tübingen together with Spiegel, who was a friend of Erasmus and the author of the successful volume *Lexicon iuris civilis* which was published in eleven editions between 1538 and 1577. As for Oldendorp, we can affirm that his ideas, in particular certain fundamental concepts one of which being natural law, were similar to those of Melanchthon. Ralph Keen, *Divine and Human Authority in Reformation Thought. German Theologians on Political Order 1520–1555 (Bibliotheca Humanistica et Reformatorica)*, vol. LV (Nieuwkoop: De Graaf, 1997), 182.

<sup>13</sup> Keen, *Divine and Human Authority in Reformation Thought*, 180–181; and Johann August Roderich Stintzing, *Geschichte der deutschen Rechtswissenschaft (Geschichte der Wissenschaften in Deutschland)*, 18/1, vol. I (München, Leipzig: Oldenbourg, 1880), 327–328.

<sup>14</sup> Oldendorp, *Lexicon iuris*, 52v: "[...] naturalia quidem iura quae apud omnes Gentes per aequae observantur: divina quadam providentia constituta, semper firma atque immutabilia permanent."

<sup>15</sup> *Ibid.*, 56v: "Lex est notitia naturalis a Deo nobis insita, ad discernendum aequum ab iniquo."

<sup>16</sup> Philip Melanchthon, *Philosophiae moralis epitomes libri duo*, CR XVI, 72–73.

<sup>17</sup> *Ibid.*, CR XVI, 73: "Etsi principia moralia sunt firma, sicut principia physica [...] tamen est infirmior assensus moralium, propter corruptionem naturae. Quia enim non satis obediunt naturae, assensus fit infirmior, et ipsae notitiae sunt obscuriores, et facile assentimur contrariis imaginationibus."

<sup>18</sup> Melanchthon, *Enarrationes*, CR XVI, 391: "[...] totus ordo vel harmonia legum naturalium est immutabilis [...] etiamsi de usu rerum in natura integra aliter, aliter in natura depravata ratio praecipit."

<sup>19</sup> Hegendorf, *Dialectica legalis*, 12: "[...] ius gentium est etiam cognitio earum sententiarum quas Deus omnibus hominibus natura inscripsit, et quas veras esse ratio omnes homines docet" [Emphasis is mine.]

<sup>20</sup> Hermann Heineck, "Die älteste Fassung von Melanchthons Ethik," *Philosophische Monatshefte* 29 (1893): 132: "[...] philosophiam est lex Dei quatenus legem ratio intelligit," Elisa Cuttini, *Unità e pluralità nella tradizione europea della filosofia pratica di Aristotele. Girolamo Savonarola, Pietro Pomponazzi e Filippo Melantone, premessa di Franco Biasutti* (Soveria Mannelli: Rubbettino, 2005), 151–154.

<sup>21</sup> Cesare Vasoli, *La dialettica e la retorica dell'Umanesimo. "Invenzione" e "metodo" nella cultura del XV e XVI secolo* (Milano: Feltrinelli, 1968), 293–294. Vasoli affirms that Melanchthon's logic should be understood as inventio which allows one to find new elements and give order to the subject of one's speech through the system of loci,

example, that every living being in nature tends towards the conservation of its own species, and as a minor premise that unjustified killing alters the continuity of the species, this would appear to demonstrate that murder is both against nature and against reason, and therefore should not be perpetrated.<sup>22</sup> This syllogism thus appears to establish an analogy between the natural world and the moral sphere; in fact the major premise belongs to the natural order while the minor premise and the conclusion refer to the moral order, thereby testifying to the relationship existing between the two orders. According to an analogous procedure, the importance of practising the virtue of temperance is demonstrated by observing that in nature everything tends to conserve order, but in order for that to be possible men must control their own instincts by exercising temperance, which is therefore necessary.<sup>23</sup> One can therefore, on the one hand, understand that natural law is not an authoritarian imposition, but the opportunity to respect it is rationally demonstrable, while, on the other hand, it emerges that, as he is the bearer of the law, Man can base his judgement on his own reason in order to decide on each different occasion what is best to pursue and what is best to avoid.

## Natural Law and Civil Law

Both Oldendorp and Hegendorf<sup>24</sup> consider natural law for its value in the political sphere, starting from the trichotomy between *ius naturale*, *ius gentium* and *ius civile* which is derived directly from Ulpian:<sup>25</sup> natural law is the element that nature has placed in all living beings;<sup>26</sup> the law of the nations concerns only mankind, is shared by all nations and is identified by the same natural law placed in a social context;<sup>27</sup> civil law neither coincides with nor completely detaches itself compared to natural law and the law of the people and it belongs to each political community.<sup>28</sup> Therefore, even if the definition of natural law does not directly involve the sphere of normal procedure, the fact that natural law is understood as the canon to which any social norms must conform confirms the existing connection between natural order and moral political order.

Spiegel, in also taking up Ulpian's thoughts, defines civil law as the specific order of a particular people derived from the natural law instilled in Man by God.<sup>29</sup> In this sense, the positive law which governs each state is understood as the establishment of natural law based on circum-

---

which can be compared to a "treasure" or "store room" full of topics which you can always find and use. Vasoli, *La dialettica e la retorica dell'Umanesimo*, 291–299.

<sup>22</sup> Philip Melancthon, *Ethicae doctrinae elementorum libri duo*, CR XVI, 217: "Quaelibet res in natura, quantum potest, appetit conservationem suae speciei naturali inclinatione [...] Iniustae cedet [...] destruunt speciem. Ergo necesse est, haec mala prohiberi."

<sup>23</sup> *Ibid.*, CR XVI, 220: "Omnis natura est conservatrix sui recto ordine. Temperantia servat animantia. Ergo est necessaria."

<sup>24</sup> Oldendorp, *Lexicon iuris*, 52v–53r; Hegendorf, *Dialectica legalis*, 16.

<sup>25</sup> Digesta 1.1.1.2, Ulpianus 1 inst.: "Privatum ius tripartitum est: collectum etenim est ex naturalibus praeceptis aut gentium aut civilibus;" Max Kaser, *Ius gentium* (Forschungen zum römischen Recht, Abh. 40) (Köln, Weimar, Wien: Böhlau Verlag, 1993), 66–70.

<sup>26</sup> Digesta 1.1.1.3, Ulpianus 1 inst.: "Ius naturale est, quod natura omnia animalia docuit: nam ius istud non humani generis proprium, sed omnium animalium [...];" Guglielmo Nocera, "*Ius naturale*" nella esperienza giuridica romana (Milano: Giuffrè, 1962), 5–9.

<sup>27</sup> Digesta 1.1.1.4, Ulpianus 1 inst.: "Ius gentium est, quo gentes humanae utuntur. Quod a naturali recedere facile intellegere licet, quia illud omnibus animalibus, hoc solis hominibus inter se commune sit."

<sup>28</sup> Digesta 1.1.6, Ulpianus 1 inst.: "Ius civile est, quod neque in totum a naturali vel gentium recedit nec per omnia ei servit: itaque cum aliquid addimus vel detrahimus iuri communi, ius proprium, id est civile efficimus."

<sup>29</sup> Spiegel, *Lexicon iuris civilis*, 315a: "Ius Civile est unius populi iussus, est norma naturae promanans, que a Deo in corde et conscientia hominis est insculpta," here, Spiegel quotes Oldendorp: Oldendorp, *Lexicon iuris*, 53v.

stances, and is characterised by being probable and not necessary.<sup>30</sup> Melanchthon, in agreement with Spiegel, contrasted the universality and unchangeability of positive law, with the fact that in the political sphere the legislator must be aware of the context in which he operates in order to face, case by case, questions that cannot be managed in analogous ways by different peoples. God therefore imbues Man with general natural principles leaving space, always with respect to these principles, for environmental and cultural elements which have to be considered in the establishment of positive laws.<sup>31</sup> Thus as architecture – suggests Melanchthon – is the art of describing the shapes of buildings which can assume different forms, politics is the art that is concerned with civil order and rationally outlines each community's own characteristics. As with all art, it moves from some constant and unalterable regulating principles which correspond to natural law<sup>32</sup> and, according to the judgement of reason, it uses them in different contexts.

As circumstances which can change must be taken into account, political rationality is characterised by being only probable and draws a certain stability and authority from the faithfulness with which the legislator devotes himself to applying natural law to the social context through the institution of positive laws. Melanchthon affirms, for example, that by its very nature theft is known to be punished, therefore penalties which are believed to be in all probability both appropriate and efficacious,<sup>33</sup> are established rationally without, however, being certain that on each occasion these are the most suitable.

Although the only probable nature of political choices is underlined, an element that occurs fairly frequently in the works of the German jurists mentioned thus far, and in particular those of Melanchthon, is a reference to a passage from the letter of St. Paul to the Romans according to which political authority is part of God's plan to maintain order, therefore it follows that he who does not submit himself to such authority is, in fact, opposing natural order.<sup>34</sup> The function of political authorities, therefore, is to ensure that divine will is present in the life of Man. Thus, starting from the teachings of St. Paul, Melanchthon reaches a point where he states that God himself is the author of civil order, seeing that in a final analysis, everything which has order owes its position to Him.<sup>35</sup>

Upsetting natural order therefore means not respecting the will of God who established it. This is valid both in the ethical sphere, where there is a need to let oneself be guided by natural law instilled by God which allows one to distinguish between good and evil, as well as in the civil sphere where one must conform to the order as defined by the political authorities which were

---

<sup>30</sup> Spiegel, *Lexicon iuris civilis*, 316b: "Ius positivum determinatio est iuris naturalis per circumstantiam aliquam, ratione probabili, non necessaria, ut ius naturale docet furta punienda esse: deinde legislator addit speciem, videlicet modum poenae, in quo constituendo sequitur probabilem rationem."

<sup>31</sup> Philip Melanchthon, *Commentarii in aliquot politicos libros Aristotelis*, CR XVI, 419–420; Melanchthon, *Enarrationes*, CR XVI, 383–384.

<sup>32</sup> Melanchthon, *Commentarii in aliquot politicos libros Aristotelis*, CR XVI, 417: "Politica ars est continens generalia quaedam praecepta de ordine civitatis. Sicut architectonica ars est qua formae aedificiorum describuntur. Ita politica certam formam civitatis describit [...]."

<sup>33</sup> Melanchthon, *Enarrationes*, CR XVI, 392: "Ius positivum significat conclusiones propter rationem probabilem, additas legibus naturae, congruentes cum illis, non dissentientes, ut lex naturae praecipit puniri furtum. Hic legislator propter *probabilem rationem modum ponere determinat.*" [Emphasis is mine.]

<sup>34</sup> *Romans* 13, 1–2.

<sup>35</sup> Philip Melanchthon, *Disputatio*, CR XII, 694: "[...] omnia, quae ordinata sunt, a Deo ordinata sunt" and Philip Melanchthon, *Ethicae doctrinae elementorum*, CR XVI, 182; Sachiko Kusukawa, "Law and Gospel: the Importance of Philosophy at Reformation Wittenberg," *History of Universities* XI (1992): 38.

instituted by God himself.<sup>36</sup> The need to respect order can be understood rationally through practical philosophy as, according to what we have seen, Melanchthon understands this need as the expression of natural law through reason with the objective of showing Man the good that lies in moral precepts and positive law, in this way persuading Man to follow them without having to resort to coercive methods.

## Free Will

The fact that each person can choose whether or not he wishes to adhere to moral order and civil order raises the question, a particularly delicate one in the Protestant sphere, of the possibility of free will.<sup>37</sup> As Spiegel explains, civil order and positive laws take the events and exterior behaviour of Man into consideration, such as, for example, obedience due to magistrates.<sup>38</sup> Likewise Melanchthon, who supports the idea that politics concerns only exterior actions, observes that these are carried out in this life.<sup>39</sup> Neither moral nor political philosophy are concerned with interiority, which is about Man's relationship with God and his heavenly destiny, but rather they consider the exterior actions that are carried out in relation to other men in the sphere of civil life.<sup>40</sup> In this way, Melanchthon establishes a clear division between the interiority and exteriority of the same moral subject. He can therefore, on the one hand, support the theological truth of the unavoidability of the salvific action of God, which denies real, true freedom in the spiritual sphere, yet, on the other hand, is able to affirm that Man can exercise his own will freely even if this is limited to carrying out his exterior activities.

Melanchthon bases free will on the Augustinian concept whereby Man, as an *imago Dei*, cannot be lacking in that rationality and freedom which make him an image of his own creator.<sup>41</sup> Further confirmation comes from the Pauline affirmation of the "justice of the flesh" which is understood as being a discipline connected to the activities of the body which presupposes free will.<sup>42</sup> Due to the fact that Man can choose how to act in the sphere of exterior actions, Man is not abandoned to himself. God not only creates Man in His own image giving him freedom to act, He also transmits natural law which guides his moral conduct and political decisions, but

---

<sup>36</sup> Philip Melanchthon, *Oratio de legibus*, CR XI, 909–912; Michael Becht, *Pium consensus tueri: Studien zur Begriff consensus im Werk von Erasmus von Rotterdam, Philipp Melanchthon und Joannes Calvin* (Münster: Aschendorff, 2000), 257.

<sup>37</sup> Wolfgang Matz, *Der befreite Mensch. Die Willenslehre in der Theologie Philipp Melanchthons* (Göttingen: Vandenhoeck and Ruprecht, 2001).

<sup>38</sup> Spiegel, *Lexicon iuris civilis*, 353b: "Lex humana, ordinatio publica, non praecipiens de interiori mentis iusticia, nec iudicans de occultis: quod homo non intueatur cor, sed tantum de factis externis, honorem deferens operibus extrinsecus bonis, et ponam irrogans externis malefactis."

<sup>39</sup> Melanchthon, *Commentarii in aliquot politicos*, CR XVI, 419: "Politica est doctrina de externa actione in vita [...]"

<sup>40</sup> Philip Melanchthon, *Philosophiae moralis*, CR XVI, 42–43: "Philosophia non loquitur de motibus cordis erga Deum, nec de interiore, et integra obedientia, quam requirit lex Dei, sed loquitur de moribus vitae civilis, hoc est, de moderatione quadam affectum erga homines, et de *externis actionibus*." [Emphasis is mine.]

<sup>41</sup> Philip Melanchthon, *Ethicae doctrinae elementorum*, CR XVI, 185: "Est enim et libertas singulare donum Dei in natura intelligente, et *pars imaginis Dei in homine*, ac vult Deus reliquam esse aliquam libertatem, ut assueferi homines et disciplina regi possint." [Emphasis is mine.]

<sup>42</sup> *Ibid.*, CR XVI, 190: "Quod autem talis sit libertas voluntatis, hoc testimonio Pauli manifesto et firmo ostenditur. Saepe fatetur Paulus aliquam esse iustitiam carnis, id est, disciplinam, qua homo non renatus, facit externa honesta opera [...]" Melanchthon, *Philosophiae moralis*, CR XVI, 43.

also reinforces and supports his will in the choice of what is good to do,<sup>43</sup> so that he can maintain or bring back moral order.

## Conclusions

It is therefore possible to try to understand the relationship that lies between natural law, as defined as the law related to natural phenomena, and the natural law as defined as the set of behavioural rules. As we have seen in both Melanchthon's thought and in the juridical perspective of his contemporaries, natural law refers essentially to the practical sphere. One can in fact speak of a clear distinction between the laws which govern the physical world and therefore also the cosmos, and the law which concerns the behaviour of rational beings. The latter corresponds to natural law being understood by its juridical moral meaning and refers not only to nature in general but also to a specific concept of nature which exclusively concerns moral phenomena.

Considering this distinction between the two different meanings of nature, the problem arises of the relationship which lies between the cosmic order, of nature in the physical sense, and the moral political order characteristic of rational nature. Melanchthon himself, establishing a parallelism, observes that just as the beautiful order made up of the sky, the air, the land surrounded by water and including the order of the movement of the heavenly bodies, that determine the alternation of night and day and the changing of the seasons, was all no doubt created and supported by God; in the same way all political moral order was established by God, and even if this is often subverted by Man, the immense goodness of God restores it, so that mankind is not totally destroyed.<sup>44</sup> Here Melanchthon, even if he starts from the movement of the Heavenly bodies, apparently only wishes to refer to the reality of nature understood as the cosmos: in fact he traces it back to the mind of God the creator, so he locates it not at a physical level but at a metaphysical level. Parallelism must therefore be understood in the sense that the creation of the world comes from the divine mind, so likewise the illumination of man, which guides the usual procedure, derives from the same divine mind.<sup>45</sup> Natural order and moral order therefore have the same origin and, on this basis, there is a relationship between them which continues to surface so one can say that they are interconnected and in harmony: in other words, they are in mutual agreement. The references to divine genesis and to the connections between the two orders are not further specified, and remains thereby only vague and potential.

According to Melanchthon, the affirmation stating that moral action must respect natural order should be inscribed in the theological concept according to which the first law – which

---

<sup>43</sup> Ibid.: De his ita sentendium est, quod voluntas humana sit libera, quod ad mores vitae civilis attinet, hoc est, voluntas humana potest aliquo modo obtemperare iudicio rationis, et expetere ac fugere res oblatas, quod ad mores illos attinet, et potest externis membris imperare, ut iudicio rationis obediant. Ita et moderari affectus aliquo modo potest, et externas actiones honestas efficere propriis viribus sine renovatione. Melanchthon, *Oratio de legibus*, CR XII, 911.

<sup>44</sup> Melanchthon, *Oratio de legibus*, CR XII, 912: Ut hic pulcherrimus ordo, positus corporum, coeli, aeris, terrae circumfusae Oceano, et ut *ordo motuum coelestium*, qui vices temporum, dies et noctes, aestates et hyemes efficit, sine ulla dubitatione a Deo conditus est et conservatur: ita *totum hunc ordinem politicum* [...] verissime status a Deo institutum esse: et quanquam diaboli et hominum furores saepe eum turbant, tamen immensa bonitate Dei conservari, ne totum genus humanum fonditus deleatur. [Emphasis is mine.]

<sup>45</sup> Melanchthon, *Enarrationes*, CR XVI, 321: "[...] humana ratio habet quasdam de Deo notitias, intelligit Deum esse conditorem rerum, Deo parendum esse iuxta discriminem honestarum et turpium [...];" Spiegel, *Lexicon iuris civilis*, 355a: "[...] Deus naturae conditor harum legum [naturae] sit autor."

includes all others in itself – coincides with God himself as the supreme mind giving order to all things, as far as concerns both the mind of Man and physical nature.<sup>46</sup>

Elisa Cuttini  
Liceo Guarino Veronese  
via Cavalieri di Vittorio Veneto 28  
37047 San Bonifacio  
Verona  
Italy  
e-mail: elisa.cuttini@virgilio.it

---

<sup>46</sup> Melanchton, *Ethicae doctrinae elementorum*, CR XVI, 182: “Prima lex est ipse Deus ordinans omnia in hominum mentibus et in tota natura.”

# Olusola Victor Olanipekun

Obafemi Awolowo University Ile-Ife, Osun State, Nigeria

## Perception, Sensitive Knowledge, and the Problem of the Independent Existence of the Material World in Lockean Empiricism

**Abstract** | The nature of perception and the challenge of knowing the existence and nature of the material world are problematic issues in philosophy. In fact, the belief that other things exist outside us is what necessitated the quest to perceive and to know them. Do things therefore really exist outside us? If they do, how can we perceive or understand them? Or better still, how can we account for the existence of things outside us granted that they exist? Locke's account and adoption of representative theory of perception in his epistemology reveals how serious the problem of perception is. Thus for Locke, what we perceive are only "ideas" about an object and not the object itself. This development is what informed the Lockean idea of sensitive knowledge, wherein our account of the knowledge claim of the material world is largely dependent on the information presented to us by our sense organs. My focus in this paper is to critically examine the problems of the independent existence of the material world in Lockean empiricism with the aim of revealing how Locke's metaphysical claim ensnared his epistemological commitment.

**Keywords** | Perception – Sensitive Knowledge – Lockean Empiricism – Realism – Reductionism

.....

### Introduction

A careful and philosophical inquiry into John Locke's empiricism, as recorded in his brilliantly written *An Essay Concerning Human Understanding*, reveals clear evidence of the overlapping nature of the epistemological as well as the metaphysical themes embedded in his work. While the epistemological aspect is concerned with how we come to know, as well as the source and origin of what we claim to know, the metaphysical aspect of his thought focuses on the question of being and the independent existence of the material world. Tracing the development of ideas in history between the 17th and 18th centuries, the world of scholarship experienced its fair share of philosophers who were rationalists, especially of the Platonist variety. We have scholars such as Rene Descartes, Gottfried Leibniz, and Nicholas Malenbrahe. These philosophers argued, in line with Plato's ancient view, that we have an inborn knowledge of the perfect forms of justice, piety, goodness, and countless others. John Calvin held in the Renaissance that we are all born with a sense of God. For him, "[...] that there exists in human mind a natural instinct, some sense of deity, we hold to be beyond dispute."<sup>1</sup> Descartes, the leading Continental rationalist

---

<sup>1</sup> John Calvin, *The Institutions of the Christian Religion*, trans. Henry Beveridge (Edinburgh: Calvin Translation Society, 1845), ch. 3.1.

in *Meditation III*, also held that we have an innate idea of ourselves and of infinite perfection. Britain's philosophy was, however, soon dominated by an alternative and more scientific view that knowledge is gained primarily or mainly through the five senses. This view was championed by three great philosophers of the 18th century: John Locke, George Berkeley, and David Hume. Given that rationalism and empiricism are two rival philosophical positions paired against each other within the realm of epistemology, it thus becomes imperative to see the different accounts presented by each school on how we come to know. While rationalists such as Plato and Descartes argued that human beings are born with ideas imprinted in the mind, empiricists such as Locke argued against innatism, that the human mind is devoid of any character, not even a dot, at birth. In other words, British empiricists largely denied the role of innate ideas and deduction in the quest for knowledge. Instead, they argued that knowledge comes from sensory experience and inductive reasoning. The human mind is therefore a clean slate at birth. The focus of this paper is to examine the overlapping nature of Lockean metaphysics and epistemology. This is with the aim of demonstrating how his metaphysical claims created a serious challenge for his epistemology.

This paper is divided into three major sections. The first section examines the nature and scope of the debate between the innatists and the empiricists on the question of human knowledge. The second section discusses John Locke's notion of perception and sensitive knowledge. The third section shall discuss the problems of the independent existence of the material world in Lockean empiricism. The same section three shall cover both the epistemological and metaphysical problems in Locke's empiricism. Our thesis is stated and defended in this section three. The thesis argues that the problem of Lockean empiricism is his metaphysical claims. In other words, John Locke's metaphysical avowal ensnares his epistemological commitment. It should be noted that there are two possible approaches to the debate between the innatists and the empiricists namely:

- first; one may choose to defend innatism, and
- second; one may choose to defend empiricism.

