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FALSAFA

UNDERGRADUATE JOURNAL OF PHILOSOPHY

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at the University of California, Irvine

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The Philosophy Club at the University of California, Irvine

UCI Department of Philosophy
School of Humanities

Faculty Advisors

Professor Annalisa Coliva
Professor Marcello Fiocco
Kourosh Alizadeh
Adam Sanders

Chief Editors

Tanuj Raut
Adrian Perez

Editors / Reviewers

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Design and Publication

Ellis Diaz
Matthew Downing
Alisa Egecioglu
Elise Hughes
Zahrah Kabbara
Tanuj Raut
Jason Schwartz

Communication and Management

Nolan Zoltan Berge

Administrative Staff

Sara Connor
Miriam Torres

Website Development

Matthew Downing
Hirdyanshu Goyal

Contact Details:

email: falsafauci@gmail.com

website: www.falsafa.org

club facebook: www.facebook.com/PhilClubUCI/

club website: www.humanities.uci.edu/philosophy/undergraduate/club.php

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Letter from the Department Chair

Falsafa, the new undergraduate journal in Philosophy, edited by UCI students, has now become a reality. After months of planning and hard work, our students have now succeeded in producing its first issue. This is already a remarkable achievement, which testifies to their enthusiasm and passion for philosophy. It is even more remarkable if one looks at its content. Not only is the quality of papers outstanding, but also the breadth and variety of perspectives they present is truly amazing. Interested readers will read about Ibn Rush'd monopsychism, as analyzed through the lenses of Aquinas' theory of understanding; about whether there is consciousness in deep sleep, once we approach the issue through different Hinduist schools of thought; and also about the Chinese philosopher Zhuangzi and his development of new dialectical tools, different from Plato's, aimed at weakening readers' conviction in their own positions. Thus, several papers will testify to the variety of philosophical traditions undergraduate students are nowadays interested in, often by comparison with authors and themes in the Western tradition. But you will also read about the kinds of epistemic injustice perpetrated towards marginalized groups, usually identified in terms of race and gender, as well as about how historical materialism and paternalism played a role in creating "institutionalized male dominance", and finally, about how transsexual subjectivities call for a different metaphysics. All this testifies to the relevance philosophy has to our understanding of human experience and, in particular, of its social dimension.

We are extraordinarily proud of all students who made this possible and of hosting *Falsafa* in the Department of Philosophy's website. Enjoy the reading!

Annalisa Coliva
Professor and Chair
Department of Philosophy
University of California, Irvine

Letter from the Club Advisor

The Department of Philosophy at the University of California, Irvine is proud to present *Falsafa!* This journal is edited and maintained entirely by our undergraduate students. It is truly an international journal, with submissions from all over the world. One of the objectives of *Falsafa* is to present papers on topics of interest that are not well-represented in generalist professional journals or in other undergraduate venues. This objective is met admirably by the selection of papers to appear in this, the inaugural issue of the journal.

There is no better way to learn a practice or art than by doing it. There is no better way to learn philosophy than by writing it, reading it, discussing it. This journal is, then, an invaluable tool in the education of not only our students, but of those who make the effort to prepare a paper for submission. There is no better way to learn about academic publishing than by founding and running a journal—and submitting work to one. So *Falsafa* is also an invaluable tool for those who aspire to academic careers in which they will have to engage regularly with journals, and their editors and referees.

My colleagues and I are, therefore, very pleased with the particularly active contributions our students are making, with *Falsafa*, to their own philosophical development and to that of their peers worldwide. The quality of these contributions will be apparent to anyone who reads this journal.

Dr. M. Oreste Fiocco
Associate Professor and Director of Undergraduate Programs
Department of Philosophy
University of California, Irvine

Letter from the Chief Editors

After months of toil, organization, and focus, we are elated to present the first Undergraduate Journal of Philosophy at UCI, *Falsafa* (Urdu for ‘Philosophy’). The aim of the journal is not just to encourage undergraduate students to think and write like philosophers, but also to provide a space for discussing ideas that are either marginalized or underrepresented in university curricula for Philosophy. The journal offers an outlet for philosophy undergraduates to share their views on a variety of topics that deserve reflection and recognition. We believe it is essential to destabilize the authorial centrality of Western canonical philosophical texts through an inclusive and diverse approach to the discipline. The contributions by authors in the first issue reflect the achievement of that goal.

We received an overwhelming number of submissions for our first issue from around the world; selection of papers for the first issue has been quite a task! If the aim of philosophy is to foster and express critical thought, the authors have certainly accomplished it. Readers will find stimulating ideas engaging with Islamic Philosophy, Indian Philosophy, Chinese Philosophy, Philosophy of Gender, and Feminist Philosophy. Moreover, the authors themselves represent the best of undergraduate writings across several institutions from the world.

Our greatest gratitude goes to the Department of Philosophy at UC Irvine, the contributing authors, and our team of undergraduates, made up of some of the most tireless students we’ve ever worked with. We hope you enjoy reading the first issue of *Falsafa* as much as we enjoyed putting it together. Expect another successful issue of *Falsafa* in the future!

Tanuj Raut
Co-President
The Philosophy Club at UC Irvine

Adrian Perez
Treasurer
The Philosophy Club at UC Irvine

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A momentous achievement such as organizing and publishing an undergraduate journal would not have been possible without the hard work, patience, and dedication of numerous individuals. We would like to begin by thanking faculty of the Philosophy Department of the University of California, Irvine. First, a thank you to Prof. Annalisa Coliva for organizing a crucial workshop for the editorial team. She helpfully introduced and guided our editing team into the enterprise of journal editing. Next, thanks to Prof. Marcello Fiocco for his logistical and technical advice which proved extremely useful, and in general for his guidance in this endeavor. *Falsafa* was going to be a big step, and we thank him for giving us perspective and ideas of what we should expect. Lastly, thank you to Prof. David Woodruff Smith, Prof. Sven Bernecker, and Prof. Margaret Gilbert for their words of encouragement that kept us inspired and motivated.