Our intervention, however, in the debate is not intended to do either of the above, but to show how Locke's metaphysical claims created a serious challenge for his epistemology in his attempt to defeat innatism and establish the possibility of the independent existence of the external world. Our focus is not on solving the problem inherent in Lockean empiricism, but on understanding it in a different light. We need to initially understand the notion of innatism in relation to the philosophical problem of our knowledge of the external world in Lockean empiricism.

## **Innatists versus Locke on the Question of the Source of Human Knowledge**

The notion of innate ideas has long been the subject of intense debate in the fields of philosophy and cognitive science. Over the past few decades, methodological advances have made it possible for developmental researchers to begin to examine what innate ideas-what innate concepts and principles might contribute to infants' knowledge acquisition in various core domains.<sup>2</sup> What is innatism? Innatism is a philosophical doctrine that holds that the mind is born with ideas/knowledge, and that therefore the mind is not a "blank slate" at birth, as early empiricists such as John

---

<sup>2</sup> Renee Baillargeon, "Innate Ideas Revisited For a Principle of Persistence in Infants' Physical Reasoning," *Perspective on Psychological Science* 3, 1 (2008): 2–13.

Locke claimed. Innatism has a respectable history derived from the origin of philosophy. The origin was established in “normos/physics antithesis”<sup>3</sup> or the nature/nurture debate.

To be more specific, innatism refers to the philosophy of Plato and Descartes who assumed that innate ideas are placed in the human mind at birth. It is therefore maintained that even at birth, a child has some ideas printed in his mind or that human beings are born with certain principles/ideas printed in the mind. This argument was reinforced by Plato in *Meno* that knowledge is by recollection. In Descartes’ accounts, his sceptical method also suggests that what the mind by its own power sees to be clear and distinct is the basis of knowledge. In another development, Descartes theorized that knowledge of God is innate in everybody as a product of the faculty of reason. In other words, rationalists are of the opinion that innatism is invoked to explain how we can have knowledge of certain propositions that seem to go beyond experience, either (i) because of its universal applicability, or because (ii) its subject matter transcends experiential reality.

In terms of modern scholars, Michael Proudfoot and A. R. Lacey have provided a concise outline for innatism. According to these thinkers, an innate idea or concept may be any of the following:

- (i) an idea we can acquire without our being presented with an instance in experience, and without having to construct it from ideas so presented (as perhaps we construct a unicorn from a horse and horn);
- (ii) an idea we must so acquire, if we acquire it at all, since experience could not supply us with it, e.g., the ideas of validity or negation;
- (iii) an idea we can acquire without any experience at all, or never acquire but have always had; substance and cause may be examples;
- (iv) an idea we can apply without using experience; we do not use the senses to find out whether an argument is valid – but perhaps this sort of idea might be better called *a priori*.<sup>4</sup>

Similarly in the area of language, Chomsky claims that we have an innate tendency to learn and use certain grammatical structures more easily than others, and could not otherwise learn our native language as quickly as we do. Nativism is the view that some ideas are innate.<sup>5</sup> An important question arises, however, “Is an infant’s or human knowledge about the physical world derived solely from the application of domain-general processes to experience? Or does it also reflect the contribution of innate ideas?”<sup>6</sup> The answer to the above question was summarised with the following arguments by the innatists.

Succinctly, the two major arguments adduced to defend innatism by the rationalists are:

1. “General assent the great argument.”<sup>7</sup>
2. “The universal consent argument.”<sup>8</sup>

The summary of these arguments by the rationalists is that innatism is invoked to explain how we can have knowledge of certain propositions that seem to go beyond experience, either (i) because of its universal applicability, or because (ii) its subject matter transcends experiential reality.

<sup>3</sup> Normos implies the conventions, customs or learning established by society. Physics, in contrast, has to do with nature/innatism.

<sup>4</sup> Michael Proudfoot and A. R. Lacey, ed., *The Routledge Dictionary of Philosophy* (London: Routledge, 2010), 193–94.

<sup>5</sup> Noam Chomsky, *Reflections on Language* (London: Maurice Temple Smith and Fontana, 1976), 123.

<sup>6</sup> Baillargeon, “Innate Ideas Revisited For a Principle of Persistence in Infants’ Physical Reasoning,” 2.

<sup>7</sup> John Locke, *An Essay Concerning Human Understanding* (London: Thomas Bassett, 1690), 28.

<sup>8</sup> Ibid.

Locke articulated his view in a book entitled *An Essay Concerning Human Understanding* that human knowledge arise from experience.<sup>9</sup> Before he could, however, advance in his view that human knowledge comes from experience, he needed to dispose of all other existing dominant views maintained by the earlier philosophers that knowledge is innate in nature. It should be noted that Locke was not critical of other types of alleged innate human characteristics, such as coughing or blinking, which are inborn muscle reflexes. Instead, his focus is against the view that human beings are born with ideas imprinted in the mind.

Locke basically introduces *tabula rasa* (i.e., the mind is like a blank slate at birth) with the argument that it is the experience that writes or furnishes us with whatever we come to know.

To use Locke's precise words:

All ideas come from sensation and reflection. Let us then suppose the mind to be, as we say, void of all characters, without any ideas: how come it is to be furnished? Whence has it all the materials of reason and knowledge? To this I answer, in one word, from EXPERIENCE.<sup>10</sup>

In other words, from the above quotation, Locke's argument is that we should completely reject the theory of innate ideas and instead look for the true source of our ideas within human experience. In fact, the empiricist thesis held that innate ideas were superfluous, because knowledge acquisition could be explained more parsimoniously in terms of the application of domain-general (and often species-general) processes to experience.<sup>11</sup> This idea was defended by empiricists such as John Locke (1690), David Hume, George Berkeley, and John S. Mill. Since our concern in this work is Locke, his basic position, which encapsulates the entire empiricist approach, is that the mind is from birth a blank slate (or sheet of "white paper" in his words), which gets filled with information through experience.

The process, however, by which we form our ideas through experience, has two main steps. We first acquire simple ideas through experience, and then recombine those simple ideas in different ways to create more complex ideas.

While Locke's attack on innate ideas certainly applies to the views of Descartes and other Continental rationalists, they were not his immediate target. Instead, according to Locke, there are two types of innate ideas that philosophers commonly allege: "speculative ones"<sup>12</sup> and "practical ones."<sup>13</sup> Speculative innate ideas, for Locke, refer to the general maxim as well as the laws of thought law such as the law of identity, as well as the law of non-contradiction. It is believed, for example, that "what is, is" and "it is impossible for the same thing to be and not to be."<sup>14</sup> These are examples of speculative innate ideas due to the fact that they are universally agreed upon by all mankind. John Locke launched, in contrast, a powerful attack on this very concept. Locke's main arguments against the innateness of these ideas is that

[...] it is evident, that all children and idiots have not the least apprehension or thought of them. And the want of that is enough to destroy that universal assent which must needs be the necessary concomitant of innate truths: it seeming to me near a contradiction to say, that there are truths imprinted on the soul.<sup>15</sup>

---

<sup>9</sup> Ibid., 515.

<sup>10</sup> Ibid., 121.

<sup>11</sup> Baillargeon, "Innate Ideas Revisited For a Principle of Persistence in Infants' Physical Reasoning," 2.

<sup>12</sup> Speculative principles are a general maxim such as what is, is.

<sup>13</sup> Practical innate principles refer to moral principles that are capable of demonstration.

<sup>14</sup> Locke, *An Essay Concerning Human Understanding*, 96.

<sup>15</sup> Ibid., 96.

In other words, if children and idiots have souls, have minds, with those impressions upon them, they must unavoidably perceive them, and necessarily know and assent to these truths. And since they do not, it is evident that there are no such impressions. For if they are not notions naturally imprinted, how can they be innate? And if they are notions imprinted, how can they be unknown? To say a notion is imprinted on the mind, and yet at the same time to argue that the mind is ignorant of it, and never yet took notice of it, is to make this impression nothing.

Another form of innate ideas involves *practical/moral principles*.<sup>16</sup> This implies ideas that regulate moral behavioural practices. Examples of these, according to Locke, are the celebrated “five common notions” of religion and morality proposed by the British philosopher Edward Herbert. They are: 1. there exists a supreme God; 2. we should worship God; 3. the best form of worship is proper moral behaviour; 4. we should repent for our immoral conduct; and 5. we will be rewarded or punished in the after-life for our conducts on earth. Herbert argued that all humans have an inborn knowledge of these truths and we find these truths exhibited in virtually all religions around the world.<sup>17</sup>

Locke’s major criticism of the purported practical innate ideas is that

No moral principle is so clear and generally received as the aforementioned speculative maxims. If those speculative maxims, have not an actual universal asset from all mankind, as we there proved, it is much more visible concerning practical principles, that they come short of an universal reception: and I think it will be so hard to instance any one moral rule which can pretend to so general and ready an assent as “what is, is.”<sup>18</sup>

From the above quotation, it is evident that moral principles are not innate because they require reasoning and discourse to establish them. If speculative principles/maxims, that carry their evidence with them, fail the test of innacy, it is therefore apparent that no moral principle is qualified to be tagged innate.

## Locke on Perception and Sensitive Knowledge

Locke’s main aim in the introductory part of his brilliantly written *An Essay Concerning Human Understanding* is “to enquire into the original, certainty, and extent of human knowledge together with the grounds and degrees of belief, opinion and assent.”<sup>19</sup> This background brings us to Locke’s account of perception and sensitive knowledge. What then is perception? Perception, as it were, is said to be a process or act of gaining knowledge through the senses as well as apprehension with the mind.<sup>20</sup> Going along with this line of thought, Locke tends to argue that knowledge comes by making generalizations from the information collected through sense experience and testing those hypotheses based on the perceptions we receive from the world. All knowledge is therefore founded on and ultimately derived from experience. Locke mainly defines knowledge as “the perception of the connection of an agreement, or disagreement and repugnancy of any of our ideas.”<sup>21</sup> In other words, our knowledge depends upon our perception of the relationships of our ideas to each other. Is the above definition of knowledge by Locke, however, truly

<sup>16</sup> Ibid., 27.

<sup>17</sup> Edward Lord Herbert of Cherbury, *On Truth, as it is Distinguished from Revelation, the Probable, the Possible, and the False*, trans. Meyriok Heath Carre (Bristol: University of Bristol, 1937), 145.

<sup>18</sup> Locke, *An Essay Concerning Human Understanding*, 96.

<sup>19</sup> Ibid., 22.

<sup>20</sup> Iannone Pablo, ed., *Dictionary of World Philosophy* (London: Routledge, 2001), 3.

<sup>21</sup> Locke, *An Essay Concerning Human Understanding*, 121.

appropriate without any problem for the epistemologists? The answer is no. Before coming to the main point, it should be noted in passing that the charge of inconsistency against Locke was traced to this definition. Let me reserve this inconsistency argument for the last section while we focus on perception for now.

Locke's interpretation of perception as "the first simple idea of reflection"<sup>22</sup> seems to be confusing or sound repugnant to a modern understanding of perception due to the way Hume elaborated classification of perception. Perception for Hume is bifurcated into: the perception of the mind and that of the senses.<sup>23</sup> The challenge now is in other words, can we really draw the line between sensation and perception, which is the initial reception of information in a specific sensory modality, without any confusion upon critical reflection? This is a serious unanswered question for Locke.

Meanwhile, in an attempt to establish a different degree of knowledge as regards reality, Locke classified perception into three broad categories. Namely: the intuitive, demonstrative, and sensitive.<sup>24</sup> It should be noted that sensitive knowledge gives us a certain degree of knowledge but not certainty. While intuitive knowledge provides certainty, demonstrative knowledge is the type that reveals to us that God exists. It is therefore the sensitive knowledge that assures us the existence of an external world other than ourselves. Locke was essentially ready to grant that only intuition and demonstration are capable of giving knowledge that is certain with a definite degree of assurance. In his analysis, however, there is still a certain form of knowledge with another degree of knowledge which he called sensitive knowledge as earlier hinted. Thus, for Locke, sensitive knowledge is the category of perception that assures us of the actual existence of particular things. As Locke puts it:

But whether there be anything more than barely that idea in our minds, whether we can thence certainly infer the existence of anything without us, which corresponds to the idea, is that whereof some men think there may be a question made; because men may have such ideas in their minds, when no such thing exists, no such object affects their senses. But yet here, I think, we are provided with an evidence, that puts us past doubting: for I ask anyone, whether he be not invincibly conscious to himself of a different perception when he looks on the sun by day, and thinks on it by night; when he actually tastes wormwood, or smells a rose, or only thinks of that savour or odor? We as plainly find the difference there is between any idea revived in our minds by our own memory, and actually coming into our minds by our senses, as we do between any two distinct ideas.<sup>25</sup>

The import from the above-mentioned view is that a complete understanding of our knowledge of the natural world will always be beyond the limits of our knowledge since Locke's empirical theory supported the fact that knowledge of things outside us is limited to the respects in which our various ideas agree or disagree within us. If we wish to follow, however, Locke's account from that pedestal to its logical conclusion, his account on perception will tend to be parasitic on Protagoras' account. Going by the following quotation from the Protagoras fragment, "About the gods, I am not able to know whether they exist or do not exist, or what they are like in form; for the factor preventing knowledge are many: the obscurity of the subject and the shortness of human life."<sup>26</sup> Knowledge is therefore limited to various perceptions and these perceptions will differ in each person. If this is accepted, however, one will not be able to escape the problem

---

<sup>22</sup> Ibid.

<sup>23</sup> David Hume, *A Treatise of Human Nature*, ed. Lewis Amherst Selby-Bigge (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1960), 1.

<sup>24</sup> Locke, *An Essay Concerning Human Understanding*, 122.

<sup>25</sup> Ibid.

<sup>26</sup> Samuel Enoch Stumpf and James Fieser, eds., *Socrates to Sartre and Beyond: A History of Philosophy* (New York: McGrawHill, 2003), 32.

of epistemic subjectivism. At the same time, the rationalists will always have a way of fighting back. For Andrew Pyle, arguments in matter theory can clearly run both ways. We might begin with the first principles and use a set of accepted principles to establish constraints and impose guidelines on empirical research. Or we could argue back from successful empirical work to the picture of nature that they presuppose. Philosophers of a “rationalist” persuasion, such as Descartes and Leibniz, will tend to favour the former approach. Philosophers of an “empiricist” persuasion, such as Boyle and Locke, will favour the latter.<sup>27</sup> Let us leave this for now due to space and turn to the question of the perception of external reality.

## The Question of External Reality: How Real?

Philosophers have held since the time of Aristotle that qualities of material objects depend on and exist in a substance which has those qualities. This supposed substance allegedly remains the same through change, which at the same time form the basis for the existence of the external world. Is it therefore possible for me to be certain that there is a world outside me and that certain things are true about it? The answer is yes for an empiricist such as Locke, given the definitive principle of his position and his primacy thesis. Such a view may be contended by George Berkeley, however, arising from his notion of *esse est percipi*.<sup>28</sup> What no empiricist will allow is substantive *a priori* knowledge because in the spirit of empiricism, we have no rational insight into real necessities or the inner structure of nature, but must rely on the judgements of our senses for all information about external reality. Nevertheless, for every claim that there are material substances which exist independently of every other thing, there must be a corresponding reason(s) to support that claim or at least, one must be ready to defend such a view since the burden of proof lies with the claimer. In *An Essay Concerning Human Understanding*, Locke develops a series of arguments to the effect. To defend the above-mentioned view, Locke’s argument for the independent existence of the material world goes as follows:

**Point 1:** There is a difference between primary qualities and secondary qualities.

- Primary qualities are those qualities which pertain to the object itself (objective) weight, mass, figure, extension.
- Secondary qualities are those qualities which depend on the perceiver as much as the perceived object (subjective) color, sound, texture, taste, smell.<sup>29</sup>

**Point 2:** If there is a difference between primary qualities and secondary qualities then there must be a distinction between the perception and the object perceived (between the idea of the object and the object itself).<sup>30</sup>

**Point 3:** If there is a distinction between the perception and the object perceived then the object must exist independently of the perceiver – the object cannot merely be a subjective idea of the perceiver & entirely dependent on the perceiver.

---

<sup>27</sup> Andrew Pyle, “The Theory of Matter,” in *The Routledge Companion to Seventeenth Century Philosophy*, ed. Dan Kaufman (London: Routledge, 2018), 410.

<sup>28</sup> *Esse est percipi* means to be is to be perceived or perceiver.

<sup>29</sup> Locke, *An Essay Concerning Human Understanding*, 117.

<sup>30</sup> Ibid.

**Thus**, objects must exist independently of our perception.

In line with the above view, Locke is of the opinion that the external world exists independently from us. Therefore,

External objects furnish the mind with the ideas of sensible qualities, which are all those different perceptions they produce in us [...] let anyone examine his own thoughts, and thoroughly search into his understanding; and then let him tell me, whether all the original ideas he has there, are any other than of the objects of senses, or of the operation of the mind.<sup>31</sup>

Locke's supported his arguments, in defence of the independent existence of the material world, by relying on the senses and its judgements. This is because for Locke: the senses produce pleasure and avoid pain; if one sense is missing, then so is the corresponding idea – e.g., a blind person from birth has no sense of colour; we have no choice in the act of perceiving – we cannot just wish things into or out of existence; there is a difference between the sensation and the memory of sensation; there is a correspondence between the senses; sensations work to preserve us, dreaming gets us into trouble.

Locke argues towards the end of his *Essay* that with the limited information that we obtain from sense experience, we have some basis for claiming a knowledge of things that exist outside our minds. Locke's justification for this claim is that our knowledge of our ideas is more than our own imagination and that there is a conformity between our ideas and the real nature of things. One problem that arises from the above-mentioned statement is, how do we tell whether our ideas represent something outside our minds? Locke's attempt to rescue his empiricism from this problem led him to another issue which is the problem of inconsistency. This shall be considered in the following section.

## **The Problem of the Independent Existence of the Material World in Lockean Empiricism**

The problem of the independent existence of the material world in Lockean empiricism comes in different phases. These problems shall be considered one after the other.

### ***The Inconsistency Argument/The Problem of Inconsistency***

One central problem that has troubled Lockean empiricism is the inconsistency cum sceptical disposition or attitude of Locke over the nature of substance. This, for many commentators, spelt how Locke's metaphysical account undermined his epistemology. Locke is faced with the problem of having to account for how secondary qualities inhere in primary qualities, while, the primary qualities are said to inhere in substance. Locke's inability to answer the question as to where substance inhere led him to "I-know-not-what," making the argument of inconsistency a genuine problem for Locke. David Hume was more consistent in his account than Locke because he did not assert the existence of God and human freedom. It should be noted that Hume even rejected metaphysics altogether, since it does not fall within the purview of matters of facts or relations of ideas.

This argument of inconsistency in Lockean empiricism also contains another internal difficulty. The challenge is if substance is seen as the primary essence of things, then it will be absurd, inconsistent and repugnant to reason to argue that such a substance exists independently of the

---

<sup>31</sup> Ibid., 122.

thing which is its essence. In other words, if the Aristotelian view of essence is correct, it will be difficult to separate a thing from the essence for which it was created.

In another platform, Locke was criticized for being inconsistent in his theory of knowledge due to the vagueness in his presentation of and development of many of his ideas. Locke's tendency towards inconsistency can be seen in his definition of knowledge as "The perception of the connection and agreement, or disagreement and repugnancy of any of our ideas."<sup>32</sup> This view is viewed as being incompatible with his later contention that, "we have intuitive knowledge of our own existence, demonstrative knowledge of God's existence, and sensitive knowledge of the existence of particular things."<sup>33</sup>

Locke's quest to develop his own theory of knowledge also reveals that the empirical approach might engender certain difficulties. The concern, according to Richard Popkin, is that if all our information is based upon the ideas that we acquire from experience, and our knowledge is about the agreement and disagreement of our ideas, how can we ever tell if our knowledge is actually about something outside us?<sup>34</sup> This question is of importance because what we may in general affirm concerning these acts of understanding is limited to the ideas that we receive from the senses.

It should be noted that there has been an ongoing important debate concerning this issue. Michael Ayers (1993) has proposed, for example, that in order to avoid this problem we must understand the notions of "substratum" and "substance in general," in terms of Locke's doctrine of real essences developed in Book III of the *Essay*, rather than as a separate problem from that of knowing real essences.<sup>35</sup> The real essence of a material thing is its atomic constitution. This atomic constitution is the causal basis of all the observable properties of the thing. Were the real essence known, all the observable properties could be deduced from it. This proposed way of interpreting Locke has been criticized by a range of scholars. From the above line of thought, my view remains that there is a clear indication that Locke's argument, in defence of the independent existence of the material world, is problematic. Locke is of the opinion that we have to assume that there is something called substance (substratum) that our ideas or at least some of them belong to. The problem which Popkin identified is that Locke tends to argue that by an examination of the nature of the ideas, we can distinguish those that do in fact represent some actual features of this substance, and hence discover some actual knowledge about the real world. A critical examination and analysis of Locke's view in this manner suggests, however, that his interpretation of "ideas" made his claim for the existence of other things outside us difficult to support, since all we have that goes in our mind are ideas and not external things.

A problematic deduction was noted in Locke's way of using "idea." Having established that idea is the object of thinking, he went further to formulate certain arguments that ended in a confusing conclusion.

For Locke:

- first, idea is the material of knowledge (Locke's claim),<sup>36</sup>
- second, knowledge itself must be an idea (Locke's claim).<sup>37</sup>

---

<sup>32</sup> Ibid., 121.

<sup>33</sup> Ibid., 124.

<sup>34</sup> Ibid., 213.

<sup>35</sup> Michael Ayers, *Locke: Epistemology and Ontology* (New York: Routledge, 1993), 45.

<sup>36</sup> Locke, *An Essay Concerning Human Understanding*, 150.

<sup>37</sup> Ibid., 515.

Indeed, in as much as the notion of idea, as it is commonly used, is quite different from the way Locke employed it, it could be argued that what appears to be a genuine problem is not. The trouble now, however, is that in order to argue that an idea is a material of knowledge and also at the same retain the claim that an idea is knowledge sound unacceptable to the beliefs of certain contemporary epistemologists who are of a Platonic pedigree. Plato, Gettier, and some post-Gettier scholars have alluded to the fact that there are basic elements in a knowledge claim. A reflection on the traditional account of knowledge reveals that the conditions (Justified, Truth, and Belief) are necessary for some scholars such as Gettier and Zagzebski, but are not sufficient for knowing a given proposition.<sup>38</sup> The problem is whether an idea possesses all the features that a knowledge claim possesses? In other words, can an idea be true for all time? Does it possess an element of belief? And can it pass the test of justification? If these conditions are not satisfied, I am not certain if contemporary scholars will want to accept that “idea” and “knowledge” are the same or are of equal status as Locke insisted. In other words, going by the nature of the problem of knowledge, when we say “we know” something, what sort of claim are we usually making? Is it rational to conclude that “I know object X” is the same as “I have an idea of object X?” I consider this a genuine problem of Lockean epistemology.

Another phase of inconsistency in Locke is traceable to his introduction of God in his postulations. Alberto Vanzo argued that Epicurus and Hume were more consistent than Aristotle and Locke because they did not assert the existence of God, human freedom or the immortality of the soul.<sup>39</sup> Vanzo’s argument is that both Locke and Aristotle overstepped the boundary of their professed empiricism because it is obvious that the existence of God cannot be an object of experience, thus, how should I come to know his existence? The point here is that, concerning God’s existence, Locke adopted a cosmological argument to prove the existence of God. From the certainty of our own self, the existence of God immediately follows intuitively. Eternal being alone can produce “thinking, perceiving beings, such as we find ourselves to be.”<sup>40</sup> Locke fails to point out, however, how the self can be an idea and thus belong to the material of knowledge which will help us know how God exists in external reality to us. Let us consider next, how the question of perceptual reductionism generates a further problem for Lockean empiricism.

### ***The Problem of Perceptual Reductionism***

The question of “how much do we perceive directly?” poses a serious threat to Lockean empiricism. Laurence Bonjour has presented fairly standard accounts of the epistemology of perceptual knowledge to distinguish three main alternative positions: representationalism (also called representative realism or indirect realism), phenomenalism, and a third view that is called either naive realism (usually by its opponents) or direct realism (usually by those who are more sympathetic to it).<sup>41</sup> Locke’s account therefore belongs to the first category. On the concept of idea, Locke’s theory of idea, which led to the representative theory of perception, problematized his account of knowledge. This is because such a view could be reduced to what a scholar such as G. A. Paul called “perceptual reductionism.”<sup>42</sup> The challenge in following this theory of perceptual

<sup>38</sup> Linda Zagzebski, “The Inescapability of Gettier Problems,” in *Epistemology: An Anthology*, ed. Ernest Sosa (Malden: Blackwell, 2008), 207.

<sup>39</sup> Alberto Vanzo, “Kant on Empiricism and Rationalism,” *History of Philosophy Quarterly* 30, 1 (2013): 60.

<sup>40</sup> Locke, *An Essay Concerning Human Understanding*, 10.

<sup>41</sup> Laurence Bonjour, “In Search of Direct Realism,” *Philosophy and Phenomenological Research* 69, 1 (2004): 349–367.

<sup>42</sup> Perceptual Reductionism is an epistemological view which states that an object of perception can be reduced to mere ideas about the object. See G. A. Paul, “Is There A Problem About Sense-Data?” in *Perceiving, Sensing and Knowing*, ed. Robert J. Swartz (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1965), 271.

reductionism is that, human knowledge will only be limited to perceptual ideas and not necessarily the real object behind the ideas. To use Stroud's example, "suppose that on looking out the window I announce casually that there is a goldfinch in the garden. If I am asked how I know it is a goldfinch and I reply that it is yellow, we all recognise that in the normal case that is not enough for knowledge."<sup>43</sup>

From the above illustration, we can establish that human knowledge will be limited to only the perceptual ideas, and not necessarily the real object behind the ideas and this is not enough for knowledge as far as Stroud is concerned. What follows is the question as to whether Locke can justify his theory of representationism, which holds that we receive a mental image of the physical substance that exists outside in reality and still escape the problem created by the veil of perception. I consider this a difficult task for Locke. In an attempt to escape this problem, Locke made an effort to formulate a theory of knowledge that would show how we derive all of our information from our experiences. For Richard Popkin, if our knowledge is based on sensations and reflections, Locke attempted to show that there are certain conditions under which we can be sure of what we know, and even sure that what we know applies to something outside ourselves.<sup>44</sup> Having said this much, the question now arises as to how to know those conditions under which we can be so sure that what we claim to know are truly external objects that exist outside our minds. This question is particularly pertinent because Locke did not state how the conditions expressly couple with the fact that a central task in the theory of knowledge is to examine the conditions under which a subject knows something to be the case.

Furthermore, to make the matter worse, Locke's notion and concept of ideas made such a knowledge claim difficult to support and defend. In other words, to argue that external objects exist but our knowledge of them is limited to our perceived ideas about them without direct access to the real object is questionable. The point that I am making is that, for every real object, there should be real perception. In other words, a real object should be perceived directly without any veil of ideas. Locke's initial argument is that we can be sure that all simple ideas represent something real. He argued that the mind is incapable of inventing them since they cannot be formed from any other ideas that we already possess. Simple ideas therefore form the basis of the existence of external objects as Locke insisted. The problem with such a view is whether we can really say that complex ideas are the main cause(s) of the veil between an object and the perceiver? This question is essential because at the level of simple ideas, the object has not been formed. The object is fully formed when several simple ideas of a similar nature and structure are put together.

### ***Further Problems***

Given that Locke has earlier argued that it is the sensitive knowledge that assures us of the actual existence of particular things, the challenge with this type of knowledge is that Locke's argument, for the objective validity and defence of sensitive knowledge, consists of several considerations in relation to the works of other empiricists such as George Berkeley and David Hume. The problem is that a lower degree of certainty is accrued to knowledge of the external world, made possible in part by our noting that certain ideas reliably come to us in clusters, which we, assume indicate the presence of substances outside of us, and also by our consciousness of our passivity in receiving ideas of sensation.

---

<sup>43</sup> Barry Stroud, "The Problem of the External World," in *Epistemology: An Anthology*, ed. Ernest Sosa (Malden: Blackwell, 2008), 18.

<sup>44</sup> Richard Popkin and Avrum Stroll, eds., *Philosophy Made Simple* (New York: Broadway Book, 1993), 213.

In Locke's theory, ideas that are received from experience are only the ingredients of our thought. For Jennifer Nagel, however, "many entities other than ideas are postulated during the course of the theory: the external objects causing our ideas, power inherent in those ideas and causal relations among them, and the mind itself."<sup>45</sup> It should be noted that David Hume's version of empiricism exposes some of the difficulties in attempting to maintain this kind of mixed ontology within the empirical framework.<sup>46</sup> It is therefore apparent that Hume is more careful than Locke to extract evidence for his theory of human cognition only from the perceivable phenomena, and to refrain from positing the kind of physical and metaphysical entities access to which would be unaccountable from an empiricist perspective.

There is one final point. In the first wave of reaction to Locke, George Berkeley had already demonstrated that "when we do our utmost to conceive the existence of external bodies, we are all the while only contemplating our own ideas."<sup>47</sup> Thus, if we are able to reflect only upon our perceptions then the attendant consequence will be that the belief in an independent material world has to be read as a belief in the independent existence of our perceptions. As a result, even the apparently straightforward claim that our ideas of sensation are caused by external objects could prove difficult for an empiricist to defend because, "if we are directly conscious only of our ideas, with what right could we claim that these ideas resemble, and have their origin in, things of an entirely different kind which are not themselves present to the mind?"<sup>48</sup> It therefore becomes apparent that Berkeley argues for a phenomenalist understanding of objects in order to escape the problem. The objects of which we are conscious are not independent matter but in fact collections of perceptions. I would hold this position to be more plausible than that of Locke. This does not entail, however, that Berkeley's account is not also without error, because most modern phenomenologists rejected the theological conclusion he drew from his epistemology; the point is that the level of consistency in his empiricism is higher than that of Locke.

## Conclusion

I have argued in this paper that I have been able to figure out the problems of the independent existence of the material world in Lockean empiricism. Following Popkin's summary, the issue for any philosophical work is that no one has succeeded in developing a theory that is both credible and consistent (Popkin, 1993: 213).<sup>49</sup> In fact, a number of popular theories in philosophy appears to contain grave inconsistencies. Certain other theories, in contrast, that appeared to be perfectly coherent seem less than credible. The Lockean brand of empiricism which states that our knowledge comes to us through our senses is no exception. In *Essay Concerning Human Understanding*, Locke attempted to construct an empiricist theory of knowledge by what he calls his "historical plain method" of showing how all the contents of the mind – which is a "blank slate" (*tabula rasa*) at birth – enter the mind through experience, either externally through the senses (ideas of sensation) or internally through experience of its own operations (ideas of reflection). It should be noted that Locke's position is not as tenable as it appeared although he did not hold as radical a position as an empiricist. He instead held a moderate position without playing

---

<sup>45</sup> Jennifer Nagel, "Empiricism," in *The Philosophy of Science: An Encyclopedia*, eds. Sahotra Sarkar and Jessica Pfeifer (London: Routledge, 2006), 235.

<sup>46</sup> Ibid.

<sup>47</sup> George Berkeley, *Treatise Concerning the Principles of Human Knowledge*, ed. G. J. Warnock (London: Penguin, 1953), 71.

<sup>48</sup> Nagel, "Empiricism," 235.

<sup>49</sup> Popkin and Stroll, *Philosophy Made Simple*, 213.

down the role of reason which raised sceptical doubt on whether he is a true empiricist or not. In summary, despite the fact that Locke made an attempt to systematically demonstrate where various concepts or ideas come from, or are built from different kinds of experiences through which we form the basis for claiming the knowledge of the existence of things outside our mind, his theory is not spared from problems. Nevertheless, in spite of various disagreements, interpretations and critical comments on Lockean empiricism, his account in an *Essays Concerning Human Understanding* still remain relevant with great influence for subsequent thinkers and modern scholars.

Olanipekun, Olusola Victor  
Department of Philosophy  
Obafemi Awolowo University  
P.M.B. 13: Ile-Ife: Osun: 220282  
Osun State  
Nigeria  
e-mail: [olanipekuno@oauife.edu.ng](mailto:olanipekuno@oauife.edu.ng)

Karel Šebela

Palacký University, Olomouc, Czech Republic

## Internal Negation and the Universe of Discourse: Kant and Boole

**Abstract** | I will focus on so-called internal negation and its philosophical consequences, namely in Kant and Boole. Firstly, the difference between internal and external negation is presented and it is shown that internal negation can be derived from external negation with the help of the so-called Principle of Complete Determination. The Principle states that every object is completely determined with respect to every pair of predicates F and non-F. Kant discusses the Principle in his *Critique of Pure Reason*. Surprisingly, Kant argued that the Principle does not analytically follow from the law of the excluded middle. He claims this principle is synthetic and that it represents objects as deriving their possibility from the whole of possibility. This strange notion will be clarified, mainly with respect to Kant's remarks that determination of objects rest only on the limitation of this whole. It will also be argued that Boole's neologism universe of discourse can be seen as the de-epistemological adaptation of Kant's whole of possibility, mainly with respect to Boole's remarks that all other concepts of class are understand as being formed by the limitation of this universe. I will argue that the result of Boole's adaptation is more formal ontology than formal epistemology and that in these conditions the Principle of Complete Determination can be seen as analytic, or as a matter of choice. As a result, internal negation can be seen as equivalent with external negation. In contrast, logic can lose its connection with the empirical world and is then open to what Kant called transcendental illusion.

**Keywords** | Immanuel Kant – George Boole – Universe of Discourse – Logic – Philosophy of Logic

### Introduction

The objective of this study is to find reasons for the interesting fact from the history of logic, namely that so-called internal negation, a traditional part of logical studies, came to its peak in Kant's theoretical philosophy, only for internal negation to almost completely disappear after no more than sixty years in the works of George Boole. The question is simply what happens, what is the key difference in the philosophy of logic between Kant and Boole in this point? In the introduction, I will shortly introduce the opposite concepts of external and internal negation and try to show some relations between them. The second part introduces Kant's philosophy of logic, especially his opinions about internal negation. In the third part, Boole's philosophy of logic will be presented, and finally a comparison of Kant's and Boole's concepts will show the reason for such a different treatment of internal negation in the work of both of them.

## From Internal Negation to the Principle of Complete Determination

It is commonly agreed that one can distinguish between so-called external and internal negation.<sup>1</sup> External negation is the well known truth function of classical logic, a sentence operator which turns a true sentence into false and vice versa. Usually the sign for the external negation is “ $\neg$ .” Internal negation operates on predicates, in natural languages it is connected with the words such as “immortal,” “indefinite,” etc. To (internally) negate a predicate means to not speak about the things, which fall under the respective predicate, but about the things, which do not fall under the respective predicate. Usually the sign for the internal negation is “ $\sim$ .” The scope of the internal negation can now be understood in two ways: firstly, its scope are all the things, which do not fall under the respective predicate, but at the same time it is limited to those things, about which it is meaningful to say that they are P or  $\sim$ P, e.g., it can be seen as senseless to say that stones are unwise or that numbers are immortal (in older logic it corresponds to *negatio privans*). Secondly, the scope of the internal negation are all the things, which do not fall under the respective predicate, without any exception (in older logic it corresponds to *negatio infinitans*). We will focus in what follows on only the second one.

At first glance, it seems that it should be possible to reduce internal negation to external negation. It is commonly accepted that the inference from “S is  $\sim$ P” to “ $\neg$ (S is P)” is valid. If one can convincingly argue that even the converse is valid, then one can safely conclude that both negations are equivalent and we can get rid of one of them in our logical practise. As Frege wrote: “if it did not effect an economy of logical primitives. [...] Such economy always shows that analysis has been pushed further, which leads to a clearer insight.”<sup>2</sup>

At first sight, it seems that it should not be so difficult to come up with such inference, e.g., in the following way:

1.  $\neg$ (S is P)
2. (S is P)  $\vee$  (S is  $\sim$ P)
3. S is  $\sim$ P

This inference is apparently valid, because the first disjunct of premise 2 is false, according to premise 1, so we may safely conclude the second disjunct. What is questionable, however, is the status of premise 2 itself. Is it the particular case of the principle of the excluded middle? The principle of the excluded middle is usually formulated in the form  $p \vee \neg p$ , and by substituting “S is P” for “p,” one may obtain (S is P)  $\vee$   $\neg$ (S is P). In other words, the principle of the excluded middle works with external negation. Premise 2 works with the internal negation. Premise 2 is thus not obtainable purely logically. At the same time, as it was shown, it is crucial in attempts to reduce internal negation to external negation.

In what follows, my concern will be to introduce and evaluate I. Kant’s approach to the problem of our premise 2. Internal negation, for Kant, is undoubtedly not equivalent with external negation. The evidence is his “Table of Judgements” (in *Critique of Pure Reason*), where in the category of Quality one can find the so-called infinite judgements. Infinite judgements are simply affirmative judgements with an internally negated predicate, i.e., of the form “S is  $\sim$ P.” This kind of judgement is explicitly kept apart from the negative judgements.

Regarding the negating of the predicate, i.e., internal negation, Kant interestingly differentiates between two similar, but not identical, principles, the Principle of Determinability and

<sup>1</sup> Laurence R. Horn, *A Natural History of Negation* (Stanford, CA: CSLI Publications, 2001), 106–109.

<sup>2</sup> Gottlob Frege, “Negation,” in *Collected Papers on Mathematics, Logic, and Philosophy*, ed. Brian McGuinness (Oxford: Blackwell, 1984), 384–385.

the Principle of Complete Determination. The first, the Principle of Determinability, says about every concept “that of every two contradictory predicates only one can apply to it.” The second, the Principle of Complete Determination, says about every thing that “among all possible predicates of things, insofar as they are compared with their opposites, only one must apply to it”<sup>3</sup> (A572/B600). To better understand Kant’s terminology, it is important to know that Kant distinguishes between the concept of a thing and a thing and moreover distinguishes between the predicating of a concept and the predicating of a thing. The Principle of Determinability therefore concerns the determinability of concepts. For Kant, concept formation and its regulation is an a priori matter, thus also the truth or falsity of the Principle of Determinability is an a priori matter. Moreover, it is related to concepts only (thus not intuitions), so it is also an analytic judgement, which means, that its truth or falsity rests solely on reason – “rests on the principle of contradiction,” as Kant puts it. It says, briefly, that for a given concept C and contradictory predicates P and non-P, C is P or C is non-P, but C cannot be P and non-P simultaneously. It really is a case of the principle of contradiction. But – and it is important – it does not say that one of the opposed predicates P and non-P must always apply to C. The principle of the excluded middle need therefore not be fulfilled here.

The Principle of Complete Determination, in contrast, deals with things, not concepts. It says, briefly, that for a given thing T and contradictory predicates P and non-P, T is P or T is non-P, but T cannot be P and non-P simultaneously. It is again a case of the Principle of Contradiction. But – and it is important – it does also say that one of the opposed predicates P and non-P must always apply to T. The principle of the excluded middle therefore needs to be fulfilled here. Consequently, the validity of the Principle of Complete Determination does not rest solely on the Principle of Contradiction, so for Kant this principle is not analytic, but synthetic. And a fortiori – we will see that for Kant the truth value of this principle regarding a concrete object can be seen only a posteriori. This is worth considering because the principle can be seen as a straightforward expression of premise 2 above. If the Principle of Determinability will be said to correspond to premise 2, then the letter “S” will need to denote a concept and – more importantly – it will need to be reformulated, because its form corresponds more to a case of the Principle of the Excluded Middle than the Principle of Contradiction. In the next section we will examine Kant’s arguments for his claim that the Principle of Complete Determination is synthetic.

## **From the Principle of Complete Determination to Kant’s Concept of the Whole of Experience**

Kant’s argument for the Principle of Complete Determination being synthetic is in a way simple and was suggested above: the principle concerns things, not concepts, and the question as to whether things are determinate with respect to (every) opposite pair of predicates and can be answered only by empirical investigating of things, i.e., a posteriori, thus not analytically (a judgement cannot be both analytic and a posteriori).

More concretely, the principle concerns all possible objects of experience and their relation to our thought. In this kind of thinking something (in Kant’s terminology the empirical form) can be given a priori, but Kant also emphasizes that the reality in appearance has to be given (empirical matter) (A581/B609). It is not an additional requirement, because e.g., a purely

---

<sup>3</sup> In translating passages from the first Critique I follow the translation from the translation of Paul Guyer and Allen Wood, only with one exception when I translate Kant’s term *durchgängig* as “complete.” I follow here Nicholas Stang; see Nicholas E. Stang, “Kant on Complete Determination and Infinite Judgement,” *British Journal for the History of Philosophy* 20, no. 6 (2012): 1118–1119.

spatiotemporal object with no (particular) size, shape, location, etc. or a causally determined object with no particular law of force as a cause are not possible objects of experience. What is, however, precisely this reality in appearance, which has to be present in the concept of possible objects of experience?

But because that which constitutes the thing itself (in appearance), namely the real, has to be given, without which it could not be that at all, but that in which the real in all appearances is given is the one all-encompassing experience, the material for the possibility of all objects of sense has to be presupposed as given in one sum total; and all possibility of empirical objects, their differences from one another, and their complete determination, can rest only on the limitation of this sum total. (A582/B610)

With the quotation we finally come to the key concept of Kant's theory – the all-encompassing experience. All-encompassing experience is the totality of all subject's experiences. Kant contrasts it with hallucinations or dreams, for if we speak only about a particular perceptual episode, then even a dream or hallucination is an experience. The reason why one can distinguish between a dream or hallucination and experience is that in an all-encompassing experience the particular experiences cohere with one another. This coherence, according to Kant, means that the experiences are "correctly and thoroughly connected up according to empirical laws" (A493/B521). Clearly the experience in which one can fly or is bigger than Earth is easily recognizable as a dream. It follows from this that something is a possible object of experience if and only if it is in coherence with the all-encompassing experience, or, in Kant's words, "the objects of experience are never given in themselves, but only in experience, and they do not exist at all outside it." From the previous quotation one can understand that the all-encompassing experience is not just the sum of experiences, but it is also structured by "empirical laws." It will be misleading to treat those "empirical laws" automatically as the laws of physics, etc. Even men without any knowledge of scientific laws have their all-encompassing experience, and even for them the idea of flying or giant men will seem impossible. With this provision we can call it one's theory of the empirical world. More precisely, Nicholas F. Stang summarizes and defines the concept of the all-encompassing experience as follows: "It is the lawful representation of the empirical world that is maximally systematic and maximally justified by the totality of sensory states (perceptions) of human subjects."<sup>4</sup>

Now, and this is the key point, one can ask if in his/her theory of the empirical world objects are determinate with respect to every pair of opposite predicates, e.g., if every object is healthy or unhealthy, which is even for the case of humans sometimes not easy to decide. Precisely this possible vagueness of objects is the reason why the Principle of Complete Determination cannot be said to be valid a priori.

Just to be sure, Kant definitely did not think that the Principle of Complete Determination is (empirically) decidable for a given thing, it is rather an imperative of reason – "complete determination is consequently a concept that we can never exhibit *in concreto* in its totality, and thus it is grounded on an idea which has its seat solely in reason, which prescribes to understanding the rule of its complete use."

For our purposes the last two lines of one of the previous quotations from Kant are also important. Kant here argues that all possibility, differences and determination of empirical objects "rest only on the limitation of this sum total." This means that the process of concept (or strictly speaking, the extension of concept) formation is the process of division. It is reminiscent of the Aristotelian idea of being as the highest genus and all other concepts as subordinate concepts

---

<sup>4</sup> Stang, "Kant," 1132.

to it. If the concept formation is the division of the sum total, then every concept can be read as the sum total minus some specification, i.e., “possible object of experience, which is [...]”

## From Kant’s Concept of the Whole of Experience to Boole’s Concept of the Universe of Discourse

We will now move to George Boole and his concept of logic. I hope that a comparison of Kant and Boole will reveal some interesting similarities.

George Boole was the first to use the expression “universe of discourse” in English. It was concretely in his book *The Laws of Thought* (1854). For Boole, “universe of discourse is in the strictest sense the ultimate subject of the discourse.”<sup>5</sup> What does it mean?

In every discourse, whether of the mind conversing with its own thoughts or of the individual in his intercourse with others, there is an assumed or expressed limit within which the subjects of its operation are confined. The most unfettered discourse is that in which the words we use are understood in the widest possible application, and for them the limits of discourse are co-extensive with those of the universe itself.<sup>6</sup>

The universe of discourse is thus the class of all objects, symbolized by 1. Boole’s original concept which presupposes only one fixed universe of discourse, but in 1854 the version of a pluralistic multi-universe framework is proposed. In Boole’s logic, any subsequent specialization of the subject of the proposition is construed as a concept based on the concept of the universe of discourse in addition to whatever else it involves, e.g., to say “Water is fluid” is equivalent to “Water is a fluid thing,” or “human” has a logical form “entity, that is a human.” John Corcoran call it the Principle of Wholistic Reference: “each and every [...] proposition refers to the universe of discourse as such.”<sup>7</sup>

Now, what does Boole say about internal negation? In Chapter III of his *Laws of Thought*, Proposition III, he claims that to any class of objects  $x$  there is a supplementary class of all objects, which are not comprehended in class  $x$ . If we denote the original class  $x$  and the universal class 1, then the complementary class will be  $1-x$ . For our purposes it is crucial that as a consequence of this Boole stated that “the whole Universe is made up of these two classes together,”<sup>8</sup> i.e., the principle of the excluded middle holds for a given class and its complementary class. Our premise 2 therefore holds for Boole. What is Boole’s reason for this claim? According to Boole, the idea of the supplementary class of objects “is suggested to the mind,” which means that it belongs to the operations of the mind, as Boole puts it. Operations of the mind are laws of thought, and even though they are “deduced from observation,”<sup>9</sup> these observations are observations of the operations of the mind. The existence of complementary classes (and the fact that our premise 2 obeys the Principle of the Excluded Middle for Boole) is thus something wholly independent of empirical facts or other epistemological issues. A dependence on them is, as we have seen, the reason for a posteriori and synthetic character of it for Kant.