Second, we would like to thank the staff of the Philosophy Department, especially Sara Connor and Miriam Torres, whose endless support was crucial to the success of this publication. They kept their doors open for consultations and discussions about the journal, and ensured we were making progress.

Third, we would like to extend a special thanks to our graduate advisors, Kourosh Alizadeh and Adam Sanders, for hosting training sessions for our editors. The wonderful work performed by the editing team is a testament to their vital contributions to *Falsafa*.

Finally, we would like to extend our thanks to several members of the School of Humanities whose words of encouragement and support have been vital for *Falsafa*'s publication, including but not limited to: Prof. Ngũgĩ Wa Thiong'o, Barbara Caldwell, Prof. Rajagopalan Radhakrishnan, Prof. Rebecca Davis, Prof. Aijaz Ahmad, Prof. Alicia Cox and Prof. Richard Godden. We would also like to extend our thanks to Siddharth Adelkar of The People's Archive of Rural India (PARI), for suggesting the student publication's elegant name. For her creative judgment and useful input in terms of design, a special thanks to Sairandhri Raut.

At the heart of *Falsafa*'s success is the ceaseless dedication of the editorial and publication team. Thank you so much for all that you did! A heartfelt thanks to our authors and all those who submitted to our journal. We were amazed by the quality and thought underlying all the papers presented in this journal, and hope you all will find them equally intriguing.

A Simplified Definition of Gaslighting and its Social Scope

Lorenzo Benitez
Cornell University

Abstract

In this paper, I articulate a conception of gaslighting that identifies it as having three distinct but necessary properties in its every conceivable manifestation. Synthesizing Kate Abramson, I describe the three necessary and sufficient properties in every conceivable case of gaslighting to be: (1) the undermining of a speaker's judgement-making confidence, (2) the denial of some contents of a speaker's testimony, and (3) the threatening of the speaker with social consequences. In the second part of the paper, I make three separate clarifications about the nature of gaslighting. First, incorporating the recent work of Kate Manne, I clarify that not all cases of gaslighting are misogynistic. Second, I explain how gaslighting might be wrought unintentionally by an unsuspecting gaslighter, citing a hypothetical example by Rachel McKinnon. Third and last, I accept the definition of *hermeneutical injustice* offered by Miranda Fricker to argue for the recognition of gaslighting as a political, in addition to an interpersonal, phenomenon.

Introduction

Apple co-founder Steve Jobs was adept at conjuring “reality distortion fields.” As recounted in his 2011 biography, Jobs would obscure the potential difficulty of arduous deadlines by persuading employees during the firm’s infancy that the almost-possible was within reach.¹ While employees initially doubted their own ability to satisfy tight schedules, Jobs would downplay their testimony and supplant it with his own, employing a “confounding mélange of a charismatic rhetorical style, indomitable will, and eagerness to bend any fact to fit the purpose at hand.”² While Jobs is today remembered for his contributions to American productivity, this ability to reshape others’ testimony in accordance with his own resembles the phenomena of gaslighting. That we continue to celebrate Jobs’ contributions without

¹ Isaacson, *Steve Jobs*, 272.

² Ibid., 118.

interrogating some of the mechanisms he used to achieve them implies the need for a more thorough definition of gaslighting.

To offer this ameliorative definition, in this paper I first simplify the varying examples of gaslighting described by Kate Abramson in “Turning Up the Lights on Gaslighting” by collapsing them into three distinct categories.³ Each of these categories clarifies a particular aspect of gaslighting that, although not unique to gaslighting, is evident in its every conceivable manifestation. Moreover, I also offer examples of gaslighting to complement Abramson’s own. From this, I argue that something is gaslighting if and only if all three characteristics are present: that the satisfaction of all three *uniquely* defines gaslighting.

Second, accounting for the distinction between sexism and misogyny in *Down Girl*, by Kate Manne, I argue that although gaslighting is among the most consequential and unquestioned social practices perpetuating sexist norms, not all gaslighting is necessarily sexist.⁴ Third, I argue that gaslighting can be done unintentionally, even by the most well-intentioned of inadvertent gaslighters, as illustrated by Rachel McKinnon in “Allies Behaving Badly: Gaslighting as Epistemic Injustice”.⁵ Fourth, I argue that gaslighting is a broader political phenomenon rather than one merely present in interpersonal relations, citing Miranda Fricker’s conception of hermeneutical injustice in *Epistemic Injustice*.⁶

Ultimately, I offer a simplified definition of gaslighting and argue for how it can also be without sexist implications, unintended by its practitioner, and political in its universality.

The Three Characteristics of Gaslighting

While Abramson’s paper offers several vivid examples of gaslighting, they can be categorized into three separate characteristics that, together, define gaslighting. The first of these characteristics incorporates just one of Abramson’s examples—that of an intellectually-belittled Simone de Beauvoir—whose *subjectivity is degraded* by Jean-Paul Sartre when, after engaging in a three-hour-long argument with him, de Beauvoir recounts sensing her own reasoning to be “shaky” and her ideas “confused.”⁷ The second characteristic—demonstrated by the downplaying of sexually-abusive behavior in a workplace—*undermines the specific contents of*

³ Abramson, “Turning Up the Lights on Gaslighting,” 1-30.

⁴ Manne, *Down Girl*, 77-78.

⁵ McKinnon, “Allies Behaving Badly,” 168-176.

⁶ Fricker, *Epistemic Injustice*, 147-176.

⁷ Abramson, “Turning Up the Lights on Gaslighting,” 4: concerning example (3).