One can now see the differences and similarities between Kant’s concept of the all-encompassing experience and Boole’s concept of the universe of discourse: firstly, in both concepts

<sup>5</sup> George Boole, *An Investigation of the Laws of Thought* (Urbana, Illinois: Project Gutenberg, 2006), 30, [http://self.gutenberg.org/articles/eng/Laws\\_of\\_Thought?View=embedded%27](http://self.gutenberg.org/articles/eng/Laws_of_Thought?View=embedded%27).

<sup>6</sup> Boole, *Laws of Thought*, 30.

<sup>7</sup> John Corcoran, “The Principle of Wholistic Reference,” *Manuscripto* 27, no. 1 (2004): 498.

<sup>8</sup> Boole, *Laws of Thought*, 34.

<sup>9</sup> *Ibid.*, 29.

the possibility of objects is given by some already given whole. Each object is thinkable only as a part of this whole. In both, however, the concept formation is the division of the previous whole, which is in a way an ultimate condition of our thinking, so what holds for objects, holds *cum grano salis* even for concepts. The difference is, *inter alia*, in that for Kant, when thinking about possible objects of experience, we have to deal not only with the (empirical) form, but also something real has to be given (an all-encompassing experience). Boole's concept does not require such a condition. If we return to the Principle of Complete Determination, in Kant's concept it is a question of empirical knowledge, whether the principle is valid, which means that the principle is synthetic. If in Boole's philosophy of logic the condition of something real has to be given is not required, then the question of the validity of the principle can be answered analytically, or in the case of the multi-universe version just simply by choice. So if one prefers the universal applicability of the *tertium non datur*, then it is possible to choose a universe of discourse, in which objects are determinate in that way. As a result, internal negation can be seen as being equivalent with external negation.

## Conclusion

The previous comparison can be seen as partial evidence for John Corcoran's thesis that the concept of logic as a formal ontology began with Boole (in contrast to Aristotle's project of logic as formal epistemology).<sup>10</sup> In order to see it, it will be convenient to discuss in more detail the nature of the objects, which constitute the universe of discourse. Boole, at the beginning of his 1854 book, wrote that there is a dispute about the meaning of the signs used as names in the process of thinking. According to Boole, "By some it is maintained, that they represent the conceptions of the mind alone; by others, that they represent things."<sup>11</sup> In other words, Boole presents the clash between idealism and realism and he himself claims that signs represent things (Boole does not offer any further reasoning for this claim). To refute the position that names represent the concepts of the mind, means to refute the epistemological disputes about the possibility of the human mind to acknowledge objective reality. This holds even more for the pluralistic multi-universe framework of the universe of discourse. This enlargement (or deliberation) in a way makes logic independent from epistemological limitations of knowledge, because in this framework the given universe of discourse is a matter of choice.

In contrast, logic can lose its connection with the empirical world and is then open to what Kant named transcendental illusion, i.e., the illusion that we are dealing with real (but nonempirical) objects, whereas it is just an illusion of an object. Similar doubts are sometimes raised even in modern logic, especially with respect to the metaphysics of possible worlds and Platonism in logic.

Karel Šebela  
 Department of Philosophy  
 Palacký University  
 Křížkovského 12  
 Olomouc 771 80  
 Czech Republic  
 e-mail: karel.sebela@upol.cz

---

<sup>10</sup> John Corcoran, "Aristotle's Prior Analytics and Boole's Laws of Thought," *History and Philosophy of Logic* 24, no. 4 (2003): 278–279.

<sup>11</sup> Boole, *Laws of Thought*, 18.

# Vana Nicolaidou-Kyrianidou

National and Kapodistrian University of Athens, Greece

## Politics and Cultures in the Thought of Hannah Arendt<sup>1</sup>

**Abstract** | The present paper examines the issue of multiculturalism in connection with Hannah Arendt's view of the public sphere. Section I examines the meaning of culture as directly related to Arendt's understanding of worldliness. Section II analyses the meanings of plurality and citizenship as defined by Arendt's anthropology. The aim is to shed light on the antithesis of Arendt to the communitarian cultural homogeneity of communal existence, and also on her clear detachment from political individualism. In Section III, based on the narrative structure of action and personal identity, I conclude that Arendt's concept of the public sphere, opposing an unconditionally multicultural society, is consequently not characterised by the same relativism with that which exists in the latter. This is only so because the public sphere presupposes a civic culture. Although perceived as universal, civic culture is in fact considered a creation of Europe and it is only in European languages that the genuine meaning of politics survives.

**Keywords** | Hannah Arendt – Politics – Communities – Identities – Culture – Plurality

.....

### The Meaning of Culture

The truly comprehensive modern meaning of culture<sup>2</sup> is the result “of the secularisation of religion and the dissolution of traditional values.”<sup>3</sup> It is consequently related to “the polytheism of values,” which puts to test the cohesion of contemporary societies. It is all about the question of political legitimacy following the abolition of universal standards and the ongoing potential for clashing on the horizon of human coexistence.

Examining the relationship between culture and politics, in the background of the undeniable “loss of tradition”<sup>4</sup> and the emergence of a voracious consumer mass society,<sup>5</sup> Arendt states that not only the word itself but also the meaning of culture is a creation of the Romans,<sup>6</sup> “perhaps the most political people we have known.”<sup>7</sup> Related etymologically to the cultivation of the earth, culture refers to the transformation of mere nature into the world, that is, the permanent habitat

<sup>1</sup> Thanks are due to the *Foundation for Education and European Culture Nicos and Lydia Trichas*, Athens, for supporting this research.

<sup>2</sup> Cf. Robert Legros, *L'humanité éprouvée* (Paris: Classiques Garnier, 2014), 41–45.

<sup>3</sup> Hannah Arendt, *The Jewish Writings*, eds. Jerome Kohn and Ron H. Feldman (New York: Schocken Books, 2007), 298.

<sup>4</sup> Hannah Arendt, *Between Past and Future*, Introduction by Jerome Kohn (New York: Penguin Books, 2006), 94.

<sup>5</sup> Hannah Arendt, *The Human Condition* (Chicago and London: Chicago University Press, 1958), 126

<sup>6</sup> Arendt, *Between Past and Future*, 208.

<sup>7</sup> Arendt, *The Human Condition*, 7. Cf. Hannah Arendt, “On Hannah Arendt,” in *The Recovery of the Public World*, ed. Melvyn A. Hill (New York: St. Martin's Press, 1979), 330–331.

of human beings.<sup>8</sup> Culture belongs to the activity of fabrication.<sup>9</sup> Work, labor and action form the “three fundamental activities”<sup>10</sup> of *vita activa*.<sup>11</sup>

Labour constitutes a basic human activity, driven by the irrefutable need of physical survival.<sup>12</sup> It is *homo faber* who builds the material field to host human affairs. The works of the *mortal maker* attribute to the world its “thing-character,” and are thus destined to resist the insatiable needs of animal life.<sup>13</sup> Constituting “objective” reality as it compares to “ever-changing nature,” artifacts become the basic condition to *humanize* life<sup>14</sup> by de-naturalising the human being.<sup>15</sup> Unlike *animal laborans* that remains *outside the world*,<sup>16</sup> the “human condition of work is worldliness.”<sup>17</sup>

The products of fabrication are mainly items of use. The prevalence of the principle of usefulness which the maker serves, transforms all things into means, depriving them of any inherent value. Thus, the measure of all things, under the condition they are tools of barter value, becomes man-centered interest.<sup>18</sup> *Homo faber* is the builder of the world which, nevertheless, as long as it is governed by his principle, remains meaningless.<sup>19</sup> According to the ontology phenomenologically originating with Arendt, “Being and Appearing Coincide,”<sup>20</sup> the phenomenal character of existence establishes that whatever exists, is a shape.<sup>21</sup> If utility is therefore one standard of the world, beauty is the other.<sup>22</sup> Being useless, the creations of culture are made *for the sake of* the world.<sup>23</sup> This means that they exist to satisfy the mundane criterion *par excellence*.<sup>24</sup> Due to their non-anthropocentric character, their appreciation demands detachment from the care of the self. This distance generates the Kantian “disinterested joy,”<sup>25</sup> which is what Arendt considers the appropriate attitude towards worldly things.

As an artifact, culture serves the ideals of “permanence, stability and durability.”<sup>26</sup> Furthermore, because works of art do not satisfy utilitarian needs, they resist the wear of time more than all other things.<sup>27</sup> Culture is therefore related to care for the durability of the common world. In this sense, its *raison d'être* is to save memorable human deeds from oblivion.<sup>28</sup>

This role of preservation connects culture directly to politics, that is human plurality *in actu*.

<sup>8</sup> Cf. Arendt, *Between Past and Future*, 206.

<sup>9</sup> Arendt, *The Human Condition*, 168–169.

<sup>10</sup> *Ibid.*, 7.

<sup>11</sup> Cf. *ibid.*, 12.

<sup>12</sup> *Ibid.*, 7.

<sup>13</sup> *Ibid.*, 94. Cf. Hannah Arendt, “Labor, Work, Action,” in *Amor Mundi. Explorations in the Faith and Thought of Hannah Arendt*, ed. James William Bernauer (Boston, Dordrecht, Lancaster: Martinus Nijhoff Publishers, 1987), 34.

<sup>14</sup> Arendt, *The Human Condition*, 135.

<sup>15</sup> *Ibid.*, 137.

<sup>16</sup> Cf. *ibid.*, 118.

<sup>17</sup> *Ibid.*, 7.

<sup>18</sup> Cf. *ibid.*, 153–156.

<sup>19</sup> *Ibid.*, 154–155.

<sup>20</sup> Hannah Arendt, *Life of the Mind, One. Thinking* (San Diego, New York, London: Harcourt Brace and Co., 1978), 20.

<sup>21</sup> Arendt, *Between Past and Future*, 205; Arendt, *The Human Condition*, 173.

<sup>22</sup> Arendt, *The Human Condition*, 152.

<sup>23</sup> Arendt, *Between Past and Future*, 205, 207; Arendt, *The Human Condition*, 167.

<sup>24</sup> Arendt, *Between Past and Future*, 207.

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

<sup>26</sup> Arendt, *The Human Condition*, 126.

<sup>27</sup> *Ibid.*, 167.

<sup>28</sup> Arendt, *Between Past and Future*, 210.

## The “Plural We”

Reversing the Aristotelian and Platonic hierarchy of the ways of life, word and deed are defined as the utmost of human activities.<sup>29</sup> They constitute the “*differentia specifica* of human beings.”<sup>30</sup> Unlike behaviour, action is the initiative which brings the unexpected new to the world, interrupting the automated flow of events.<sup>31</sup> Acting is the “human answer to the condition of natality.”<sup>32</sup> It manifests the being whose “essence is beginning,” for this very being is endowed with the “gift of freedom.”<sup>33</sup> Natality therefore promises the constant rejuvenation of the world through discontinuity.<sup>34</sup> Unpredictable action is not defined by any model or norm as the activity of fabrication presupposes. It is not subordinate either to the Aristotelian *telos* or to the Platonic Idea.<sup>35</sup> “It is, by definition, a-moral.”<sup>36</sup> Similarly, speech, in the manner of which “most acts are performed,” personifies and establishes action as significant.<sup>37</sup> It is through speech that human beings become political beings.<sup>38</sup> Because of this, speech “corresponds to the fact of distinctness.”<sup>39</sup>

Unlike the activities of labour and fabrication, both of which do not necessitate the presence of other people, speaking and acting, which are “truly political activities,”<sup>40</sup> take place solely among human beings and address no one else but themselves.<sup>41</sup> As Arendt argues, plurality is the *conditio per quam* and *sine qua non* for the performance of exclusively human activities.

While describing the way living beings exist, Arendt states: “Plurality is the law of the earth.”<sup>42</sup> With this expression, we understand that plurality is the fact *always expected to happen* as far as it describes the way of being on earth. Since earth is “the very quintessence of the human condition,”<sup>43</sup> we cannot but accept that: “men, not Man, live on the earth and inhabit the world.”<sup>44</sup>

---

<sup>29</sup> Cf. Arendt, *The Human Condition*, 22–23.

<sup>30</sup> Maurizio Passerin d’Entrèves, *The Political Philosophy of Hannah Arendt* (London and New York: Routledge 1994), 66.

<sup>31</sup> Arendt, *Between Past and Future*, 150; Hannah Arendt, “Freedom and Politics,” in *Freedom and Serfdom. An Anthology of Western Thought*, ed. Albert Hunold (Dordrecht: D. Reidel Publishing Company, 1961), 196; Hannah Arendt, *The Promise of Politics*, ed. Jerome Kohn (New York: Schocken Books, 2005), 113; Arendt, *The Human Condition*, 40.

<sup>32</sup> Hannah Arendt, *Crises of the Republic. Lying in Politics. Civil Disobedience. On Violence. Thoughts and Politics and Revolution* (San Diego, New York, London: Harcourt Brace and Co., 1972), 179; Arendt, *The Human Condition*, 178.

<sup>33</sup> Hannah Arendt, *Essays in Understanding 1930–1954. Formation, Exile and Totalitarianism*, ed. Jerome Kohn (New York: Schocken Books, 1994), 321. Cf. Arendt, *The Human Condition*, 177; Arendt, “Freedom and Politics,” 216.

<sup>34</sup> Cf. Arendt, *Crises of the Republic. Lying in Politics*, 78.

<sup>35</sup> Hannah Arendt, *Denktagebuch 1950 bis 1973*, hrsg. von Ursula Ludz und Ingeborg Nordmann, I–II (Munich: Piper Verlag, 2002), Feb. 1954 [36], 469

<sup>36</sup> “Alles Handeln ist a-moralisch *per definitionem*.” Arendt, *Denktagebuch 1950 bis 1973*, March 1955, [16], 521. Cf. Hannah Arendt, *Responsibility and Judgment*, ed. Jerome Kohn (New York: Schocken Books, 2003), 153, 80.

<sup>37</sup> Arendt, *The Human Condition*, 177–178.

<sup>38</sup> *Ibid.*, 3.

<sup>39</sup> *Ibid.*, 176.

<sup>40</sup> Arendt, *Between Past and Future*, 214.

<sup>41</sup> Arendt, *The Human Condition*, 188.

<sup>42</sup> Arendt, *Life of the Mind, One. Thinking*, 19.

<sup>43</sup> Arendt, *The Human Condition*, 2, 10.

<sup>44</sup> *Ibid.*, 7; Arendt, *The Promise of Politics*, 61–62; Arendt, *Between Past and Future*, 205.

If Kant's cosmopolitan right<sup>45</sup> bases the common possession of the earth on the fact that the Earth is spherical, plurality as a fact, being an object of universal experience with Arendt, transforms into a paradigm. Namely, plurality, as an object of thinking,<sup>46</sup> is chosen as the best among all the known conditions of human coexistence.<sup>47</sup> This status of example is attributed to plurality by the option of conforming to the observed *status terrenis* of living beings.<sup>48</sup> Plurality constitutes the transcendent (of the human subject), yet immanent (in earthly reality) evaluative criterion of immiscible human coexistence.<sup>49</sup> For politics which is "based on the fact of human plurality,"<sup>50</sup> "the in-between is not physical but normative."<sup>51</sup> Thus, as far as political theory is concerned, plurality is a *fait à être*: unconditioned, regarding its rise, and at the same time an exemplary way of institutionalising the public sphere.

It is neither the *height* of the absolute nor the *inside* of the sovereign subject but the *in-between* which is defined as a place of *normativity* by the world-centered view of Arendt. It is the impossibility to appropriate space which widens between individuals connected with one another through speaking and acting; these individuals are distinguished by that distance which makes their dissimilarity easily discernible: "Human plurality [...] has the twofold character of equality and distinction."<sup>52</sup> Understood as "public space,"<sup>53</sup> the world seems to be the institutional counterpart of "law of the earth."

The world turns into the objective standard of the human way of life, thus remedying the problem of legitimacy deprivation caused by the collapse of absolute standards, God or the law of Nature. As a *meta-positive* criterion, the world opposes the perception which inevitably prevailed concerning the Law which identifies what is just with what is good for the individual, the family, the majority or the people.<sup>54</sup> The priority of the world comes to support the anti-communitarian priority of justice over good. It also revives the republican concept regarding the courageous transcending of oneself for the benefit of unselfishly occupying themselves with common affairs.<sup>55</sup> "At the center of politics lies concern for the world, not for man."<sup>56</sup> It becomes clear that as a manifestation of Arendt's political justice, plurality is not identified in all its forms

<sup>45</sup> Hans Reiss, ed., H. B. Nisbet, trans., *Kant Political Writings* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1991), 172.

<sup>46</sup> "What is the subject of our thought? Experience! Nothing else." Arendt, "On Hannah Arendt," 308.

<sup>47</sup> Hannah Arendt, *Lectures on Kant's Political Philosophy*, ed. Ronald Beiner (Chicago and London: The University of Chicago Press, 1982), 76–77. Cf. Arendt, *Between Past and Future*, 243–244.

<sup>48</sup> Cf. Arendt, *Life of the Mind, One. Thinking*, 20.

<sup>49</sup> "Concrete political norms and ethical prescriptions emerge from the unchosen character of these modes of cohabitation." Judith Butler, *Parting Ways. Jewishness and the Critique of Zionism* (New York: Columbia University Press, 2012), 125.

<sup>50</sup> Arendt, *The Promise of Politics*, 93.

<sup>51</sup> Jeremy Waldron, "Arendt's Constitutional Politics," in *The Cambridge Companion to Hannah Arendt*, ed. Dana Villa (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2000), 204.

<sup>52</sup> Arendt, *The Human Condition*, 175, 178.

<sup>53</sup> Hannah Arendt, "'What remains? The Language remains.' A Conversation with Günter Gaus," in *The Last Interview and Other Conversations*, trans. Joan Stambaugh (Brooklyn, London: Melville House, 2013), 28.

<sup>54</sup> Hannah Arendt, *The Origins of Totalitarianism* (San Diego, New York, London: Harcourt Brace and Co., 1979), 299.

<sup>55</sup> Arendt, *Between Past and Future*, 155; Arendt, *The Human Condition*, 36; Hannah Arendt, "Public Rights and Private Interests. In Response to Charles Frankel," in *Small Comforts for Hard Times. Humanists on Public Policy*, eds. Michael Mooney and Florian Stuber (New York: Columbia University Press, 1977), 106.

<sup>56</sup> Arendt, *The Promise of Politics*, 106. Cf. Arendt, *Responsibility and Judgment*, 151; Hannah Arendt, *On Revolution* (London, New York: Penguin Books, 1990), 279, TI, 31.

with “communal existence.”<sup>57</sup> For Arendt, the ways of coexistence which do not correspond to the definition of politics as “the coexistence and association of *different* men”<sup>58</sup> are anti-political.<sup>59</sup> Phenomenal by nature, the world is formed as common by the total of the points of view of the participants. Due to its inherent relativity, the political realm remains alien to absolute certainties.<sup>60</sup> It is the realm of *doxa* in its double meaning as a viewpoint and shining glory.<sup>61</sup>

Opinion belongs to the *unruled* realm which opens up between two coercions: of rational and of factual truth.<sup>62</sup> *Doxa* through speech expresses what the world looks like (*dokei moi*) to an individual in a particular position from which she views the “objective datum,”<sup>63</sup> that is, a world common to all. Despite the fact that opinion is always individual,<sup>64</sup> it is not “subjective fantasy and arbitrariness.”<sup>65</sup> The formation of opinion presupposes the existence of a public realm, and is “tested in a process of exchange opinion against opinion.”<sup>66</sup> Arendt’s separation of the social from the political saves the individuality of opinion from any grouping on the basis of common interests, either private or class. Moreover, on the horizon of her antipathy for the party system,<sup>67</sup> as well as the distinction between people and the mob<sup>68</sup> Arendt, following Tocqueville, denounces *impersonal* public opinion.<sup>69</sup> What each person’s opinion is worth shall be proven through the degree of agreement their opinion is going to achieve.<sup>70</sup> Opinion is therefore not “something absolute and valid for all.”<sup>71</sup> The performance of solely human activities demands the creation and institutional shielding of a space in which “human plurality is the paradoxical plurality of unique beings.”<sup>72</sup> Coexistence is political to the extent that it establishes equality among people who are indeed inevitably unequal, and that is from both a natural and a social perspective.<sup>73</sup> For the same reason, it allows the singularity of each and every individual to come into broad daylight as such.<sup>74</sup> The city-state materialised the best of the experienced human conditions. *Agora* means the space where freedom makes its appearance as tangible reality – this happens because within its institutionalised boundaries,<sup>75</sup> everyone’s opinion is taken into consideration and acting is perceived as an act “in concert.”<sup>76</sup> Arendt’s “plural we”<sup>77</sup> denounces the *monologi-*

---

<sup>57</sup> Arendt, “Freedom and Politics,” 191.

<sup>58</sup> Arendt, *The Promise of Politics*, 93.

<sup>59</sup> Cf. Arendt, *The Human Condition*, 57–58.

<sup>60</sup> Hannah Arendt, *Men in Dark Times* (San Diego, New York: Harcourt Brace and Co., 1983), 30–31.

<sup>61</sup> Arendt, “Philosophy and Politics,” 80.

<sup>62</sup> Arendt, *Between Past and Future*, 235.

<sup>63</sup> *Ibid.*, 219.

<sup>64</sup> Arendt, *On Revolution*, 227.

<sup>65</sup> Arendt, “Philosophy and Politics,” 80.

<sup>66</sup> Arendt, *On Revolution*, 227.

<sup>67</sup> Hannah Arendt, Hans Morgenthau et al., “The Importance of Power,” in *Dissent, Power, and Confrontation*, ed. Alexander Klein (New York, St. Louis: McGraw-Hill Book Company, 1971), 212.

<sup>68</sup> Arendt, *The Origins of Totalitarianism*, 107.

<sup>69</sup> Arendt, *On Revolution*, 228; Arendt, *The Jewish Writings*, 391–392.

<sup>70</sup> Arendt, *Crises of the Republic. Lying in Politics*, 68.

<sup>71</sup> Arendt, “Philosophy and Politics,” 80; Arendt, *Between Past and Future*, 238.

<sup>72</sup> Arendt, *The Human Condition*, 176.

<sup>73</sup> Arendt, *The Origins of Totalitarianism*, 301; Arendt, *The Human Condition*, 33, 41.

<sup>74</sup> Arendt, *The Human Condition*, 175–176.

<sup>75</sup> Arendt, *On Revolution*, 275.

<sup>76</sup> Arendt, *The Human Condition*, 189; Arendt, *On Revolution*, 30; Arendt, *The Promise of Politics*, 45–46.

<sup>77</sup> Arendt, *Life of the Mind, One. Thinking*, 200.

cal character of Rousseau's *volonté générale*.<sup>78</sup> It consequently opposes his claim for a culturally homogeneous political body.<sup>79</sup> It also condemns the *völkisch* identity, which establishes the concept of the political in Carl Schmitt.<sup>80</sup> It also undoubtedly rejects organic unity and homogeneity – at which “the tradition of the nation-state thinking”<sup>81</sup> aims – and according to which, those who do not share the *common* traits are to face the irrefutable dilemma: “either complete assimilation – that is, actual disappearance – or emigration.”<sup>82</sup> Referring to her personal experience, Arendt emphasised that she was not obliged to “pay the price of assimilation”<sup>83</sup> in order to be an American citizen.

The inherent traits of action exhibit the nature of Arendt's *sui generis* republicanism.<sup>84</sup> Arendt's turn to Antiquity is enriched with her adoption of Kantian spontaneity.<sup>85</sup> Regarding therefore the *quarrel between Antiquity with Modernity*, she sides with the latter and holds that human beings have no nature, unless what is meant is their capacity to become “something highly unnatural.”<sup>86</sup> Human beings are not citizens by nature.<sup>87</sup> By adopting, in contrast, the pre-Platonic agonal spirit, Arendt replaces the modernist fear of death with the fear of *invisibilty* and the urge for self-preservation with that for distinction.<sup>88</sup> She therefore replaces the “universal pursuit of happiness”<sup>89</sup> with “public happiness.”<sup>90</sup> Speaking and acting reveal the

<sup>78</sup> Arendt, *On Revolution*, 76–78, 156, 183. Cf. Margaret Canovan, “Arendt, Rousseau, and Human Plurality in Politics,” *The Journal of Politics* 45 (1983): 286–301.

<sup>79</sup> Cf. e.g., Jean-Jacques Rousseau, *Discourse of Political Economy and Social Contract*, trans. Christopher Betts (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1999), I: 54–58, II: 89–90, IV: 156–157.

<sup>80</sup> Cf. Carl Schmitt, *The Concept of the Political*, trans. George Schwab with Leo Strauss' *Notes on Schmitt's Essay*, trans. J. Harvey Lomax and Foreword by Tracy B. Strong, (Chicago and London: The University of Chicago Press, 1996), 27. Also *ibid.* *The Crisis of Parliamentary Democracy*, trans. Ellen Kennedy (Cambridge Mass. and London: M. I. T. Press, 1988), 9. Cf. *ibid.*, *Legality and Legitimacy*, trans. and ed. Jeffrey Seitzer, with an Introduction by John P. McCormick (Durham and London: Duke University Press, 2004), 28. *Ibid.*, *Glossarium. Aufzeichnungen der Jahre 1947–1951* (Berlin: Duncker and Humblot, 1991), 18. Yves Charles Zarka, *Un détail nazi dans la pensée de Carl Schmitt. La justification des lois de Nuremberg du 15 septembre 1935* (Paris: P. U. F., 2005), 35–42. Cf. Liisi Keedus, “‘Human and nothing but human.’ How Schmittian is Hannah Arendt's critique of human rights and international law?,” *History of European Ideas* 37 (2011): 194–196.

<sup>81</sup> Christian Volk, “The Decline of Order. Hannah Arendt and the Paradoxes of the Nation-State,” in *Politics in Dark Times. Encounters with Hannah Arendt*, ed. Seyla Benhabib (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2010), 180.

<sup>82</sup> Arendt, *The Jewish Writings*, 352, 367; Arendt, *Essays in Understanding 1930–1954*, 206–211.

<sup>83</sup> Hannah Arendt, “Sonning Prize speech”, in *The Hannah Arendt papers at the Library of Congress. Essays and Lectures, Series: Speeches and Writings File, 1923–1975* (Copenhagen, Denmark 1975), 2, 1, <http://memory.loc.gov/cgi-bin/ampage>; Arendt, *The Jewish Writings*, 367.

<sup>84</sup> Cf. Margaret Canovan, *Hannah Arendt. A Reinterpretation of Her Political Thought* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1995), 201.

<sup>85</sup> Arendt, *The Promise of Politics*, 113; Arendt, *Essays in Understanding 1930–1954*, 170; Ronald Beiner, “Action, Natality, and Citizenship: Hannah Arendt's Concept of Freedom,” in *Conceptions of Liberty in Political Philosophy*, eds. Zbigniew Pelczynski and John Gray (London: St. Martins Press, 1984), 357–366. Also, Canovan, *Hannah Arendt*, 212.

<sup>86</sup> Arendt, *The Origins of Totalitarianism*, 455, 234.

<sup>87</sup> Cf. Arendt, *The Promise of Politics*, 95. Cf. Arendt, *Denktagebuch 1950 bis 1973*, Sept. 1950 [29], 21.

<sup>88</sup> Cf. Arendt, *The Human Condition*, 180.

<sup>89</sup> *Ibid.*, 134.

<sup>90</sup> Arendt, *Between Past and Future*, 259; Arendt, *On Revolution*, 127, 275–256; Hannah Arendt, “Thoughts on Politics and Revolution: A Commentary,” interview by Adelbert Reif and trans. by Denver Lindley, in *Crises of the Republic* (Summer 1970), repr. in Hannah Arendt, *The Last Interview and Other Conversations* (Brooklyn and London: Melville House, 2013), 71.

unique identity of the agent, that is, “who” that person is.<sup>91</sup> In the distinction between “whoness” and “what someone is,” the former does not refer to the accidental traits deriving from various loyalties of a conditioned being.<sup>92</sup> Moreover, it cannot be analyzed to the predicates of a human nature-objective standard of perfection. In addition, it does not draw its significance from the modernistic concept of an unchanging, objective human nature.<sup>93</sup> Since action is free to the extent it transcends “motives and aims,”<sup>94</sup> everyone should be treated solely on the basis of his doings.<sup>95</sup> The answer to the question of “who somebody is” becomes evident through the various interpretations of his public appearance: “identity is not the condition but the product of action.”<sup>96</sup> The actor is the doer and the sufferer of a new story,<sup>97</sup> which acquires meaning through its narration. The storyteller shall give the final answer to “who you are.”<sup>98</sup> As long as culture exists, while it preserves that part of the past which is worth remembering, it does not allow the world to render itself meaningless.

Furthermore, thanks to the concept of the public realm as a theatrical scene,<sup>99</sup> the “political self” is perceived as the “theatrical self.”<sup>100</sup> This concept reveals the ephemeral and perishable nature of public activities. Like labour, and contrary to fabrication, acting and speaking leave no tangible product behind meant to last after they are complete.<sup>101</sup> Similarly as with the performing arts,<sup>102</sup> action lasts only for as long as it is being performed. Only the praise of the audience and remembrance can preserve valuable words and deeds from oblivion.<sup>103</sup> Culture, as *poiesis*, satisfies through reification the need for the permanence of the “living deeds and spoken words,”<sup>104</sup> handing them over to the following generations.<sup>105</sup> Deprived of fabrication models, human activity becomes a paragon for the production of solely worldly things. The purely worldly character of deed and word makes clear that political activity, like the products of culture,<sup>106</sup> has nothing to do with usefulness. The right criterion to judge human deeds and words is greatness due to their splendour:<sup>107</sup> “as the good is the norm of the private life so the beautiful is the norm of the public.”<sup>108</sup>

---

<sup>91</sup> Arendt, *The Human Condition*, 179.

<sup>92</sup> *Ibid.*, 9.

<sup>93</sup> Albert O. Hirschman, *The Passions and the Interests. Political Arguments for Capitalism before its Triumph* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1977), 12–14.

<sup>94</sup> Arendt, *Between Past and Future*, 150; Arendt, *The Human Condition*, 179.

<sup>95</sup> Arendt, *The Origins of Totalitarianism*, 276, 6; Hannah Arendt, *Eichmann in Jerusalem. A Report on the Banality of Evil* (New York: Penguin Books, 1994), 278.

<sup>96</sup> Bonnie Honig, “Arendt, Identity, and Difference,” *Political Theory* 16 (1988): 89.

<sup>97</sup> Arendt, *The Human Condition*, 190; Arendt, *Between Past and Future*, 45.

<sup>98</sup> Arendt, *The Human Condition*, 192. Cf. Arendt, *Essays in Understanding 1930–1954*, 320; Arendt, *Lectures on Kant's Political Philosophy*, 56.

<sup>99</sup> Cf. Arendt, *Between Past and Future*, 152.

<sup>100</sup> Shiraz Dossa, *The Public Realm and the Public Self. The Political Theory of Hannah Arendt* (Waterloo, Ont.: Wirlfrid Laurier University Press, 1989), 93.

<sup>101</sup> Arendt, *The Human Condition*, 183.

<sup>102</sup> Arendt, *Between Past and Future*, 152, 197; Arendt, *The Human Condition*, 207.

<sup>103</sup> Arendt, *The Promise of Politics*, 45. Cf. Arendt, *The Human Condition*, 95; Arendt, *Denktagebuch 1950 bis 1973*, Nov. 1952 [28], 290.

<sup>104</sup> Arendt, *The Human Condition*, 206.

<sup>105</sup> Arendt, *Between Past and Future*, 42–44, 213–215; Arendt, *The Human Condition*, 168, 173, 204.

<sup>106</sup> Cf. Arendt, *Between Past and Future*, 215–219.

<sup>107</sup> Arendt, *The Human Condition*, 180–181, 205.

<sup>108</sup> Arendt, *Denktagebuch 1950 bis 1973*, Aug. 1957 [36], 583.

Arendt's pessimism concerning the re-naturalisation of mass society and the final prevalence of *animal laborans* at the expense of the "public person," is inherently connected to the loss of "worldly objectivity" of works of art.<sup>109</sup> The indifference regarding the preservation of the past signifies the un-political indifference towards the world of human beings. The inability of this society to "be cultured or produce a culture" is because "culture can be safe only with those who love the world for its own sake."<sup>110</sup> For Arendt, the essential relationship between a cultivated person and a political being lies in care for the world.<sup>111</sup> The world is the common norm for both political<sup>112</sup> and aesthetic judgment. This norm was born of the tradition concerning the *polis* which "supplied the 'form of State' which action required."<sup>113</sup> The city-state as the particular which Arendt establishes as paradigmatic,<sup>114</sup> reached down to us through the creations of culture which preserved culture itself.

Action "produces stories"<sup>115</sup> and "stories make culture out of politics."<sup>116</sup>

## The Cultivated Plurality

The Augustinian relationship between man (*initium*) and the universe (*principium*)<sup>117</sup> redefines Kantian freedom as "freedom of a *relatively* absolute spontaneity."<sup>118</sup> Thus for Arendt "the human person [...] somehow is always a specific mixture of spontaneity and being conditioned."<sup>119</sup> Once they appear on Earth, human beings enter an organised world of coexistence.<sup>120</sup> This entrance into an "already existing web of human relationships"<sup>121</sup> is understood as a "second birth" and happens through "word and deed."<sup>122</sup> To be a person means to have a place in the world. This concerns "the right of every human being to membership in a political community"<sup>123</sup> namely, "the right to have rights." This position is directly connected with Arendt's understanding of human rights.

The importance attributed to one's private place in the world,<sup>124</sup> attests that Arendt is not indifferent towards the institutional protection of the private sphere.<sup>125</sup> Nevertheless, accord-

<sup>109</sup> Cf. Arendt, *Between Past and Future*, 202–208.

<sup>110</sup> Hannah Arendt, "Society and Culture," *Daedalus* 89 (1960): 286–287.

<sup>111</sup> Arendt, *Between Past and Future*, 215.

<sup>112</sup> Arendt, *Responsibility and Judgment*, 80.

<sup>113</sup> Arendt, "Freedom and Politics," 197.

<sup>114</sup> Arendt, *The Human Condition*, 201; Arendt, *The Promise of Politics*, 114.

<sup>115</sup> Arendt, *The Human Condition*, 184.

<sup>116</sup> George Kateb, "The Judgment of Arendt," in *Judgment, Imagination and Politics. Themes from Kant and Arendt*, eds. Ronald Beiner and Jennifer Nedelsky (Lanham: Rowman and Littlefield, 2001), 129.

<sup>117</sup> Hannah Arendt, *Love and Saint Augustine*, eds. Joanna Vecchiarelli Scott and Judith Chelius Stark (Chicago and London: The University of Chicago Press, 1996), 58.

<sup>118</sup> Hannah Arendt, *Life of the Mind, Two. Willing* (San Diego, New York, London: Harcourt Brace and Co., 1978), 110.

<sup>119</sup> Arendt, *Essays in Understanding 1930–1954*, 240.

<sup>120</sup> Arendt, *Crises of the Republic. Lying in Politics*, 87–88; Arendt, *The Jewish Writings*, 297. Cf. Arendt, *The Origins of Totalitarianism*, 291.

<sup>121</sup> Arendt, *The Human Condition*, 184.

<sup>122</sup> *Ibid.*, 176.

<sup>123</sup> Hannah Arendt, "'The Rights of Man' What Are They?," *Modern Review* 3/1, Summer (1949): 34. Cf. Arendt, *The Origins of Totalitarianism*, 296–297.

<sup>124</sup> Arendt, *The Origins of Totalitarianism*, 474. Cf. Arendt, *The Jewish Writings*, 264–265; Arendt, *The Human Condition*, 70–71.

<sup>125</sup> Cf. Arendt, "Public Rights and Private Interests. In Response to Charles Frankel," 105–106.

ing to the hierarchy of human activities, she maintains a strict distinction between “private and public rights”<sup>126</sup> – the former is inexorably connected with the private sphere and consists of the requisite for purely human freedom, meaning political freedom.<sup>127</sup> All the above enlightens Arendt’s criticism of Man’s rights as an abstract entity. Based on the experience regarding the suffering of unwanted minorities in the family of Nations-States, Arendt finds that the loss of political status: does not allow human dignity to reveal itself. Contrary to that, denuding the human being of their empirical traits, turns them into a specimen of some animal species.<sup>128</sup> That the physical integrity of people in a refugee camp is protected and that they have the essentials for their survival while they are not deprived of the right to freedom, does not mean that they enjoy human rights. Having lost the recognition<sup>129</sup> provided by the public space where their opinions are significant and their actions effective,<sup>130</sup> they in fact remain without any rights. Human rights presuppose citizenship. To wit, “the term ‘humanity’ must become a political concept.”<sup>131</sup>

As humanly human, the right to have rights is intrinsically connected with the gift of spontaneity and with natality. It is therefore apparent that institutional protection of the individual includes a “universal thrust”<sup>132</sup> which clearly differentiates Arendt’s position from the “famous arguments”<sup>133</sup> of E. Burke. A fundamental human right is not the product of some particular historical tradition and cannot be considered as constituting the inimitable hereditary prerogative of a particular political community. On the contrary, it is the identification of human rights with national identity which makes them redundant for the unprotected “nationally frustrated people”<sup>134</sup> and the stateless people.<sup>135</sup> Consequently, Arendt’s criticism of the abstract human being is not founded on political romanticism and the irrevocable entrapment of people in a uniform way of life and thinking, but in full accordance with the naturalised values and traditions of an isolated historic community.<sup>136</sup> For Arendt, belonging to a nationality is one of the qualities given to one by nature and which one has not chosen by oneself. It is all about pre-political traits which require the definitive classification of the subject to categories, roles and taxonomy if they are to answer the question of “what somebody is.”<sup>137</sup> Thus, similarly with gender, “qualities, gifts,

<sup>126</sup> Ibid., 103.

<sup>127</sup> Ibid., 107; Arendt, *Between Past and Future*, 147. Cf. Arendt, “Freedom and Politics,” 191.

<sup>128</sup> Hannah Arendt, *The Origins of Totalitarianism*, 302. See Robert Legros, “Hannah Arendt: une compréhension phénoménologique des droits de l’homme,” *Études phénoménologiques* 2 (1985): 29–37. Cf. Étienne Tassin, *Un monde en commun. Pour une cosmo-politique des conflits* (Paris: Seuil, 2003), 265–291, showing how apropos Arendt’s positions are regarding illegal immigrants in the modern conditions of globalisation.

<sup>129</sup> Cf. Ann Lane, “Is Hannah Arendt a Multiculturalist?,” in *Hannah Arendt and Education. Renewing Our Common World*, ed. Mordehai Gordon (Boulder: Westview Press, 2001), 161.

<sup>130</sup> Arendt, *The Origins of Totalitarianism*, 296.

<sup>131</sup> Volk, “The Decline,” 196–197.

<sup>132</sup> Richard J. Bernstein, *Hanna Arendt and the Jewish Question* (Cambridge: Polity Press 1996), 84. See also, Seyla Benhabib, “The Right to have Rights in Contemporary Europe,” 5–15, March 31, 2015, [https://www.researchgate.net/publication/241442319\\_The\\_Right\\_to\\_Have\\_Rights\\_in\\_Contemporary\\_Europe](https://www.researchgate.net/publication/241442319_The_Right_to_Have_Rights_in_Contemporary_Europe). Also, Seyla Benhabib, *The Rights of Others. Aliens, Residents and Citizens* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2004), 56–69; Jeffrey C. Isaak, “Hannah Arendt on Human Rights and the Limits of Exposure, or why Chomsky is wrong about the Meaning of Kosovo,” *Social Research* 69 (2002): 515.

<sup>133</sup> Arendt, *The Origins of Totalitarianism*, 299; Arendt, *On Revolution*, 108.

<sup>134</sup> Arendt, *The Origins of Totalitarianism*, 272.

<sup>135</sup> Ibid., 293.

<sup>136</sup> Arendt, *Between Past and Future*, 167; Robert Legros, *L’idée d’humanité. Introduction à la phénoménologie* (Paris: Grasset, 1990), 263–264.

<sup>137</sup> Arendt, *The Jewish Writings*, 466.

talents, and short-comings,”<sup>138</sup> ethnic identity refers to the dark area of the private sphere.<sup>139</sup> In contrast, the right to freedom is interlinked with the “right to dissent,”<sup>140</sup> namely a “recognized niche for civil disobedience in our institutions of government.”<sup>141</sup> The “moral content” of citizenship lies in the human faculty of promising.<sup>142</sup> The choice not to fail the “mutual promises” on which the “horizontal” contract is based,<sup>143</sup> is expressed by keeping its terms. Presupposing “voluntary membership,”<sup>144</sup> consent is meant as the constant renewal of *signing together* the written document which approves the act of Foundation.

It becomes apparent that Arendt has little to do with the *instrumental republicans* for whom the active participation of the citizen is justified by the need to preserve the citizen’s negative liberties; whereas, despite the absolute importance Arendt attributes to citizenship, she was extremely critical of “moral despotism,”<sup>145</sup> where the positions of *strong republicans* lead eventually.<sup>146</sup> Plurality needs a “political guaranteed public realm”<sup>147</sup> governed by the principles of *isonomia* and *isēgoria*<sup>148</sup> to not “disappear into complete unity.”<sup>149</sup>

For Arendt, isonomy is the right to participate in public affairs. It expressed the political content of Homer’s impartiality, who praised “the glory of Hector no less than the greatness of Achilles.”<sup>150</sup> As the “ability to see the same thing first from two opposing sides and then from all sides,”<sup>151</sup> impartiality migrated to the ancient *agora* which *housed* the exchange of opinion among equal and free citizens, namely neither the ruled nor the rulers.<sup>152</sup> This exchange of opinion may be compared with the capacity for unobstructed movement, using imagination, in order to visit others’ standpoints *looking at* a certain aspect of an issue.<sup>153</sup> Since plurality is essentially plurality of aspects, to be a citizen “means: to accept that every thing has many aspects.”<sup>154</sup> It emerges that genuine political ability is defined as “the greatest possible overview of all the possible standpoints and viewpoints from which an issue can be seen and judged.”<sup>155</sup> Impartiality corresponds to a disinterested interest in the world which characterizes the activity of taste.<sup>156</sup>

---

<sup>138</sup> Arendt, *The Human Condition*, 179.

<sup>139</sup> Arendt, “What remains? The Language remains,” 28.

<sup>140</sup> Arendt, *Crises of the Republic. Lying in Politics*, 94.

<sup>141</sup> *Ibid.*, 99.

<sup>142</sup> Arendt, *The Human Condition*, 243–247; Arendt, *Crises of the Republic. Lying in Politics*, 92.

<sup>143</sup> *Ibid.*, 86–87.

<sup>144</sup> *Ibid.*, 87.

<sup>145</sup> Cf. Alain Renaut, “Républicanisme et modernité,” in *Libéralisme et républicanisme*, ed. Stéphane Chauvier (Caen: Presses universitaires de Caen, 2000), 183.

<sup>146</sup> Iseult Honohan, *Civic Republicanism* (London: Routledge, 2002), 8–9.

<sup>147</sup> Arendt, “Freedom and Politics,” 192, 201.

<sup>148</sup> Arendt, *The Promise of Politics*, 118.

<sup>149</sup> Arendt, *Crises of the Republic. Lying in Politics*, 94.

<sup>150</sup> Arendt, *Between Past and Future*, 51.

<sup>151</sup> Arendt, *The Promise of Politics*, 167.

<sup>152</sup> Arendt, *The Human Condition*, 32; Arendt, On Revolution, 30–31; Arendt, *The Promise of Politics*, 52–59, 117–120; Hannah Arendt, “Philosophy and Politics,” *Social Research* 57, no. 1 (Spring 1990): 93.

<sup>153</sup> Cf. Arendt, *The Promise of Politics*, 168.

<sup>154</sup> Arendt, *Denktagebuch 1950 bis 1973*, Jun. 1953 [20], 390–391.

<sup>155</sup> Arendt, *The Promise of Politics*, 168–169. –f. Arendt, “Philosophy and Politics,” 84.

<sup>156</sup> Arendt, *Between Past and Future*, 219–220. Cf. Arendt, “Public Rights and Private Interests. In Response to Charles Frankel,” 105.

Arendt actually finds political meaning of impartiality once again in Kant's aesthetic judgment in which she discovers the paragon of political judgment.<sup>157</sup>

The diversity, which reflective judgment implies, confirms the conclusion that cultural creations belong to the world and their value resides in their capacity to transcend the limits of their community of origin. Cultural creation which is limited to be produced within the realm of one nation is cancelled out by *ethnic* culture; to wit, according to Arendt, the terms "ethnic" and "culture" counteract each other.<sup>158</sup> In a letter to Jaspers,<sup>159</sup> where Arendt makes clear her detachment from the German people and its "historical-political destiny,"<sup>160</sup> she states: "For me Germany means my mother tongue, philosophy and literature. I can and must stand by all that."