*testimony.*⁸ The third and final category takes Abramson's examples of authority figures inviting a worker to "take time off" as among those which implicitly-reference *social relations* to coerce assent.⁹ So, although the variety of Abramson's real-world examples helpfully demonstrate the real-life incarnations gaslighting can take, identifying how these examples each serve to highlight one of the three necessary and sufficient characteristics of gaslighting better serves this paper's analytic purpose.

The first of these characteristics is ***undermining a speaker's confidence in their judgment-making*** abilities. These judgment-making, or subjective, abilities, include the ability to perceive and the ability to reason. Ascriptions of perspective ignorance attack the former, whereas ascriptions of epistemic ignorance attack the latter. It is by attacking either, but more commonly both at once, that a gaslighter exacerbates a speaker's self-doubt. This self-doubt increases in proportion to the speaker's belief that inconsistencies in their own thinking might have emerged.¹⁰ Thereafter, in justifying how a speaker's perceptive and intellectual abilities might have possibly been jeopardized in the first place, a gaslighter offers an alternative account rationalizing possible inconsistencies in the speaker's testimony. If the denial of testimony constitutes a gaslighter's attack against *what* is spoken, it is through degrading a speaker's confidence in their own subjectivity—both regarding their perceptive and reasoning abilities—that a gaslighter attacks *how* those spoken views were formed from the start. This aspect of gaslighting ensures that the rational mechanism responsible for dissenting worldviews will not be as confident in its next appraisal of a given experience.

To illustrate the harmfulness of this particular aspect of gaslighting, Abramson describes the destabilized sense of agency it causes, citing de Beauvoir's uncertainty toward "what [she] thinks, or even if [she] thinks at all."¹¹ This description by de Beauvoir of her relationship with Jean Paul-Sartre appears to resemble gaslighting, but so too does understanding another fundamental moral malice that Abramson identifies: that if a gaslighter actually believes a speaker's subjectivity has been compromised, the gaslighter would not be as strongly compelled to reason with that speaker in the first place.¹² However, the gaslighter nonetheless attempts to persuade a speaker that the latter's judgment-making abilities have been degraded,

⁸ Ibid., concerning examples two (2), four (4), five (5) and six (6).

⁹ Ibid., this concerns examples one (1), seven (7) and eight (8).

¹⁰ Ibid., 8.

¹¹ Ibid., 4.

¹² Ibid., 13.

hence prompting an epistemological self-doubt of lasting impact. Indeed, under Fricker's account, gaslighting represents a kind of testimonial injustice—"a kind of injustice in which someone is wronged specifically in her capacity as a knower."¹³ It is because of this that the gaslighter appears to be acting out of a particular moral failing. It is by attacking the perceptive and reasoning faculties that make one a "knower" that gaslighting ultimately is a form of testimonial injustice.

The second characteristic of gaslighting is ***denying the specific contents*** of testimony. The speaker may be told that their reaction is disproportionate to the perceived harms, or that they are mistaking acceptable behavior as otherwise. In whatever manifestation, throughout all the specific content of their testimony is being denied. If testimonial injustice refers to a speaker suffering a credibility deficit due to the incredulity of a listener, then it is first through expressing skepticism toward the contents of a speaker's testimony that gaslighting is initiated. This disbelief toward contents is not necessarily a phenomenon unique to gaslighting; after all, anyone engaged in an argument will inevitably try to undermine the content of opposing arguments. However, all plausible cases of gaslighting originate from the denial of speaker's specific testimony. Indeed, for the attempted degrading of a speaker's judgment-making capacities, the characteristic detailed previously, to even play out, a gaslighter must first take issue with *what* a speaker has said.

This characteristic is morally harmful in how it might normalize or excuse harmful behaviors. Abramson offers a host of examples showing sexual harassment, the objectification of women, and "an overwhelming accumulation of small incidents."¹⁴ To complement these cases, I offered an example clarifying this particular characteristic. The probable leading motivation behind Steve Jobs' gaslighting was to discredit the skepticism of his employers' testimony. While Isaacson's biography causes a reader to believe Jobs attacked his workers' subjective abilities by elevating his own relative experience, and coerced cooperation by creating a work environment in which such deadlines were reasonable, Jobs also sought to discredit the specific content of their testimony. If his dissenting employees' confidence in their subjective abilities were to remain intact and the social environment barely-affected, Jobs would likely have had an even more efficient "reality distortion field" from the perspective of his capitalist interests.

¹³ Fricker, *Epistemic Injustice*, 20.

¹⁴ Abramson, "Turning Up the Lights on Gaslighting," 5.

The threat of ***social consequences***, again while not alone unique to gaslighting, is present throughout all attempts to gaslight. All conceivable cases of gaslighting threaten a reduced social standing should the speaker refuse to, as described by Abramson, “assent” to the gaslighter’s worldview.¹⁵ This social standing can be compromised to varying extents and within varying contexts, making it difficult to detect precisely what kind of social standing is threatened by a given instance of gaslighting. Nonetheless, it is possible to detect that in all cases of gaslighting, a gaslighter attempts to shape environmental forces, external to the gaslighter’s own self, that will increase the speaker’s relative comfort in abandoning their initial testimony than maintaining it. Indeed, the ultimate presence of power structures within any social relation, and the often-privileged status afforded to gaslighters over their speaker, characterizes even cases of gaslighting where there are no more than two parties. No two individuals, even if you fix all possible intersecting identities presenting varying levels of privilege, ever truly occupy identical statuses of authority at any given moment. It is hence these social forces that make it more uncomfortable for the speaker to not assent to the gaslighter’s worldview.

A clear example of this is the implicit reference to authority when a boss invites a subordinate to “take a break” from work, subtly communicating how the latter’s current grievances constitute a deviation from the norm compromising their productive capacities and should therefore be addressed. In this case, the boss leverages his status as an authority figure over the speaker to silence the latter’s testimony. Moreover, the social consequences accompanying a loss of employment constitute an even higher-order environmental threat following from the boss’ direct control of the workplace as a higher-order social threat.

The Interdependence of These Characteristics

Each of these three characteristics do not alone define gaslighting, but together characterize every conceivable case of gaslighting. For example, a speaker whose subjective abilities are questioned (characteristic one) is also threatened by possible social exclusion (characteristic three) stemming from their jeopardized subjectivity, ultimately coercing their cooperation through this implicit social threat. After all, being labeled “crazy” degrades not just your own subjective self-confidence, but the confidence others are willing to entrust in you. This

¹⁵ Ibid., 12.

environmental conditioning, (characteristic three) in turn, reinforces the alternative account the gaslighter offers, undermining the speaker's specific claims (characteristic two) and further compromising the speaker's confidence in their own subjectivity (characteristic one). And moreover, denying the specific contents of a claim is always the first motivator that initiates gaslighting. Had the speaker made a claim agreeable to the gaslighter, the need to gaslight would never have emerged in the first place.

Ultimately, a thorough understanding of the nature of gaslighting demarcates those features that are not necessarily unique to gaslighting on their own, but recognizing how they, categorically separate but in occurring in tandem, identify gaslighting.

Is Gaslighting Sexist or Misogynistic?

We now consider whether gaslighting is inherently sexist or misogynistic, with attention to the distinction offered by Kate Manne in *Down Girl*. Manne argues that sexism is the belief in the subordinate social placement of women, while misogyny concerns the actual practices enforcing sexist ideology.¹⁶ As part of her account, sexism refers to a set of beliefs promoting the subordination of women, to varying extents, in society, while misogyny refers to the actual enforcement of such beliefs. To generalize, there are sexist *beliefs* and misogynistic *practices*. However, in reality, we may only detect the former through the latter. Gaslighting, when it is misogynistic, must necessarily be sexist. But it is not necessarily misogynistic in all cases.

While there are examples one could cite of gaslighting to showcase how it can be neither sexist nor misogynist, we must acknowledge that its misogynistic character has captured the public attention as of late. The persistent divide between the experiences of men and women perpetuated by the patriarchal structure of predominant social institutions ensures that gaslighting commonly manifests in interactions between the genders. This is because the gaslighter, considering the three characteristics which together define gaslighting, most successfully gaslights in an environment where he has a degree of social, environmental leverage over the speaker—and there are few authority asymmetries remaining like that between the genders. All examples offered by Abramson are misogynistic insofar as they promote sexist ideology either subordinating, or passively allowing the continued subordination of women.

¹⁶ Manne, *Down Girl*, 77-78.

However, we must acknowledge that not all gaslighting is necessarily sexist or misogynistic. To show this, I now offer an example from my own childhood of when I gaslit my father. Years ago, before I even knew what gaslighting was, I cracked open a water bottle my father had just bought, thinking he had bought it to share. However, when he turned to my sibling and I and angrily asked who had opened his water, I leveraged his occasional absent-mindedness to meekly suggest that perhaps he had been the one who opened it and had just forgotten. This, in addition to those aforementioned examples, including Steve Jobs' capitalistic, rather than sexist, motivation to meet tight deadlines, and Winston's co-educational experience at the end of 1984, ultimately demonstrate that not all gaslighting is necessarily misogynistic.

Gaslighting, as It Is Unintentionally Practiced

In addition to my non-misogynistic examples of gaslighting, McKinnon explains how those who consider themselves “allies” are capable of gaslighting a speaker’s testimony without realizing it. McKinnon accepts the frequent definition of allies as “dominant group members who relinquish the social privileges conferred by their group status through their support of nondominant groups.”¹⁷ This is demonstrated by her hypothetical story. Take the case of James, who, despite self-identifying as a trans ally, misgenders Victoria at a workplace party, doing so while drunk in front of a handful of their colleagues. McKinnon is right that this is not yet gaslighting. Rather, the opportunity to gaslight emerges in how others react to Victoria once she voices how she is upset with James’ behavior. The subsequent reactions of Michaela—the first colleague Victoria confides in, who downplays the seriousness of James’ wrong as “like getting [her] niece’s name mixed up with her sisters”—and that of Susan—who, as the second colleague Victoria confides in, justifies her disbelief in Victoria’s testimony by invoking having never witnessed James’ misbehavior herself—demonstrate the possibility of unintended gaslighting.¹⁸ Indeed, Michaela’s reaction excuses behavior as falling within acceptable norms, much like the examples of sexual harassment posited by Abramson, while Susan’s reaction tends more to doubt the subjective capacities of the speaker in question. Indeed, it appears possible, as McKinnon argues, for gaslighting to occur unintentionally.

McKinnon reminds us that leveraging ally status to exclude oneself from the necessary self-examinations of their socially-conditioned attitudes could lead to a well-intentioned ally who

¹⁷ Brown and Ostrove, “What does it mean to be an ally?” 2211-2222.

¹⁸ McKinnon, “Allies Behaving Badly,” 6.

nonetheless errs. Gaslighting contains the harms involved in not trusting a speaker, but it is a particularly harmful form of testimonial injustice because of how easily allies might gaslight, betraying a particular trust placed in them by the speaker and further isolating the already isolated. This is because the circumstances in which gaslighting occurs usually subordinate the speaker, as explained before. Hence, it is important that even the most well-intentioned allies realize their capacity to gaslight, as it would potentially constitute a unique betrayal of the trust placed in them by the speaker.