Arendt's thinking opposes the communitarian position in favour of shared communal values and substantial agreement regarding the good and the aims of the particular communal existence. As an end in itself,<sup>161</sup> politics remains compatible with liberal plurality of perceptions of the good and of ways of life. The spontaneous character of the action also saves her narrative identity from the threatening communitarian traditionalism, differentiating it completely from the relative concept of A. McIntyre.<sup>162</sup>

While Arendt's plurality opposes the unity of socially and culturally situated members, her notion of individuality remains, in contrast, alien to the liberal disembodied self and the ontological priority of the individual. Thus, the narrativity which structures the action as well as the personal identity that remains "community property,"<sup>163</sup> challenges the absolute *cultural neutrality* of the public sphere.

An offspring of the modernist abolition of the chasm between the household and political realm,<sup>164</sup> society is the form of coexistence which interlinks the character of the public to activities related to "sheer survival."<sup>165</sup> Just as the public sphere establishes equality, society constitutes by correspondence the field of discriminations.<sup>166</sup> The reasoning of the household which governs the social sphere, justifies the position that the price for elimination of the differences and inequalities within its own structure, is the uniformity of mass society.<sup>167</sup> We could therefore argue that the French formula, *modèle d'intégration républicaine*,<sup>168</sup> would enhance Arendt's findings concerning the modernist prevailing of society over the public sphere. As far

<sup>157</sup> Cf. Arendt, *The Promise of Politics*, 168–169; Arendt, *Between Past and Future*, 237. Regarding the deviating reading of the third *Critique* by Arendt, cf. Ronald Beiner, "Rereading Hannah Arendt's Kant Lectures," in *Judgment, Imagination*, eds. Ronald Beiner and Jennifer Nedelsky (Lanham, Md.: Rowman and Littlefield, 2001), 91–101.

<sup>158</sup> Cf. Arendt, *The Jewish Writings*, 301.

<sup>159</sup> January 1, 1933: Hannah Arendt and Karl Jaspers, *Correspondence 1926–1969*, eds. Lotte Kohler and Hans Saner, trans. Robert and Rita Kimber (San Diego, New York, London: Harcourt, Brace and Co., 1962) 16.

<sup>160</sup> The expression comes from Carl Jaspers' reply (January 3, 1933): 18: "I want to be a German. When you speak of mother tongue, philosophy, and literature, all you need add is historical-political destiny, and there is no difference left at all."

<sup>161</sup> Arendt, *The Promise of Politics*, 117; Hannah Arendt, *Courses, University of California at Berkeley: course "History of Political Theory."* Lectures Machiavelli, Niccolò (1955) [Series Subject file 1949–1975, n.d.], 024020.

<sup>162</sup> Cf. Alasdair McIntyre, *After Virtue: A Study in Moral Theory* (Notre Dame: University of Notre Dame Press, 2007), 226–243.

<sup>163</sup> Honig, "Identity and Difference," 89.

<sup>164</sup> Arendt, *The Human Condition*, 38.

<sup>165</sup> *Ibid.*, 46.

<sup>166</sup> Arendt, *Responsibility and Judgment*, 205.

<sup>167</sup> Arendt, *The Human Condition*, 41.

<sup>168</sup> Cf. Michel Wieviorka, "Culture, société et démocratie," in *Une société fragmentée? Le multiculturalisme en débat*, ed. Michel Wieviorka (Paris: La Découverte, 1997), 38.

as Arendt is concerned, government intervention in favour of the equalising abolition or enhancement of cultural diversity would confirm the confusion in the sense of the social and the political. Arendt was in fact against “positive discrimination” in American universities in favour of black minority integration.<sup>169</sup> In her controversial article about the events in Little Rock<sup>170</sup> and integrated schools, she stresses that *égalité des conditions* aggravates instead of softening the inevitable differences.<sup>171</sup> Enforcing the abolition of social “prejudices and discriminatory practices” is not an obligation of the State which is nonetheless obliged to prevent their legal enforcement:<sup>172</sup> Equality “is violated by segregation laws, not by social customs and the manners of educating children.”<sup>173</sup>

Regarding the public sphere, action is inspired by principles which, as if coming from somewhere outside the actor, are not related to motives. Although “every particular aim can be judged in the light of its principle once the act has been started,” principles are too general to dictate particular goals or to connect with an individual or a group of people. They are inexhaustible and can be repeated infinitely, by merely being universal. Principles are manifested during the action and its performance. The manifestation of principles consequently coincides with the disclosure of the unique identity of the speaker.<sup>174</sup> Since principles are absolutely worldly, their appearance is connected with the narrative identity of their protagonist.

Here we encounter Arendt’s analogy between the Kantian schema and example.<sup>175</sup>

Regarding judgments which are not cognitions, instead of a subsumption of a particular in a general concept, we single out a particular raising it to a measure of evaluation of its peers. The general character of this example is based on the *idealisation* of an empirical fact. Its exemplary validity therefore results from the agreement persuasive activity achieved, namely, the appeal to the “community sense.”

As “go-cart of judgments,” examples are closely connected with *cultura animi*.<sup>176</sup> This concerns the attitude of the person who has no patron, a person of integrity who knows how to choose his company among human beings (living or dead, real or imaginary), among things, thoughts and incidents of the present or the past.<sup>177</sup> Culture is born in the stories which weave the world.

We observe the following:

1. Just like principles, examples are not the property of a certain community or group of people: culture is not ethnic. Arendt states that there is hope for the Jews to realise the importance of the examples bequeathed to them by the stories of their past, for “the heroes of Napoleon and

<sup>169</sup> Arendt, *Crises of the Republic. Lying in Politics*, 120–121, 191.

<sup>170</sup> Arendt, *Responsibility and Judgment*, 193–213. Cf. James Bohman, “The Moral Costs of Political Pluralism: The Dilemmas of Difference and Equality in Arendt’s ‘Reflections on Little Rock,’” in *Hannah Arendt. Twenty Years Later*, eds. Larry May and Jerome Kohn (Cambridge Mass.: MIT Press, 1996), 69–75. See also Hourya Bentouhami, “Le cas de Little Rock. Hannah Arendt et Ralph Elisson sur la question noire,” *Tumultes* 30 (2008): 175–180.

<sup>171</sup> Arendt, *Responsibility and Judgment*, 200.

<sup>172</sup> *Ibid.*, 208.

<sup>173</sup> *Ibid.*, 194.

<sup>174</sup> Arendt, *Between Past and Future*, 152.

<sup>175</sup> Arendt, *Lectures on Kant’s Political Philosophy*, 76–77. Regarding the problematic character of this analogy between schemata and examples, cf. Alessandro Ferrara, “Judgment, identity and authenticity. A reconstruction of Hannah Arendt’s interpretation of Kant,” *Philosophy and Social Criticism* 24 (1998): 120–124.

<sup>176</sup> Arendt, *Between Past and Future*, 221; Arendt, *Responsibility and Judgment*, 110.

<sup>177</sup> Arendt, *Responsibility and Judgment*, 146; Arendt, *Between Past and Future*, 222.

Washington were called Moses and David.”<sup>178</sup> The universality which characterizes examples is based on the fact that by speaking and acting, we are different; yet, being humans, we are the same.<sup>179</sup> In contrast, the paradigmatic character of political coexistence whose organising structure seems to exemplify the fundamental human experience, has been founded on a historical fact thanks to the familiarity with its cultural products. According to Arendt, if there is hope for the occasional re-appearance of public space, it is because: “The Greek polis will continue to exist at the foundations of our political existence – that is at the bottom of the sea – for as long as they use the word politics.”<sup>180</sup>

In addition, interpreting the crisis in education at present, Arendt argues that education must be conservative<sup>181</sup> for the sake of the constant rejuvenation the world needs so that it does not disappear. The teacher must therefore maintain in his professional role “an extraordinary respect for the past.”<sup>182</sup>

All the work of Arendt relates to the emergence – from the depth of this very forgotten tradition – of the pre-platonic *polis*, and the extraction of the original meanings of words which persist to remain subjects to mutations brought upon them by “our tradition of political thought.”<sup>183</sup>

A “pearl diver” herself, Arendt dives to the deep “to pry loose the rich and the strange, the pearls and the corals”<sup>184</sup> which have been waiting for someone to bring them “into the world of the living.”<sup>185</sup> This diving enterprise expresses the narrating again of stories forgotten, namely the manifestation anew of examples and principles that can inspire new beginnings. For Arendt, the demolition of the authority of established tradition is a precious opportunity for us to see the past from a new perspective.<sup>186</sup> The lost treasures Arendt digs up belong, however, to the same devisor. Her fragmentary storytelling perhaps differentiates her from the monolithic character of “moral ontology,” where from Ch. Taylor draws the constitution of the modern self.<sup>187</sup> It is also clear, however, that Arendt’s attitude of criticism towards the distortions of the meaning of politics and its sinking by political philosophy, does not lead her outside the frame of the European cultural inheritance. Arendt’s Euro-centricity becomes amply evident by her negative stance concerning the decision of American universities to reinforce cultural diversity<sup>188</sup> via their educational programs.

2. No matter how much the process of establishing the exemplar particular differs from determining judgement, and despite its purely practical character, it is not completely non-cognitive as it remains detached from the factual information it contains. Arendt leads to an understanding that the common knowledge of examples is directly related to communicative understanding.<sup>189</sup>

<sup>178</sup> Hannah Arendt, “Moses oder Washington,” *Aufbau*, March 27, 1942, 16.

<sup>179</sup> Arendt, *The Human Condition*, 8.

<sup>180</sup> Arendt, *Men in Dark Times*, 204; Arendt, *The Promise of Politics*, 115.

<sup>181</sup> Arendt, *Between Past and Future*, 189.

<sup>182</sup> *Ibid.*, 190; Arendt, *Responsibility and Judgment*, 94.

<sup>183</sup> Arendt, *Between Past and Future*, 17.

<sup>184</sup> *Ibid.*, 205.

<sup>185</sup> *Ibid.*, 206.

<sup>186</sup> *Ibid.*, 94.

<sup>187</sup> Mark Redhead, “Making the Past Useful for a Pluralistic Present: Taylor Arendt and a Problem for Historical Reasoning,” *American Journal of Political Science* 46 (2002): 803–818.

<sup>188</sup> “Even more frightening is the all too likely prospect that, in about five or ten years, this ‘education’ in Swahili (a nineteenth-century kind of no-language spoken by the Arab ivory and slave caravans, a hybrid mixture of a Bantu dialect with an enormous vocabulary of Arab borrowings; see the *Encyclopaedia Britannica*, 1961), African literature and other nonexistent subjects will be interpreted as another trap of the white man to prevent Negroes from acquiring an adequate education.” Arendt, *Crises of the Republic. Lying in Politics*, 192.

<sup>189</sup> Arendt, *Lectures on Kant’s Political Philosophy*, 84.

Matters of political discussion concern the normative dimension of all possible subjects of common interest.<sup>190</sup> Neutrality towards normative issues, for the sake of peacemaking abstention from opposed *situated* viewpoints, means depoliticisation, namely the liberal *privatization* of freedom.<sup>191</sup> Norms, deprived of the property of transcendence, are born through culturally created examples.

It is the “sharing of words and deeds” that gives rise to the political realm.<sup>192</sup> We need a common language, the sharing of concepts and meanings of bequeathed stories which makes comprehension meaningful: “One judges always as a member of a community, guided by one’s community sense, one’s *sensus communis*.”<sup>193</sup>

3. Transcending the “private condition,” which is dictated by caring for the shared world, does not mean that one is a “thin self.”<sup>194</sup> It is but our own diversity which creates the world on whose theatrical scene we emerge. It is this world which is and remains the focus of my interest: we do not shed light on things of the same principle nor are the examples each of us has chosen identical with one another. Transfer becomes possible to the degree each person remains aware of their own standpoint; or else there would be no viewpoints to exchange in this process. In other words, each person narrates about themselves in a different way and the story one begins to tell is understood differently by each different perspective. Public discussion takes place among real people each of whom participates with only their own: “go-carts” for “all judging activities”<sup>195</sup> in the uncertain public sphere, a sphere deprived of absolutes. In this sense, it is by “his manner of judging”<sup>196</sup> that someone reveals together with the rest nothing more than the subjective dimension of their opinion, that is, one’s chosen “self-presentation.” This deliberately revealed “surface,”<sup>197</sup> a pretence born of their urge for distinction, indicates that plurality subjectively needs and yet objectively provides the criterion concerning “who deserves or does not deserve to inhabit the public realm.”<sup>198</sup> The common world gives birth to “a political morality of appearance”<sup>199</sup> and it presupposes shared civic values. This public culture which has to do with remembering the act of foundation and safeguarding the principle it has brought to the world,<sup>200</sup> proves itself abundantly clear to be in conjunction with the public ethos.<sup>201</sup>

Arendt seems to follow the Augustinian position according to which who I want to be has to do with what I choose to love. This absolutely subjective choice guides the selection of those exemplary fellow conversants I will choose.

---

<sup>190</sup> Cf. Arendt, “On Hannah Arendt,” 315–319.

<sup>191</sup> Arendt, *Between Past and Future*, 154.

<sup>192</sup> Arendt, *The Human Condition*, 198.

<sup>193</sup> Arendt, *Lectures on Kant’s Political Philosophy*, 75; Arendt, *The Promise of Politics*, 175.

<sup>194</sup> Cf. the comparison of Arendt’s positions with those of J. Rawls: Margaret Canovan, “Arendt, Rousseau,” 298–300.

<sup>195</sup> Cf. Arendt, *Responsibility and Judgment*, 144–145.

<sup>196</sup> Arendt, *Between Past and Future*, 220.

<sup>197</sup> Arendt, *Life of the Mind, One. Thinking*, 36–37.

<sup>198</sup> Steve Buckler, *Hannah Arendt and Political Theory. Challenging the Tradition* (Edinburgh: Edinburgh University Press, 2011), 136.

<sup>199</sup> Garrath Williams, “Love and Responsibility: a Political Ethic for Hannah Arendt,” *Political Studies* 46 (1998): 938.

<sup>200</sup> Arendt, *On Revolution*, 213.

<sup>201</sup> Seyla Benhabib, “Judgment and the Moral Foundations of Politics in Arendt’s Thought,” *Political Theory* 16 (1988): 44–48. Cf. Maurizio Passerin d’Entrèves, “Agency, Identity and Culture: Hannah Arendt’s Conception of Citizenship,” *Praxis International* 1–2 (1989): 13–17.

Real culture is universal. This statement is amply understood, however, by those who care for the world more than they do for their souls,<sup>202</sup> “By the sheer fact of being human,” this care is the earmarking trait of “cosmopolitan existence.”<sup>203</sup> As the ability of critical judgement of *local* “moral norms and standards,”<sup>204</sup> and as care for the welfare of other peoples as well,<sup>205</sup> this attitude guides “our choice of company”<sup>206</sup> and exactly together with this company, the creation of this common world in which we prefer to live. Indifference towards these choices while practicing “enlarged mentality,” both politically as well as morally, “is the greatest danger.”<sup>207</sup> We can understand the “political significance” of taste<sup>208</sup> which produces culture in this perspective.

As Étienne Tassin points out: “the *philia* is the political name of this company where the community draws its origin.”<sup>209</sup>

The selective attitude dictated and shaped by taste<sup>210</sup> is manifested as autoselection and autoexclusion in the field of politics. Expressed as voluntary denial to participate in political life, autoexclusion is one of the most significant negative liberties. Expressing the unselfish care for common affairs, autoselection consists of the requisite for the selection following the pyramid structure by one’s peers. Authority is born neither from above nor from below, but in every layer of the pyramid. The public sphere is made of those who have a “taste for public freedom”<sup>211</sup> exactly on the basis of such reconciliation of equality with authority. Positive freedom<sup>212</sup> is the individual choice of an un-mastered self.<sup>213</sup> Those selected few who are willing to “protect the island of freedom,”<sup>214</sup> are those whose culture is capable of creating political friendship,<sup>215</sup> namely, the single possible bond among unique and distinctive beings.

Arendt’s meaning of “power”<sup>216</sup> allows us to see that pluralities can emerge from anywhere, while founding acts avoid arbitrariness by bringing their own principle into the world.<sup>217</sup> The relativity of absolute spontaneity implies, however, that the abode of principles lies within stories,<sup>218</sup> and the stories are meaningful when they can be shared: “in order to act we need friends, we cannot act alone.”<sup>219</sup> Arendt’s anti-traditionalism, which by definition lies on the side of multiculturalism, serves as the emerging of genuine political tradition, which is for Arendt

---

<sup>202</sup> Arendt, *Responsibility and Judgment*, 80.

<sup>203</sup> Arendt, *Lectures on Kant’s Political Philosophy*, 75.

<sup>204</sup> Arendt, *Responsibility and Judgment*, 45.

<sup>205</sup> Arendt, *The Promise of Politics*, 176.

<sup>206</sup> Arendt, *Responsibility and Judgment*, 145, 110.

<sup>207</sup> *Ibid.*, 146.

<sup>208</sup> Arendt, *Between Past and Future*, 220.

<sup>209</sup> Étienne Tassin, “Sens commun et communauté: la lecture arendtienne de Kant,” *Les Cahiers de Philosophie 4. Hannah Arendt Confrontations* (Automne 1987): 92. [Translated by the author.]

<sup>210</sup> Arendt, *Between Past and Future*, 220.

<sup>211</sup> Arendt, *On Revolution*, 275–279.

<sup>212</sup> Arendt, *The Promise of Politics*, 117.

<sup>213</sup> It is apparent that the meaning of positive freedom, according to Arendt, is in no way related to the meaning and the perilous consequences that Isaiah Berlin mentions, *Four Essays on Liberty* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1988), 131–134.

<sup>214</sup> Arendt, *On Revolution*, 276.

<sup>215</sup> Arendt, *Men in Dark Times*, 24–25; Arendt, “Philosophy and Politics,” 83–84. Cf. Arendt, *The Promise of Politics*, 17.

<sup>216</sup> Arendt, *The Human Condition*, 199–207; Arendt, *Crises of the Republic. Lying in Politics*, 143; Arendt, Morgenthau et al., “The Importance of Power,” 211.

<sup>217</sup> Arendt, *On Revolution*, 212.

<sup>218</sup> Cf. Arendt, *The Origins of Totalitarianism*, 192.

<sup>219</sup> Arendt, *Denktagebuch 1950 bis 1973*, Sept. 1950 [26], 20.

exclusively the birth child of European culture. Being universal by definition, this culture belongs to all human beings. It should not be ignored, however, that the hope for this tradition to come back to light lies dormant – yet all so potent – in European languages.

Vana Nicolaïdou-Kyrianidou  
Department of Philosophy, Pedagogy and Psychology  
Political Philosophy Research Laboratory. From Action to Theory.  
National and Kapodistrian University of Athens,  
Faculty of Philosophy,  
Panepistimioupoli  
GR-15784 Athens  
Greece  
e-mail: v-n-k@otenet.gr

# Marek Petruš

Department of Philosophy, University of Ostrava, Ostrava, Czech Republic

## A Precognitive Dream is a False Memory<sup>1</sup>

**Abstract** | In this article the phenomenon of precognitive (prophetic) dreaming is examined. A precognitive dream is a dream coherently leading to a climax that correlates with an external stimulus. Several possible explanations for this experience are discussed, and the view that the most acceptable explanation resides in understanding the mechanism of (dream) memory is suggested as a result.

**Keywords** | Precognitive dream – False memory – Flashbulb memory – Interference – Con-fabulation

.....

### Maury's Dream

A sixty-year-old human has experienced approximately forty years of wakeful consciousness and twenty years of sleep, the latter of which includes five years of dreaming. These five years, during which our mind is in the curious state of dreaming, therefore represent an important segment of our life.<sup>2</sup> It is difficult to understand the essence of the conscious mind and how the brain generates mental states unless we can also understand the phenomenon of dreaming.

The first non-metaphysical, naturalistic theory of dreams was developed around 1850 by Alfred Maury in his book *Sleep and Dreams*<sup>3</sup> This scholar noticed that a sleeper, when awakened, frequently does not remember any dreams. From this he deduced that a dream is an episodic phenomenon, which occurs only when sleep is shallow. In his view the dream is therefore a kind of transition between sleep and wakefulness, and not a “periodical death” during which the soul leaves the body.

Although this theory is problematic (see below), Maury's work offers one interesting puzzle which is contained within the following brief yet colourful description of his nightmare:

I was somewhat exhausted, and so I rested in my room on a bed, at the head of which stood my mother. I dream of the revolutionary terror, I witnessed scenes in which people were massacred, I came before a revolutionary tribunal, I saw Robespierre, Marat, Fouquier-Tinville, all the monstrous figures of that terrible time; I spoke to them; eventually, after a number of events which I remember only dimly, I was sentenced, condemned to death, taken by truck through an immense crowd to the Place de la Concorde; I climbed up to the guillotine; the executioner lashed me to the board and lay it down in a horizontal position, the blade fell; I felt my head being separated from my body; I awoke frightened to death, and on my neck I felt the iron frame of the head of my bed, which had suddenly broken off and fallen on my neck bone just like the blade of a guillotine. All this took place in a mere moment, as my mother

---

<sup>1</sup> This research was supported by GAČR grant 15-02993S entitled *Family Memory and Intergenerational Transmission of Identities*.

<sup>2</sup> Cf. Michel Jouvet, *Le rêve. La recherche en neurobiologie* (Paris: Seuil, 1988).

<sup>3</sup> Alfred Maury, *Le sommeil et les rêves: études psychologiques sur ces phénomènes et les divers états qui s'y rattachent, suivies de recherches sur le développement de l'instinct et de l'intelligence dans leurs rapports avec le phénomène du sommeil* (Paris: Didier, 1865).

confirmed, and nevertheless this very external feeling gave rise to a dream in which so many consecutive events took place. At the moment when I was struck, the memory of that terrible instrument, whose effect was so similar to the head of my bed, triggered in me all those images of the time of which the guillotine is the symbol.<sup>4</sup>

Maury presents an example of a “precognitive dream.” What is of interest about this dream? This primarily concerns a relatively coherent dream, distinguished by a meaningful and structured content. The individual scenes of the dream are parts of an extensive, integral plot, which proceeds towards a dramatic finale – an execution. The execution itself lasts for only a brief moment, Maury feels the impact of the blade and the separation of his head from his body, in which this dream experience corresponds with an event that has taken place in the “real world,” namely with the impact of the bed frame on Maury’s sleeping body.