Gaslighting Does Not Necessitate Dependence

The next priority of my paper is to argue against the belief that gaslighting necessitates subsuming worldviews to facilitate the speaker's social dependence on the gaslighter, as argued by Abramson.¹⁹ While it might often be a purpose, there are conceivable cases, like when I gaslit my father, where dependence is not being facilitated. On this latter point, one will notice that this dependence would perhaps be created through degrading a speaker's judgment-making capacities and increasing their self-doubting over time in multiple cases. It does not appear as an isolated indicator of gaslighting as a particular incident. My ameliorative definition of gaslighting instead sees gaslighting as a series of conjunct, definite characteristics being satisfied concurrently. The gaslighter creating or further facilitating the speaker's dependence, in a social sense, is not one of them.

Moreover, on whether gaslighting must always betray a particular trust of the speaker, in many situations, gaslighting takes place after an ally has already been entrusted with sensitive information. This is especially evident in the reluctance a speaker would have likely had to overcome to even articulate their grievance. However, not *all* gaslighting cases betray a particular trust, and can even occur between two strangers between whom no special degree of trust has been exchanged. This is my disagreement with McKinnon's view that gaslighting requires a unique trust between a speaker and their eventual gaslighter. For instance, think back to the case of my father and I: it is conceivable that had I paid a total stranger to gaslight my father in my stead, (Having him interrupt our conversation at the start of my father's anger, to interject: "Hey, pal, leave your kids alone. I saw you drink the water yourself two seconds ago.") the stranger would have been just as successful.

¹⁹ Abramson, "Turning Up the Lights on Gaslighting," 20.

Similarly, the ability to gaslight permeates most social relations in which there is an unequal, to power structure, and so Steve Jobs' ability to gaslight his employees, despite their prior experiences, that a seemingly-impossible deadline was actually possible, did not rely on any special trust afforded to him as a result of his previously-expressed sympathies for a particular marginalized group. Jobs' successful gaslighting of his employees' prior experiences depended on arguing against their incredulity toward a possible deadline, justifying how their subjectivity was informed by a lack of experience relative to his own, and by creating a social environment supporting his strict deadlines that felt like a "confounding mélange."²⁰

All three necessary and sufficient characteristics of gaslighting are present, but gaslighting here does not seem to present a harm, if you consider the gaslighting to have been a worthwhile cost for the ability for their team to meet tighter deadlines. While gaslighting in all cases is harmful, gaslighting can occur irrespective of the content being gaslighted, whether it be as trivial as meet deadlines or as significant as erasing a memory of sexual misconduct. Because of the limitless array of phenomena one could gaslight another about, gaslighting does not appear to depend on a special relationship or sensitive content, as respectively demonstrated by the imagined rendering and original rendering of my father's opened water bottle.

Hence, returning briefly to the question raised at the start of this essay on what distinguishes gaslighting from other forms of testimonial injustice, those additional constraints that make gaslighting more than simply the denial of a testimony's accuracy include coercion prompted by environmental control and explicit appeals to undermine a speaker's subjectivity. Whether it happens between two familiar parties or total strangers may affect the emotional and psychological consequences, but it does not affect the fundamental nature of gaslighting.

Gaslighting as a Political Phenomenon

Gaslighting permeates interactions throughout contemporary social structures to the point of being a political phenomenon. While gaslighting, in the micro, occurs at an interpersonal level, anecdotal evidence of gaslighting in different circumstances suggests it to be a widespread social practice in the macro. For instance, the shocking quantity of accusations against Harvey Weinstein reveals the individual cases of testimonial injustice wrought by responses of

²⁰ Isaacson, *Steve Jobs*, 118.

gaslighting form patterns of gaslighting that amount to a much broader, political silencing. This broader political silencing isolates individual victims from one another by creating a climate in which harassment and abuse are either normalized or allegations about them are dismissed.

This silencing, as identified by Kristie Dotson in her discussion of gaslighting's resulting chilling effect, is evident in the extent to which we are now discovering significant sexual abuse committed by authority figures within prominent industries. Notably, Weinstein justified his behavior as a product of a more sexist era, when it perhaps could be more precisely described as a reflection of the more ubiquitous acceptance of misogynistic gaslighting at his time.²¹ When we read of how the initial victims who confided in others had their experiences *normalized* as necessary for women—whether it is another woman laughing at a speaker's lack of desire for a threesome—to obtain professional success in the entertainment industry, we should be able to immediately recognize it for what it is: gaslighting.²²

McKinnon, channeling Fricker, situates how these political attitudes can infiltrate the reactions of the most sympathetic, self-identifying “allies,” revealing how even individual actors sometimes cannot escape the politically-disseminated prejudices against people of certain marginalized groups. This is revealed in Manne’s own explanation of misogyny as being the enforcement of sexist ideology, for many conceivable cases of gaslighting—such as that which silences the testimony of, say, a sexual assault survivor—betray misogynistic properties.²³

But gaslighting can occur beyond testimonial injustice: more broadly, as part of Fricker’s account of epistemic injustice. Epistemic injustice can occur as testimonial injustice, as already discussed, and, additionally, as hermeneutical injustice. The latter refers to the lack of social resources available to victims allowing them to understand their experiences. The speaker simply lacks avenues of recourse through which they can recognize and understand the wrong they have experienced. Instead, it is through the ubiquitous silencing of testimony that hermeneutical injustice is ultimately wrought.²⁴ To the distraught speaker who has just been gaslighted, the inability to even articulate a grievance presents perhaps the most profound injustice of all. Racism, sexism and the like are complex, thoroughly-critiqued phenomena, but

²¹ See Weinstein, “Statement.”

²² See Kantor and Twohey, “Weinstein Paid Off Sexual Harassment Accusers.”

²³ Manne, *Down Girl*, 77-78.