Maury’s dream is mentioned by Sigmund Freud in his book *The Interpretation of Dreams* as “one of the most interesting mysteries of dream [...] whose solution is not expected in the near future.”<sup>5</sup> Freud refers to a debate generated by this peculiar experience in the journal *Revue philosophique* between Victor Egger<sup>6</sup> and Jacques Le Lorraine<sup>7</sup> and adds a description of precognitive dreams from the book *Der Traum und seine Verwertung für’s Leben* of psychologist F. W. Hildebrandt.<sup>8</sup> Here is one of his examples:

It is a clear winter day. The streets are piled high with snow. I agree to go on a sleighing party, but must wait a long time before the announcement comes that the sleigh is at the door. Then follow the preparations for getting in – the fur coat is put on, the footwarmer dragged forth – and finally I am seated in my place. But the departure is still delayed until the reins give the waiting horses the tangible signal. Now they pull; the vigorously shaken bells begin their familiar Janizary music so powerfully that instantly the spider web of the dream is torn. Again, it is nothing but the shrill tone of the alarm clock.<sup>9</sup>

And finally, an example of a precognitive dream from the recent past, presented by the Czech psychologist Michal Černoušek in his book *The Dream and Dreaming*:

---

<sup>4</sup> Maury, *Le sommeil et les rêves*, 139–140: J’étais un peu indisposé, et me trouvais-couché dans ma chambre, ayant ma mère. à mon chevet. Je rêve de la Terreur; j’assiste à des scènes de massacre, je compare devant le tribunal révolutionnaire, je vois Robespierre, Marat, Fouquier-Tinville, toutes les plus vilaines figures de cette époque terrible; je discute avec eux; enfin, après bien des événements que je ne me rappelle qu’imparfaitement, je suis jugé, condamné à mort, conduit en charrette, au milieu d’un concours immense, sur la place de la Révolution; je monte sur l’échafaud l’exécuteur me lie sur la planche fatale, il la fait basculer, le couperet tombe je sens ma tête se séparer de mon tronc; je m’éveille en proie à la plus vive angoisse, et je me sens sur le cou la flèche de mon lit qui s’était subitement détachée, et était tombée sur mes vertèbres cervicales, à la façon du couteau d’une guillotine. Cela avait eu lieu à l’instant, ainsi que ma mère me le confirma, et cependant c’était cette sensation externe que j’avais prise, comme dans le cas cité plus haut, pour point de départ d’un rêve où tant de faits s’étaient succédé. Au moment où j’avais été frappé, le souvenir de la redoutable machine, dont la flèche de mon lit représentait si bien l’effet, avait éveillé toutes les images d’une époque dont la guillotine a été le symbole.

<sup>5</sup> Sigmund Freud, *Výklad snů* (Praha: Psychoanalytické nakladatelství, 1998), 297.

<sup>6</sup> Cf. Victor Egger, “La durée apparente des rêves,” *Revue philosophique de la France et de l’Etranger* 40 (1895): 41–59; Victor Egger, “Le souvenir dans le rêve. Article parut dans la,” *Revue philosophique de la France et de l’Etranger* 46 (1898): 154–157.

<sup>7</sup> Jacques Le Lorraine, “De la durée du temps dans le rêve,” *Revue philosophique de la France et de l’Etranger* 38 (1894): 275–279.

<sup>8</sup> Cf. Friedrich Wilhelm Hildebrandt, *Der Traum und seine Verwertung für’s Leben. Eine psychologische Studie* (Leipzig: F. Reinboth, 1881).

<sup>9</sup> Freud, *Výklad snů*, 48.

I'm in a dream on a hiking trip with my friends, I no longer know where, and we descend from the forested peaks into a valley, from where we can see a village taking shape in the distance. We look forward to taking some refreshments in a local pub. We approach the village and suddenly I hear a bell begin to ring in a church tower. As if it's an alarm. First of all it is imperceptible, but the ringing rapidly increases in intensity. Suddenly the entire scenario transforms, I realise that I'm waking up and my alarm clock is ringing on my bedside table. I have no option other than to turn it off abruptly and get up.<sup>10</sup>

As we can see, the structure is similar. The relatively coherent plot of the dream leads towards a final event, in this case the ringing of bells, in which this event corresponds with a stimulus registered by the sleeping body, namely the ringing of the alarm clock. How is such a dream, which seemingly foresees the future, possible?

In the following text I attempt to find a plausible explanation for the phenomenon of the precognitive dream. I discuss three alternative explanations which appear in scholarly literature and add a fourth: 1. The human mind is capable of perceiving the future, the precognitive dream is prophetic. 2. A precognitive dream is a mental illusion, the dream is not a mental experience. 3. A precognitive dream is a mental experience, but lasts only for a brief moment upon awakening. 4. A precognitive dream is an experience of REM sleep, but the subject does not experience the same that he/she later narrates about the dream.<sup>11</sup>

## True Precognition

With a little audacity it would be possible to present precognitive dreams as evidence that the human mind is capable of foreseeing the future. How else are we to explain that despite the fact that the stimulus (above all, in Maury's dream) lasted for a very short period, whilst the sleeping person experienced a dream, the lengthy plot of which clearly anticipated the event preceding awakening? Is the sleeping person not unconsciously aware that this moment will ensue, and thus creates a corresponding sequence of dream events? Does the existence of precognitive dreams not indicate at least the possibility that the human mind is capable, under certain circumstances, of foreseeing the near future?

In the history of Western culture, we frequently encounter the conviction that dreams may prefigure or reveal the future. In the Roman Empire, for example, the divination of dreams (oneiromancy) ranked amongst the traditional oracular disciplines. In his *Oneirocritica*, Artemidoros of Dalis distinguishes between two types of dreams referring to the future, namely theorematic, which simply indicates what shall occur in the future following awakening, and allegorical, which requires a symbolic interpretation.<sup>12</sup> Artemidoros' work is one of the milestones in a long occult tradition, which understands dreams as an open window into the future. The precognitive dream would be just a specific case of prophetic dreams in general.

Maury's or Hildebrant's dreams do not belong to either of Artemidoros' categories. It is important to note that the above-described precognitive dreams would evidently not be of interest or worthy of recording for a classical scholar, since divination and interpretation would have been focused on dreams related to significant future events. Nevertheless, even despite this matter, the occult European tradition provides at least a general answer to the problem of the precognitive dreams we have discussed – this would represent a curious example of a more general capacity of the sleeping mind to foresee the future.

<sup>10</sup> Michal Černoušek, *Sen a snění* (Praha: Horizont, 1988), 64.

<sup>11</sup> Cf. Marek Petrů and Petr Dvořák, "Prekognitivní sen," in *Struny mysli*, eds. Marek Petrů et al. (Ostrava: Montanex, 2009) 186–196.

<sup>12</sup> Cf. Artemidóros, *Snář* (Praha: Svoboda, 1974).

According to Stephen LaBerge, a contemporary researcher in the field of lucid dreaming, we should take this alternative seriously and understand it as a “working hypothesis.” LaBerge presents a number of studies indicating that during sleep the mind can manifest a greater sensitivity with regard to paranormal phenomena (e.g., research into the telepathic abilities of dreaming persons which was conducted in the 1960s by Montague Ullman and Stanley Krippner in a sleep laboratory at the Maimonides Hospital in Brooklyn).<sup>13</sup>

The possible existence of paranormal phenomena has long been the subject of heated discussions. Scholarly studies, however, demonstrating their occurrence are often criticised from substantive and methodological perspectives, and as far as the author knows no evidence has been produced to date which would be accepted by the majority of the academic community. I do not consider the clarification of a mysterious phenomenon by means of a theory which presupposes the existence of an even more mysterious phenomena to be an especially auspicious scholarly strategy. As Maury himself stated:

The need for the miraculous, the tendency toward the supernatural, the ease with which facts that would be difficult to state are accepted on the basis of irrational faith, inundate psychology with a mass of assertions and hypotheses which cause particular damage to its development. All that relates to sleep and dreaming, in the field of observation, yet far more than other psychological phenomena, is exposed to accusations of fantasy. And this is the reason why this so universally widespread phenomenon, namely the dream, still remains concealed in the darkness in which nature in principle shrouds all its phenomena before Man.<sup>14</sup>

As a result, let us take a look at how it would be possible to explain precognitive dreams, whilst remaining outside the realm of the paranormal.

## A Dream Is Not an Experience

Another of the possibilities to easily accommodate the phenomenon of the precognitive dream is to argue that such dreams do not exist whatsoever, that this concerns mere literary fiction, as described by one researcher from another subject, without anyone actually having such a dream in reality. This is similar to how Aristotle confused the generation that came after him, claiming that flies have four legs and two “arms,” which academic texts have repeated for more than a thousand years.

Nevertheless, the reports of precognitive dreams are rather abundant so I leave this far-fetched suspicion aside. It is more interesting to look at a more sophisticated version of this sceptical possibility, according to which the dream is not an experience. This variant has been elaborated by one of the most influential philosophers of today, Daniel Dennett, in his article “Are Dreams Experiences?,” written in 1976.

Dennett firstly presents one of his own personal precognitive dreams: “In a recent dream of mine I searched long and far for a neighbour’s goat; when I at last found her she bleated *baa-a-a* – and I awoke to find her bleat merging perfectly with the buzz of an electric alarm clock I had not used or heard for months.”<sup>15</sup> Subsequently, building upon Norman Malcolm’s philosophical analysis of dreaming in the book *Dreaming*,<sup>16</sup> he outlines a remarkable theory according to which no conscious psychological activity takes place during the course of REM sleep. While

<sup>13</sup> Stephen LaBerge, *Lucid Dreaming* (New York: Ballantine Books, 1986), 230.

<sup>14</sup> Cf. Maury, *Le sommeil et les rêves*.

<sup>15</sup> Daniel C. Dennett, “Are Dreams Experiences?,” *The Philosophical Review* 85 (1976): 157.

<sup>16</sup> Cf. Norman Malcolm, *Dreaming* (London: Routledge and Kegan Paul, 1959).

we sleep, although complex processes take place in our brain and a quantity of information is stored in our memory, we do not experience anything during this process. Upon awakening, the mind selects a certain sequence from its extensive dream library of information (either innate or created during the course of this and previous nights), which we remember as our “dream.” Selection takes place on the basis of several factors, amongst other factors also according to the character of the wakening stimulus. According to Dennett, dreams do not therefore exist, only memories of them. Since the narrative structure and plot of the dream are only composed after the action of the stimulus, no foreseeing of future events takes place here.

Whatever we might think of this bold hypothesis,<sup>17</sup> which I will try to refute in the next section, it draws attention to two other theories. A dream may be played out very rapidly, within the brief interval between the wakening stimulus and actual awakening, during which the brain retains full perception of the wakening stimulus until the time when it is meaningfully integrated into the dream. The second possibility is that the dream takes place more or less in real time, but within this brief interval the brain consolidates the memory of the dream, in which it creates a false memory under the influence of the wakening stimulus.

## Time of the Dream

A precognitive dream is a dream which the sleeper experiences subjectively as a very long process, culminating in an event which a short-term stimulus corresponds to. Could it be that the sleeper genuinely experiences this long and content-rich dream sequence within the brief period of time between the moment when he/she begins to perceive the stimulus leading to awakening, and the moment of awakening itself?

The relationship between the subjective time of the dream and the objective, physiological time of the sleeping person is complicated. Certain scholars (Maury, or out the later researchers, the psychologist Calvin Hall) have argued that dreams are only played out in the brief moment upon awakening, and contain subjectively long-lasting events in a condensed form.<sup>18</sup> From an objective, physiological perspective, the dream is conjectured to last for milliseconds, whilst the sleeper who experiences it may nevertheless narrate an adventure which lasted for several hours.

The philosopher Henri Bergson presented a lecture entitled “Dream” in 1901, in which, among other issues, he attempted to clarify Maury’s mysterious experience. According to Bergson, the events and content in dreams are generated by sensory stimuli with which the dreaming mind freely associates memories. The sleeping person, for example, subconsciously hears a dog barking, which is then projected into the dream perhaps as machine gun fire. The dreaming mind thus processes external and internal stimuli, and because there is no application of concentration and the will, bizarre fantasy images are frequently attributed to these stimuli.

For this article, Bergson’s assertion that various lengthy dream experiences can be adjoined to this sensation is of key significance. Furthermore, these need not be ordered successively, but “panoramically side by side” in a single moment, and in some cases “the dream accumulates in a few seconds what extends over several days of wakefulness.”<sup>19</sup>

---

<sup>17</sup> As Dennett significantly states: “Even stranger things have been asserted.” (In Dennett, “Are Dreams Experiences?”)

<sup>18</sup> Cf. Maury, *Le sommeil et les rêves*; Calvin S. Hall, *The Meaning of Dreams* (New York: Harper and Brothers, 1953).

<sup>19</sup> Henri Bergson, *Duchovní energie* (Praha: Vyšehrad, 2002), 144.

Maury's dream is also similarly explained by Michal Černoušek. In his book *The Dream and Dreaming*, he writes:

However, I am not at all astonished by the 'speed' of Maury's dream, because the individual elements and images of dreams are arranged in our psyche 'side by side' and not 'one after another.' [...] The dream sequence emerges simultaneously, not successively – similarly to the 'inner speech' which was analysed by the celebrated Soviet psychologist L. S. Vygotsky – the dream is like a simultaneous cluster of meanings, without a developing syntax.<sup>20</sup>

Maury's dream can therefore be explained, just as Maury himself attempted, that it lasted for only the very brief time between the stimulus and awakening (a matter of seconds) from a physiological perspective, but that a large quantity of images and scenarios were panoramically accumulated up to this brief interval, which were then logically and coherently ordered by the brain following awakening.

In neuroscience, there genuinely exists an entire range of examples as to how the brain manipulates time awareness, and how it displaces various sensations in time.<sup>21</sup>

Within this context I will take the liberty of referring only to "cinematic" visual perception, which is described in the case of some forms of Parkinson's disease. Patients with cinematic vision perceive the world and events therein as disconnected images, as if through the frames of a film recording. Moreover, it may occur that a certain image is displaced forwards or backwards in time, irrespective of the logical sequence of events. For example, patient Hester Y of the famous neurologist Oliver Sacks, described the following sequence, which she perceived at the speed of three or four images per second at the time when she observed her brother lighting his pipe. First of all she saw the match striking against the matchbox; then her brother's hand holding the burning match, which suddenly seemed to "jump" several centimetres from the matchbox; then the match lighting the tobacco; and only afterwards several phases of the movement of the hand with the match gradually approaching the pipe. As incredible as this may seem, Hester saw the image of the lit pipe a number of sequences earlier than this should logically have occurred.<sup>22</sup> It was as if she had "seen the future," just as a sleeper in the case of a precognitive dream, perceiving in the case of a F phenomenon or as a subject of Libet's interesting experiment with "sending back" something in time.<sup>23</sup> In short, the brain is capable of editing perception, whilst ignoring the "real" time sequence of certain representations.

A number of convincing experimental arguments testify, however, against the hypothesis that the ordinary dream takes place within the interval between the wakening stimulus and awakening.

In the case of lucid dreams, i.e., dreams in which the sleeping person is aware that they are dreaming, experiments have been conducted documenting that lucid dreams appear in the REM phase, and that subjective time in these dreams corresponds approximately to the objective time of the surrounding world. After a certain period of training, people during the course of a lucid dream are capable of communicating messages to an awake observer by means of eye movement, and performing prearranged tasks. Stephen LaBerge conducted an experiment in the Stanford sleep laboratory, for example, in which volunteers, during the course of a lucid dream, were to signal the beginning of a performance of the arranged task, and then count slowly "one thousand and one, one thousand and two, etc." up to "one thousand and ten," and indicate the end of the

<sup>20</sup> Černoušek, *Sen a snění*, 88.

<sup>21</sup> Cf. Daniel C. Dennett, *Consciousness Explained* (Boston, MA: Little, Brown and Company, 1991).

<sup>22</sup> Oliver Sacks, *L'Éveil* (Paris: Seuil, 1993), 140.

<sup>23</sup> Cf. Benjamin Libet, "Do we have free will?," *Journal of Consciousness Studies* 6 (1999): 47–57.

counting by means of another signal. The length of counting during the dream, thus the time between the two recorded signals, was then compared with the average length of counting in an awake state. It was demonstrated that counting to ten during lucid dreaming and in an awake state takes approximately the same amount of time.<sup>24</sup>

It is unclear as to how far, however, we can apply the observations concerning lucid dreaming to explaining ordinary, non-lucid dreams. LaBerge's experiment demonstrates that if we focus attention on a certain task during the course of lucid dreaming, we experience it for approximately as long as in an awakened state. Whereas psychological abilities approximate an awakened state in lucid dreams, certain psychological abilities are weakened or altered in regular REM dreams, and it is precisely these changes that may be the cause of the different experience of time during regular dreaming.

Hobson nevertheless presented convincing evidence that the time of the dream experience correlates to a certain degree with the length of paradoxical sleep.<sup>25</sup> If a subject is awakened after five minutes of paradoxical sleep, the report of the dream is relatively sparse and brief. If the subject is awakened after fifteen minutes, the report is longer and more detailed.

Within the framework of parasomnia, "REM sleep behaviour disorder" is also described, which is manifested by a pronounced production of dreams, and at the same time by insufficient muscle atony and abnormal behaviour. Behavioural manifestations range from convulsions, vocalisations (comprehensible or incomprehensible, single or continual, socially appropriate or inappropriate) to laughter, movements and complex behaviour. During these, the eyes are closed and dreamers orient themselves according to the dream concept of space and time, not according to the real environment. The dreams are mostly unpleasant, active and frequently of a violent character. In the dream, the subject is endangered or pursued by people, animals or monsters. At the end of the episode, the sleeper awakens into full consciousness and narrates the dream as a coherent story, in which the sequence of the dream fully corresponds with the activities the subject performed during sleep.<sup>26</sup>

Based on those outcomes, one can assume that ordinary dreams, rich in visual images, take place primarily within the REM phase of sleep. In light of this, there is a correlation between the direction of the REM and the direction in which the sleeping person looks within the dream world.

I can therefore summarise that there are relatively convincing reasons to reject the theories according to which regular dreams take place within only a brief moment upon awakening. Conscious dreaming takes place during sleep, primarily during the course of the REM phase.

## Memory of a Dream

If we therefore believe that a dream is an experience which regularly occurs during paradoxical sleep, and that its time may (though need not) correspond to "real" time, how do we explain the phenomenon of the precognitive dream? I hold the view that the most acceptable explanation resides in understanding the mechanism of (dream) memory.

As everyone knows, we quickly forget (not only) our dreams. If we could remember all our dreams (and other experiences) in the smallest detail, our brain would probably be very

---

<sup>24</sup> Cf. Stephen LaBerge, "Lucid Dreaming: Psychophysiological studies of consciousness during REM sleep," in *Sleep and Cognition*, eds. R. R. Bootzen, J. F. Kihlstrom, and D. L. Schacter (Washington, D. C.: American Psychological Association, 1990), 109–126.

<sup>25</sup> J. Allan Hobson, *Le cerveau rêvant* (Paris: Gallimard, 1992), 276.

<sup>26</sup> Cf. Karel Šonka, "Porucha chování v REM spánku," *Neurologie pro praxi* 9 (2008): 297–299.

rapidly overloaded, and functional disorders would soon occur. As a result, memory traces are not predominantly stored in the form of data or engrams, but far more likely in the form of kinds of “cues” or “markers,” on the basis of which the brain reconstructs an experience when remembering. It could be argued that it is not surprising that we forget a great deal or have false memories. It is rather miraculous that we remember anything at all. Our memory is not based on our ability to call up an image stored somewhere in the brain. It rather concerns an ability to order the world that surrounds us into meaningful categories, some of which are general and others more specific.<sup>27</sup> When we speak, for example, of a mental image of a particular friend, what kind of mental image do we have in mind? What is the friend doing, where and how? The reason for the failure of the endeavour to find a certain concrete realm in which our memory is stored, or to locate specific molecules which would be responsible for memory, is because nothing of the kind exists.

Remembering is not a purely reconstructive process. Psychologists are well aware that in real life situations memory is also of a constructive nature.<sup>28</sup> It is constructive in the sense that previous experience influences the manner in which we remember, as well as what we remember.<sup>29</sup> Subjects, for example, in one experiment who had read the same text were asked to recall it they remembered it differently if they were told that it concerned the observations of an anti-war demonstration from the fortieth floor of a building, or a flight to an uninhabited planet.<sup>30</sup>

If a quantity of different information competes for our brain's attention, this often causes interference – i.e., the forgetting of some of its aspects. Forgetting is a consequence of the fact that new information first interferes with older information, and eventually often also replaces it. I propose here the hypothesis that, in the case of memory of a precognitive dream, “retroactive interference” and “flashbulb memory” could play a significant role.

Retroactive interference (inhibition) is caused by an activity that appears after we have learned something, but before we are asked to reproduce the learned task. Flashbulb memory is a memory record of an influential and emotionally charged event, which we remember so vividly that it appears to us as if clearly illuminated by flash photography and recorded onto film. A memory becomes a flashbulb memory in the case of something individually significant or surprising, something which has an emotional impact on the individual.<sup>31</sup>

I argue that the impulse for such a flashbulb memory, within the framework of a precognitive dream, is the same external stimulus that leads to awakening. We may remember ordinary dreams more or less reliably, whereas we reconstruct dreams with a “flashbulb ending” into a meaningful event leading to a climax under the influence of retroactive interference.

According to the hypothesis proposed herein, the memory of a precognitive dream is therefore a confabulation. A confabulation may be defined as a “substitution of the gaps generated by imperfections or failure of memory with an imaginary, logically coherent experience.”<sup>32</sup> A con-

---

<sup>27</sup> Isreal Rosenfield, *L'Invention de la mémoire* (Paris: Flammarion, 1994), 170.

<sup>28</sup> Cf. Frederic Barlett, *Remembering: A study in experimental and social psychology* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1932).

<sup>29</sup> Cf. Robert J. Sternberg, R. J., *Kognitivní psychologie* (Praha: Portál, 2002).

<sup>30</sup> Cf. John D. Bransford and M. K. Johnson, “Considerations of some problems of comprehension,” in *Visual information processing*, ed. William G. Chase (New York: Academic Press, 1973), 383–438.

<sup>31</sup> Eric E. Kandel, *In Search of Memory* (New York: W. W. Bortin Company, 2007), 265.

<sup>32</sup> Alan J. Parkin and N. R. C. Leng, *L'Amnésie en question* (Grenoble: Presses Universitaires de Grenoble, 1996), 64.

fabulation is evidently the creation of false memories. It takes place entirely regularly upon various failures of memory.<sup>33</sup>

In contrast with Daniel Dennett's theory, I am therefore of the opinion that during the course of sleep we dream, and that we genuinely experience a certain dream sequence which we are actually able to remember partially after awakening. In the case of a precognitive dream, however, an unusual external stimulus impacts us, and a flashbulb re-consolidation of the dream memory takes place, with the creation of a false memory, in as much as it may be constructed from the material and experience of a dream which was actually experienced.