²⁴ Fricker, *Epistemic Injustice*, 147-152.

prior to them ever being named and recognized as such, their victims suffered a hermeneutical injustice as they likely struggled to comprehend the social significance of their personal experience. While there was never an explicit disclosure of testimony, lacking the right words with which to shape testimony is a separate feature of certain, more particularly harmful cases of gaslighting: cases of hermeneutical injustice. So, while gaslighting in the micro may not pose a hermeneutical injustice, it is often through its widespread practice concerning a particular issue in the macro that testimony is silenced at the level of individual consciousness before it might enter public consciousness. That the public consciousness no longer, therefore, aggregates individual testimonies is a possible explanation for how gaslighting as a hermeneutical injustice might be socially enforced. Indeed, gaslighting need not be, but often has throughout the history of its usage, been in support of and enforced by broader, social, and hence political, forces.

Conclusion

Ultimately, in this essay, I provide an analytic definition of gaslighting as being constituted of three separate, but interdependent, characteristics. I also reason that gaslighting can be non-sexist, unintentional, independent of special trust, and political in scope. Considering the enduring significance of gaslighting as a practice degrading the experiences of, oftentimes, already marginalized groups, it is of utmost importance that we continue to identify gaslighting as it is applied in order to combat its injustice.

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Gendering History: Investigating a Historical Materialist Account of Patriarchy

Natalie Cernius
Harvard University

Abstract

Marx's historical materialism is the theory that the key to understanding societal organization and re-organization throughout history is to understand human material needs and means of fulfilling them, and how these things have evolved over time. Colin Farrelly's paper "Patriarchy and Historical Materialism" argues that historical materialism can explain institutionalized male dominance (patriarchy), or more specifically: 1) the emergence of the gendered division of labor; 2) how the gendered division of labor turned into the oppressive structure of patriarchy; and 3) why patriarchy is being dismantled in some places while persisting in others. My essay reconstructs Farrelly's arguments for each point, and elucidates a few foundational problems within them. In particular, it seems that Farrelly has no clear answer to a fundamental question about how the gendered division of labor became oppressive specifically to women, rather than to men. Farrelly's arguments also depend on some trans-historical claims about what is inherent to sex and gender that seem highly contestable to the reader, and especially to the Marxist reader. I pose a few potential remedies to each of these problems. Without such remedies, I conclude that Farrelly's account of historical materialism is not enough on its own to explain patriarchy.

In his essay "Patriarchy and Historical Materialism," Colin Farrelly argues that Marx and fellow Analytical Marxists have failed to explain how 'reproductive labor' fits into Marx's account of historical materialism.¹ Farrelly aims to explain an important topic of feminist concern—patriarchy—using historical materialism, by devoting special attention to reproductive labor.² In this paper, I will summarize Farrelly's view of how reproductive labor functions conceptually in Marx's historical materialism, and how historical materialism as such can explain the origins, persistence, and evolution of patriarchy. I will raise some counter-

¹ In this essay, reproductive labor involves both the work of gestating a fetus undertaken by females, and the work of raising and caring for the resulting child. And historical materialism is the theory that the ordering and re-ordering of society can be explained by examining material needs and means of fulfilling them throughout human history.

² In this essay, patriarchy constitutes institutionalized male dominance in public and private spheres.

arguments to Farrelly's theory, and consider how he might respond. Finally, I will conclude that while Farrelly's work is convincing in some aspects, it leaves critical questions unanswered, and thus fails to achieve its goal of using historical materialism to explain the existence of patriarchy.

Historical Materialism and Patriarchy

Farrelly distinguishes among three types of Marxist historical materialism in order to answer three separate questions about the "creation, persistence, and evolution" of patriarchy.³ I will explain each in turn.

Basic materialism is the theory that humans have fundamental material needs, which must be fulfilled in order for them to survive.⁴ Under conditions of scarcity, humans must labor to fulfill their needs; thus, labor is necessary for survival. External pressures, such as physical environment, determine the type of labor necessary for survival. Farrelly argues that the external pressures of early human history generated two particular types of labor: warfare labor, and reproductive/caring labor.⁵ A general lack of resources caused warfare between different groups of humans, who fought one another to take control of the resources. And given the limited medical knowledge in primitive societies, child mortality rates were high, meaning that a significant portion of a fertile woman's life had to be spent in a series of pregnancies in order to raise enough healthy children to adulthood. Sustaining the population would be impossible without warfare and reproductive labor, and so in order to fulfill the requirements of basic materialism, early humans had to invest heavily in them both.

Given that biologically, only females can gestate a fetus, in these early years, women became primarily responsible for taking on reproductive labor, and men took up the default role of warfare labor.⁶ To be clear, women did not take up warfare labor in *addition* to reproductive labor because the material conditions of early primitive societies demanded frequent pregnancy to have the best chance of reproducing the population. Diversification of labor would not be very expedient, given these conditions and the primitive means of responding to them; it was most efficient for these early human communities to divide labor

³ Farrelly, "Patriarchy and Historical Materialism," 4.

⁴ Marx and Engels, "The German Ideology," 150-151.

⁵ Farrelly, "Patriarchy," 5-7.