## Conclusions

Memory distortions and illusions are troubling because they raise doubts about whether memory is a faithful mirror of the past.<sup>34</sup> If we wish to reduce or even eliminate false memories we must first clarify the mechanism of their formation and the scope of their occurrence. False memories and confabulations are often associated with different brain pathologies. As I have tried to show in this text, they can be generated by a completely healthy brain. Memory of a dream experience is an example of this.

Dream experiences are distinguished by a number of formal characteristics: motor and visual hallucinations, the confusion of these hallucinations with reality, extreme and bizarre distortions of time and space, strong emotions, and pronounced amnesia. In dreams, the place and time of the plot frequently alternate sharply and surprisingly. Without warning people and characters change, there are all kinds of diverse twists and interpolations of the plot, and natural laws are suspended.

According to the psychiatrist Allan Hobson's well-founded activation-synthesis dream theory, dreams are simply mental states of the self-stimulating brain. This theory presupposes two complementary neural mechanisms: endogenous activation triggered by structures of the brain stem (e.g., dream experience containing sensomotor hallucinations presupposes activation of parts of the sensomotor system with simultaneous inhibition of efferentation) and the synthesis of these fundamentally incoherent sensations of the auto-activated brain by telencephalon, in particular the cortex and subcortical structures responsible for mnemonic functions.<sup>35</sup>

As a result it is not surprising that in dreams, as in an awakened state, the brain (consciousness) attempts to structure these incoherent, endogenous stimulations generated by experiences into a meaningful whole. In contrast, however, to a wakeful state, the brain lacks a stable external signal ensuring a coherent context. The only reference to which the brain can meaningfully relate are memories. These confabulations, which memories of dreams often are, are produced on the basis of autobiographical memory.<sup>36</sup> In brief, as appositely summarised by Hobson, the brain, "during the course of paradoxical sleep, just as in an awakened state, does what it can in order

---

<sup>33</sup> Cf. M. K. Johnson and C. L. Raye, "False memories and confabulation," *Trends in Cognitive Sciences* 2 (1998): 137–145; Gaëlle Plancher et al., "Mechanisms underlying the production of false memories for famous people's names in aging and Alzheimer's disease," *Neuropsychologia* 47 (2009): 2527–2536.

<sup>34</sup> Cf. Chad S. Dodson, Wilma Koutstaal, and Daniel Schacter, "Escape from Illusion: Reducing False memories," *Trends in Cognitive Sciences* 4 (2000): 391–397.

<sup>35</sup> Cf. Hobson, *Le cerveau rêvant*.

<sup>36</sup> Cf. Dorthe Berntsen and David C. Rubin, ed., *Understanding Autobiographical Memory* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2012).

to bring about a meaningful integration of the data it receives, even at the expense of creating fairy tales.”<sup>37</sup> And, one of these fairy tales is the precognitive dream.

Marek Petrů  
Department of Philosophy  
Faculty of Arts  
University of Ostrava  
Reální 5, 701 03 Ostrava  
e-mail: janamir@volny.cz

---

<sup>37</sup> Hobson, *Le cerveau rêvant*, 266.

Lasse Nielsen

Palacký University, Olomouc, Czech Republic

## Reconstructing Thought Experiments in Personal Identity

**Abstract** | Thought experiments are abundant in the topic of personal identity theory as well as in metaphysics in general. While many of them serve to illustrate and guide us through complicated theories and explain difficult to grasp terms, others are irrelevant and muddle the very discussion they aim to clarify. By building upon the work of John D. Norton and Kathleen V. Wilkes, this paper sets out to establish a formula for a good thought experiment. The paper outlines Norton's theory that all thought experiments can be reconstructed into arguments. His work in this subject refers mainly to thought experiments in science, but the aim of this paper will be to apply his theory of reconstruction to thought experiments in metaphysics. Along with Norton, the work of Kathleen V. Wilkes and her critique of fission thought experiments will likewise be taken into consideration. The paper concludes that for a thought experiment to be successful it must make sense as an argument, after the impossibilities have been eliminated.

**Keywords** | Thought experiments – Personal identity – The Self – The elimination thesis  
.....

In a paper from 1991 entitled “Thought Experiments in Einstein’s Work,” John D. Norton first proposed the idea that all thought experiments can be seen as arguments. This idea sprang from the reasoning that as an empiricist philosopher of science, he could not accept that a thought experiment can replace an actual experiment. Norton elaborates on this in his paper from 1996 titled “Are Thought Experiments Just What You Thought?,” arguing that a thought experiment does not involve any new empirical data. A thought experiment can help us see a concept in a new way, but it is all based on past knowledge gained from experience.<sup>1</sup> There is no difference then, except for the form, between a thought experiment and an argument. All thought experiments can therefore be reconstructed into arguments. Norton calls this the reconstruction thesis: “All thought experiments can be reconstructed as arguments based on tacit explicit assumptions. Belief in the outcome-conclusion of the thought experiment is justified only insofar as the reconstruction argument can justify the conclusion.”<sup>2</sup> According to Norton then, we would be justified in believing a thought experiment if it can justify the conclusion when reconstructed into an argument.

Norton states that thought experiments are arguments which: “(i) posit hypothetical or counterfactual states of affair, and (ii) invoke particulars irrelevant to the generality of the conclusion.”<sup>3</sup> Point (i) is fairly obvious but (ii) is particularly interesting. Norton claims that there are elements

---

<sup>1</sup> John D. Norton, “Are Thought Experiments Just What You Thought?,” *Canadian Journal of Philosophy* 26, no. 3 (1996): 334.

<sup>2</sup> *Ibid.*, 339.

<sup>3</sup> *Ibid.*, 336.

within a thought experiment that have no impact on the conclusion of that argument. Norton argues that it is possible to remove these from the argument. He calls this claim the “elimination thesis.”<sup>4</sup>

The elimination thesis in its entirety states: “Thought experiments are arguments which contain particulars irrelevant to the generality of conclusions. Thus, any conclusion reached by a good thought experiment will also be demonstrable by an argument which does not contain these particulars and therefore is not a thought experiment.”<sup>5</sup>

Transferring this to the field of metaphysics, it could then be argued, that for a thought experiment to be successful it must be able to separate the impossibilities from the conclusion. An unsuccessful thought experiment, in contrast, fails because it bases the conclusion on the counterfactual element itself. In other words, the element that would normally be cut away with the elimination thesis is used as a premise in the argument. This leaves us with an argument that has a conclusion which rests on nonfactual premises. Because of this, the conclusion of the thought experiment cannot be applied to the real world. To illustrate the point, let us look at a very well-known thought experiment by Derek Parfit. In his book *Reasons and Persons* from 1984, Parfit constructs a thought experiment in which he enters a teletransporter:

I enter the Teletransporter. I have been to Mars before, but only by the old method, a space-ship journey taking several weeks. This machine will send me at the speed of light. I merely have to press the green button. Like others, I am nervous. Will it work? I remind myself what I have been told to expect. When I press the button, I shall lose consciousness, and then wake up at what seems a moment later. In fact I shall have been unconscious for about an hour. The Scanner here on Earth will destroy my brain and body, while recording the exact states of all of my cells. It will then transmit this information by radio. Travelling at the speed of light, the message will take three minutes to reach the Replicator on Mars. This will then create, out of new matter, a brain and body exactly like mine. It will be in this body that I shall wake up. Though I believe that this is what will happen, I still hesitate. But then I remember seeing my wife grin when, at breakfast today, I revealed my nervousness. As she reminded me, she has been often teletransported, and there is nothing wrong with her. I press the button. As predicted, I lose and seem at once to regain consciousness, but in a different cubicle. Examining my new body, I find no change at all. Even the cut on my upper lip, from this morning's shave, is still there.

Several years pass, during which I am often Teletransported. I am now back in the cubicle, ready for another trip to Mars. But this time, when I press the green button, I do not lose consciousness. There is a whirring sound, then silence. I leave the cubicle, and say to the attendant: “It's not working. What did I do wrong?” – “It's working,” he replies, handing me a printed card. This reads: “The New Scanner records your blueprint without destroying your brain and body. We hope that you will welcome the opportunities which this technical advance offers.” The attendant tells me that I am one of the first people to use the New Scanner. He adds that, if I stay for an hour, I can use the Intercom to see and talk to myself on Mars. “Wait a minute,” I reply, “If I'm here I can't also be on Mars.” Someone politely coughs, a white-coated man who asks to speak to me in private. We go to his office, where he tells me to sit down, and pauses. Then he says: “I'm afraid that we're having problems with the New Scanner. It records your blueprint just as accurately, as you will see when you talk to yourself on Mars. But it seems to be damaging the cardiac systems which it scans. Judging from the results so far, though you will be quite healthy on Mars, here on Earth you must expect cardiac failure within the next few days.” The attendant later calls me to the Intercom. On the screen I see myself just as I do in the mirror every morning. But there are two differences. On the screen I am not left-right reversed. And, while I stand here speechless, I can see and hear myself, in the studio on Mars, starting to speak.<sup>6</sup>

<sup>4</sup> John D. Norton, “Thought Experiments in Einstein's Work,” in *Thought Experiments in Science and Philosophy*, eds. Tamara Horowitz and Gerald Massey (Savage, MD: Rowman & Littlefield, 1991), 131.

<sup>5</sup> Ibid.

<sup>6</sup> Derek Parfit, *Reason and Persons* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1992), 199–200.

Parfit's point with this thought experiment is to demonstrate that what matters in cases such as these is not identity in a strict one to one relation, but rather survival of personal identity. In the first section of the thought experiment, Parfit sketches out an easy to follow the teletransportation situation, resulting in a non-branching teletransportation. He then describes the same situation with a twist. We are now asked to imagine the machine malfunctioning, leaving us with a copy and the original existing at the same time (a branching form of identity). We have already accepted, according to Parfit, that teletransportation is survivable in terms of identity. We are left with an intuitive feeling that both these Parfit persons are identical to the one that entered the teletransporter. Parfit therefore concludes that a strict one to one identity is not what matters, since we would intuitively argue that Parfit has survived the teletransportation, despite now having taken a branching form of identity.

Reconstructing the thought experiment we find, hidden within, an argument which runs something like this:

**Premise 1:** Personal identity is a one to one relation.

**Premise 2:** Teletransportation is as good as survival.

**Premise 3:** Teletransportation is not a one to one relation.

**Conclusion:** Survival does not require a one to one relation of personal identity.

In order for us to accept the conclusion of Parfit's argument, we would have to accept the second premise, that teletransportation is as good as survival. Yet because this premise is not factual, we should not accept it. An argument based hypothetical premises cannot yield a non-hypothetical conclusion. We would not be able to apply the elimination thesis to this argument since the impossibilities are what the conclusion rests upon.

Parfit argues that we can transfer the intuitive beliefs we have, to cover actual cases.<sup>7</sup> It is hard to see how one would go about applying this thought experiment to any genuine situation. We are not presented with this type of teleporter problem in any aspect of real life. We simply do not know how any sort of teleportation can alter our view of identity and merely imagining it will not allow us to gain insight into any element of real life. By creating an obscure sci-fi example, Parfit has muddled the waters of the discussion. The premises are nonfactual, and his thought experiment therefore fails.<sup>8</sup>

Wilkes speaks of a similar issue with fission thought experiments.<sup>9</sup> For Wilkes, the main problem with thought experiments of this type is that they often suffer from a reality problem. This does not mean that a thought experiment has to be 100 percent realistic. Wilkes argues that although a thought experiment can have some impossible element in it, that impossible element cannot be the one which is the focus of the experiment. When Einstein posed the thought experiment, where he postulates himself flying next to a beam of light, the impossible act – Einstein flying at the speed of light – in no way changes the properties light has, and the thought experiment was therefore a successful one. When we, on the other hand, introduce person splitting we are changing the very thing we want to investigate because splitting changes the properties of identity.<sup>10</sup>

---

<sup>7</sup> Ibid., 200.

<sup>8</sup> It is important to note that the scope of this paper is not to debate Parfit's theory about identity and survival, but to analyse the thought experiment he uses.

<sup>9</sup> By fission thought experiment, I here mean all the thought experiments that deal with people splitting or changing body, either through operations, teleportation or unnamed magical processes.

<sup>10</sup> Kathleen V. Wilkes, *Real People: Personal Identity Without Thought Experiments* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 2001), 8–9.

Making Einstein's thought experiment into an argument; it is apparent why Wilkes argues that this thought experiment works.

**Premise 1:** According to Maxwell's theory of electrodynamics, light, relative to something else at the speed of light, would be rendered as a stationary oscillatory field.

**Premise 2:** A stationary oscillatory field is an impossibility when dealing with light.

**Conclusion:** Maxwell's theory is mistaken.

The element of fiction, Einstein traveling at the speed of light looking at what will occur, can be eliminated from the argument without changing the conclusion; "Thus we need to ensure that what is imagined could be realized in some possible world; or that if it could not be, this impossibility is not 'relevant' to the derivation of the conclusion."<sup>11</sup> We can apply this to the splitting example above. We see that the premise (when split in two) cannot be eliminated from the argument since it is what the conclusion is based on.

Inspired by Norton and Wilkes, a formula can be created for what makes a good thought experiment in personal identity:

*A thought experiment is valid insofar as it makes sense as an argument, after the impossibilities have been eliminated.*

The main point with this formula is not only to sort out the logical from the illogical thought experiments, but also to eliminate the irrelevant thought experiments. This means all the experiments that do not allow themselves to be applied to the present way we view a given term. A thought experiment must be able to lend itself to our real world notion of the use of a concept.

Another issue that comes up in Wilkes book is the problem of imagination. Wilkes argues that it is not so easy to imagine a possible world where these thought experiments are supposed to take place. To imagine a possible world where people regularly receive a new body would, according to Wilkes, involve too many unknowns for us. How would we know what the result of such a process would be if the background of the possible world where this takes place is not adequately described?<sup>12</sup> To explain the point more clearly, we can look at an actual scientific experiment. Here we rightly assume that all the background information is set against our real world, and that all the factors that change are isolated factors which do not influence any other aspect of the world. With a transplant thought experiments, however, there are far too many unknowns. Our ability to imagine the thought experiment is impaired by the lack of detail. We do not know which factors remain the same, and which will be altered based on the setting of the thought experiment. Beck criticizes Wilkes on this point in his paper. He argues that the background of a thought experiment is irrelevant as long as it deals with the concepts we also deal with. He argues that Wilkes misses the mark because what we look for in a thought experiment is our notion of the concept of "person" and how the scenario applies to it: "What we are after is *our* concept, not the concept that people in the society would use."<sup>13</sup> It seems, however, that Beck has missed a key point of Wilkes argument. Wilkes is arguing that the process of imagining the thought experiment is impossible due to its lack of detail. How does one imagine a world where people split at will? This is not something that is easy to imagine, let alone conclude anything from.

---

<sup>11</sup> Ibid., 12.

<sup>12</sup> Ibid., 9.

<sup>13</sup> Beck, "Transplant Thought-Experiments," 192.

It could be argued that the thought experiment, even if it could be imagined, would fail none the less. Becks argument is that we can learn something about *our* concept of identity and persons by engaging in the thought experiment, but the issue that causes us to reconsider our concept of person and identity, is an issue that *only* happens in this very special place. It is in all probability true that if one were to find one's self in such a world, identity and person may have different necessary and sufficient conditions. Living there might force us to reconsider the way we see personal identity. We do not live there, however. We do not engage in people splitting as they do in this possible world. We cannot therefore apply what the people do in their world to the real one. It is difficult to see how this thought experiment can bring us anything of value. It is the same issue we run into when we look at the thought experiment carried out by Parfit mentioned earlier. Beck argues that a thought experiment such as this need only be plausible enough to illustrate the weakness in an opposite theory. It does not play the role of evidence, and it therefore does not need to be as well established as if it were used as actual confirmation. "But performing the task of offering a counter-example – as a refuter – to a claim of necessity has no such onerous requirements. It need only present conditions, as minimal as you like, in which we have a case in which we can apply a concept in the way the theory in question implies we can't."<sup>14</sup> Many thought experiments are used as counter-examples and some are put to good use. The problem is again the same. The premises must be factual. It is very damaging to a theory like Animalism to have people splitting and functioning normally, but what good is that *counter-example* if we do not accept the premise that people split? Animalism may suffer in a world where people split, but in this world, the thought experiment does not damage the theory. It is thus an unsuccessful thought experiment because we cannot apply it to the world we live in. To our formula then, we must add the condition that for a thought experiment to succeed, it must be described to a degree that makes it possible for us to imagine the setting.

If thought experiments can be reconstructed into arguments, then why do we then use thought experiments instead of arguments? This is a good question. Norton points out that it is easier for us to use a thought experiment than to navigate very complicated arguments.<sup>15</sup> We are often dealing with some very theoretical and difficult concepts, and a thought experiment can help us get our thoughts in order. It can thus be an exploitative tool. It can also help set the scene for the argument, making it more convincing by way of explaining some background. We must, however, be careful. If we forget the limitations of the thought experiment, we lead ourselves astray. We end up confusing the issue with fiction rather than fact as Wilkes points out.<sup>16</sup> The reconstruction and elimination theses are ways for us to check the validity of our thought experiments.

A thought experiments is only valid if:

- i. it can be reconstructed into an argument;
- ii. the impossible parts of the argument can be eliminated;
- iii. the background is described in a way that enable us to easily imagine the setting.

The setting of the thought experiment itself can be as impossible as one wishes, as long as it does not hinder our capacity to imagine the situation. If we hold our thought experiments to this standard we will reduce the confusions we face in discourse in the topic of personal identity. This is by no means an easy process. There is a reason thought experiments are preferred over

---

<sup>14</sup> Ibid., 194.

<sup>15</sup> Norton, "Thought Experiments in Einstein's Work," 131.

<sup>16</sup> Wilkes, *Real People*, 43.

conventional argumentation. If we are in doubt, however, about whether a thought experiment succeeds, we can apply the formula above.

Lasse Nielsen  
Department of Philosophy  
Palacký University  
Křížkovského 12  
Olomouc 771 80  
Czech Republic  
e-mail: lasse.bn.nielsen@gmail.com

# Czech and Slovak Journal of Humanities

Texts already published or accepted for publication in other journals or books will not be accepted by the editorial board. The peer-review process, the editing and the publication of articles is done according to the CSJH ethics statement.

The text of the article should be accompanied by an abstract in English of some 10 lines (maximum 100 words), with three to ten keywords in English in alphabetical order, and by Author's affiliation, address and e-mail address. Reviews of books and congress proceedings should present all necessary bibliographical data concerning the reviewed book, including the place and dates of the congress in question.

The affiliation address of the contributor should be given at the end of the article or review as well as an e-mail contact. If necessary, another contact address may be provided.

Contributors are kindly requested to send their contributions by e-mail to the addresses of issue editors:

<b>Philosophica</b>	Jozef Matula	jozef.matula@upol.cz
<b>Historica</b>	Martin Elbel	maelbel@gmail.com
<b>Historia artium</b>	Rostislav Švácha	svacha@udu.cas.cz
<b>Theatralia et cinematographica</b>	Milan Hain	Milan.Hain@seznam.cz
<b>Musicologica</b>	Jan Blüml	jan.bluml@upol.cz
<b>Anthropologia culturalis</b>	Jakub Havlíček	jakub.havlicek@upol.cz

## Style Sheet Rules

Submitted texts should be written in one of common text editors (doc, docx, rtf, odt), in the Times New Roman 12 font, line spacing 1.5; pictures and figures should be submitted separately in formats as jpg, tif, eps, and gif.

The CSJH follows the Chicago Style Manual.

## Publication Ethics

### Guidelines for Editors

#### General Responsibilities

- Editors are accountable for all content published in their journal. Editors must be ready to publish corrections and apologies when necessary.
- Editors must follow transparent editorial policy. Submission guidelines and requirements for potential contributors to the journal must be published.

#### Conflict of Interest

- Editors require authors, reviewers and editorial board members to disclose potential conflicts of interest.
- Editors make decisions to accept or reject submissions based on the quality of the submission and its suitability for the journal. Editors must make sure that commercial considerations do not interfere with their editorial decisions.

- Editors must make sure that non-peer-reviewed sections of the journal are clearly marked as such.

### **Peer-Review Practice**

- Editors must ensure that all research submissions are peer-reviewed. A description of the peer review practice must be published for the benefit of potential contributors to the journal.
- Editors are accountable for recruiting qualified reviewers. Editors must strive to obtain highly competent reviewers and discontinue using reviewers who consistently deliver poor quality reviews.
- Editors must ensure that reviews are relevant, courteous and timely. Reviewers should judge the quality of the research and not comment on the researcher's gender, race, beliefs and the like.

### **Academic Integrity**

- Editors and reviewers must treat all submissions under review as confidential.
- Editors must protect the identity of reviewers and the identity of authors if a double-blind review process is used.
- Editors must ensure that all submissions comply with ethical research standards, particularly in research involving human or animal subjects.
- Editors must make sure that all submissions comply with academic integrity standards, particularly with respect to plagiarism, data falsification, image manipulation and the like. Suspicions of scientific misconduct must be promptly investigated and response from authors suspected of misconduct must be sought.

## **Guidelines for Authors**

### **General Responsibilities**

- Authors are accountable for all aspects of their research submitted for publication to a journal. Authors of a multi-author submission have joint responsibility for their research, unless stated otherwise.
- Authors must promptly notify editors if they discover any errors in their research. This applies to research that has been submitted, is under review or has been published. Authors must cooperate with editors to rectify any errors.
- Authors must comply with submission guidelines and requirements published by the editors. Authors are aware that failure to meet these requirements may result in rejection of their research for publication.

### **Conflict of Interest**

- Authors must disclose potential conflicts of interest.
- Authors must publish all sources of their research funding, including both financial and non-financial support.
- Authors must disclose their relationship to the journal, particularly when editors and reviewers seek publication in a journal that they are affiliated with.

**Peer-Review Process**

- Authors must cooperate with editors at all stages of the publication process. Authors must notify editors if they choose to withdraw their submission at any stage of the peer-review and publication process.
- Authors must respond to comments of reviewers in a relevant and timely manner. Authors must carefully check proofs supplied by editors before authorising them.

**Academic Integrity**

- Authors must not seek publication of their research in more than one journal concurrently, unless all parties agree on co-publishing.
- Authors are accountable for the soundness and honesty of their research. Authors must use appropriate methods for reporting their research and provide sufficient detail for other researchers to repeat their experiments. Authors must publish the complete results of their research and not withhold findings that are inconsistent with their hypothesis.
- Authors must comply with ethical research standards, particularly in research involving human or animal subjects, and must be prepared to provide sufficient proof on request.
- Authors must comply with academic integrity standards, particularly with respect to plagiarism, data falsification, image manipulation and the like. Authors must appropriately quote and cite all sources used in their research and refrain from including indirect quotations from sources that they have not consulted.
- Authors must obtain permission to use any third party images, figures and the like from the respective copyright holders.