⁶ *Ibid.*, 4.

along gender lines in order to meet their material needs. So, according to Farrelly, the gendered division of labor (GDL) originally sprang up as a means of satisfying the requirements of basic materialism.⁷ This original division along gender lines made the advent of a gender hierarchy possible, and thus, the requirements of basic materialism appear to be the basis of the class relations of patriarchy.⁸

Next, Farrelly uses synchronic materialism to address the following questions: how did patriarchy become embedded in organized states, and why did patriarchy persist in those states? Synchronic materialism is essentially Marx's base/superstructure theory—the theory that a society's relations of production—the economic 'base'—determine the organization and character of its social institutions—the 'superstructure'.⁹ A society's political, legal, and religious systems are both determined by and built upon the economic structure of the society. Engels' "The Origin of Family, Private Property, and State" offers two illuminating examples: in Ancient Athens, "the state sprang directly and mainly out of the [economic] class antagonisms that developed within gentile society", while for "the German vanquishers of the Roman Empire, the state sprang up as a direct result of the conquest of large foreign territories, which [they] had no means of ruling."¹⁰ The distinct characteristics of each state were determined by economic conditions: in Athens, the state arose to respond to tensions between slaves and free men, and for the Germans, the state arose to respond to the unique and demanding requirements of maintaining an empire. More generally, Marx would say that an agrarian economy has certain characteristics that generate political and social systems that are distinct from the ones more likely to arise from an industrial economy. The state, its institutions and its character, according to Engels and Marx, are "by no means a power forced on society," but "a product of society at a certain stage of development."¹¹

Farrelly's argument follows the line of reasoning advanced by synchronic materialism. He claims that the relations between producers, non-producers, and productive forces of society, determine the existence and persistence of patriarchy. More specifically, a patriarchal

⁷ *Ibid.*, 7.

⁸ Class relations are how different classes interact with one another, and also how they stand with respect to one another. Marx famously proclaims that "the history of all hitherto existing society is the history of class struggles" – i.e. bourgeoisie (capitalists) vs. proletariat (laborers). See Marx and Engels, "Manifesto of the Communist Party" for a longer discussion.

⁹ Farrelly, "Patriarchy," 8.

¹⁰ Engels, "The Origin of the Family, Private Property, and the State," 754.

¹¹ *Ibid.*, 752.

society has material needs that require women's unpaid reproductive labor. In pre-19th century European societies, medicine was basic, disease was prevalent, and childhood mortality rates were high; women simply had to undergo many pregnancies, and invest significantly in reproductive/caring labor, in order to raise one or two healthy children to adulthood. Productive forces in the medical arena—means of enhancing and maintaining health—were limited. So, men dominated women because reproductive/caring labor was essential to the survival of the society; engaging in reproductive labor could not be a woman's choice. The 'base' of primitive medical practice catalyzed the 'superstructure' of patriarchy. Men had to control women's reproductive labor power in order to ensure that reproductive labor was undertaken adequately.¹² The social organization of patriarchy is born out of these dominant relations of reproduction¹³. So it seems that as long as a strong investment in reproductive labor is necessary, male-dominant relations of production exist, and patriarchy persists.

However, it is not only the base—the society's relations of production—that causes patriarchy to persist: "patriarchal components of the superstructure, such as those codified in religion and in laws and social practices governing the family, impact the relations of production, in particular the relations that pertain to a woman's reproductive and caring labor."¹⁴ In other words, the ideals of patriarchy grew to be institutionalized in social structures such as religion, thereby reinforcing male-dominant relations of production. To sum up what Farrelly argues we can learn about patriarchy from synchronic materialism: material conditions caused the relations of domination that catalyzed patriarchy; primitive productive forces caused patriarchy to persist; and the superstructure helped entrench it in society.

At this point, Farrelly believes he is sufficiently detailed the origins of patriarchy—the GDL class relations of early human communities—and the mechanism by which patriarchy has persisted in states (through the late 19th century). His next task is to use historical materialism to explain how patriarchy has evolved, and why it has gradually been chipped away in certain places but not others from the 19th century to the present, and he uses Marx's diachronic materialism in order to do so. Marx's diachronic materialism is meant to explain why societal revolutions occur when they do. It is his 'full view' of history.¹⁵ Diachronic materialism builds

¹² Farrelly, "Patriarchy," 14.

¹³ By 'dominant relations of reproduction,' I refer to the idea that men dominated women's reproductive capacity; that they forced women to undergo pregnancies and raise children.

¹⁴ Farrelly, "Patriarchy," 10.

¹⁵ Marx, "Manifesto of the Communist Party," 473.

on the basic idea advanced by synchronic materialism: a society's relations of production determine that society's organization. Revolutions occur when a society's productive forces advance sufficiently that the relations of production change, causing society to re-organize.¹⁶ Marx says that the French Revolution, for example, was sparked by the Industrial Revolution: with the development of industrial productive forces, society began to reorganize around cities, bringing French citizens out of the countryside and out of the feudal system. These developments—the transformation from the pre-Revolution agrarian economy to an industrial one—necessitated a fundamental change in societal organization. Feudalism was incompatible with the industrial economy, and this demanded a revolution: “the feudal relations of property became no longer compatible with the already developed productive forces; they became so many fetters. They had to be burst asunder; they were burst asunder.”¹⁷ Revolution is inevitable, according to Marx. As societies evolve, as they develop their productive forces, societal re-organization is bound to occur, just as it did through the French Revolution and other revolutions before it.¹⁸

Farrelly makes a similar kind of argument: since the mid 1800s, first-world society has changed rapidly. Medicine has made strong strides forward in developed countries, and we live in an age of technological entrepreneurship: “medical advances in reducing child mortality and infectious diseases (for example, immunizations) meant that the historical imperative to maximize the number of productive contributors a society could produce from birth was no longer essential, as populations were living longer, healthier lives.”¹⁹ The advancement of productive forces such as these has made the last 150 years conducive to a societal re-organization—a ‘women’s revolution,’ so to speak. The material conditions of the developed world no longer necessitate such a strong investment in reproductive/caring labor, because child mortality rates have fallen; in developed countries, they are almost negligible. That means that there is room for greater investment in productive labor. Because the heavy investment in reproductive labor is no longer necessary in order to fulfill the requirements of basic materialism, women in developed societies have been able to enter the workforce, and

¹⁶ Ibid., 477; Farrelly, “Patriarchy,” 10.

¹⁷ Marx, “Manifesto,” 478.

¹⁸ Marx’s overarching point is that capitalist societies, too, will succumb to revolution, just as Athens and Rome and feudal societies fell.

¹⁹ Farrelly, “Patriarchy,” 14.

contribute their labor power through a different means.²⁰ By contrast, underdeveloped countries in this day and age largely still hold patriarchy firmly in place.²¹ According to Farrelly, that's because their productive forces have not advanced sufficiently for women to be able to reduce their investment in reproductive labor and enter the workforce.²² Surely, any country interested in advancing its own economy would want to harness the productive power of as many of its citizens as possible. So, why don't countries with patriarchy invest more in women's productive power than in their reproductive power? According to Farrelly, it is because societies with patriarchy still struggle to meet the needs of basic materialism without investing heavily in women's reproductive labor: "improving the life prospects of women lies with overcoming the challenges of scarcity and high child mortality...advances in public health like the sanitation revolution, immunizations, and so on, have helped free some of the world's women from the most oppressive forms of patriarchal relations."²³ This is how Farrelly explains why patriarchy is persisting in some countries, even while women have been largely liberated in others.

Flaws in Farrelly's Account

My primary critique of Farrelly's account is of the way he connects the GDL and patriarchy; I am not convinced that the GDL contributed to catalyzing patriarchy in the way Farrelly indicates. I am convinced by the way Farrelly explains the origins of the GDL itself: that it arose as a means of satisfying the requirements of basic materialism in early human communities. It is also clear that over time, the GDL became entrenched in society through repetitive cultural practices. However, it is not clear to me why the GDL transformed into the oppressive structure of patriarchy. Farrelly seems to take for granted that simply dividing labor roles along gender lines necessarily makes this division oppressive, and specifically oppressive to women. Entrenching the GDL in society does not seem enough to result in patriarchy; there must be some other forces at play to turn the GDL into an oppressive structure. I think that Farrelly has failed to acknowledge and explain these other forces.

²⁰ Ibid., 14.

²¹ Farrelly takes it as given that there is a strong correlation between a country's level of development and whether or not it has patriarchy.

²² Ibid., 15.

²³ Ibid.

Seemingly the only way the GDL could inherently constitute a gender hierarchy oppressive to women is if reproductive/caring labor were valued less than warfare labor or other labor. In that case, in a society with GDL, women performing this ‘lesser’ type of labor might also come to be associated with their work, and with the ‘low’ value of their work. If women were seen as low-value workers, this plausibly could’ve led to their being oppressed by the high-value workers. But Farrelly says emphatically that this is not the case at all. In fact, he’d say that it is precisely *because* reproductive/caring labor was seen as equally valuable to productive labor—precisely *because* it was so vital to societies with limited productive forces—that patriarchy arose from GDL. In other words, Farrelly’s argument is that patriarchy exists because reproductive labor is important, but at many times and for many women, undesirable. Men came to dominate women because forcing reproductive labor was essential to the survival of the species.

My response to Farrelly is that it seems that the flip side of the previous argument is also probably true: just as it is possible that women did not desire to solely perform reproductive labor, it is quite possible that men did not particularly want to engage in warfare labor. The GDL, recall, divided labor so that women performed reproductive/caring labor, and men performed the warfare labor. Surely, warfare labor, and other forms of productive labor for that matter, were still vital to the same societies in which reproductive/caring labor was vital. So then, taking all of this together, why is it not the case that the GDL became oppressive to men? In other words, if basic materialism requires that a certain set of people perform work they are unwilling to perform, and if the only means of coercing that labor is for another class to own the original class’s labor power, then men surely should have been dominated by women in the same way that women were dominated by men. This problem indicates to me that something beyond the material conditions of society turned the GDL into something that specifically oppresses women.

So, then, why did we get a patriarchy and not a matriarchy? Marx’s concept of commodity fetishism might help solve the puzzle. For Marx, there is nothing intrinsically valuable about any commodity; it is only valuable for its use, and for its market exchange potential. For example, a toaster is valuable because its function is useful to members of the economy, who then buy it on the market. It is not valuable because there is something intrinsically useful about toasters. Commodity fetishists, according to Marx, arbitrarily ascribe intrinsic value to commodities when such value does not exist. This makes them see some

commodities as more valuable than they actually are, and ultimately inflates the commodities' market exchange price. To put the concept in the context of my discussion of patriarchy: recall that Farrelly argues that reproductive labor and other labor (productive labor broadly construed) have been equally valuable to human societies throughout history. On the other hand, I have established that the only way that Farrelly's jump from GDL to patriarchy could work is if the two types of labor were *not* equally valuable. Commodity fetishism might help us find some middle ground between the two positions. In early capitalist societies, it was perhaps the obsession with capital that allowed patriarchy to persist. Capitalist societies have a distinct preference for wage labor, given how such societies arrange the rewards of various types of labor. Under this view, the GDL arose in the way Farrelly describes, but morphed into the oppressive form of patriarchy because reproductive labor did not result in capital gain in the way that wage labor, or productive labor, did. Even though the two forms of labor are equally valuable (Farrelly's view), they were not seen as equally valuable (my view). Society's obsession with capital has influenced the external rewards system and made the conditions of persisting patriarchy—the conditions in which men maintain power—possible. This is the force that Farrelly does not account for; it is not enough to simply say that men came to dominate women because women were suited to essential, yet undesirable work, for as I have established, the same had to have been true for men. The GDL became oppressive to women *also* because of the perceptions of *value* of each type of work, which plausibly resulted in a hierarchy that placed men over women. Considering how career trends have turned in the last 100 years, our preference for wage labor seems obvious: women have attempted to infiltrate what was once a 'man's world'—the paid workforce—and yet, men have barely begun to take on roles in the domestic sphere at all. Because women have, historically, overwhelmingly performed the labor of fewer rewards, men have been primed to be in control. In an alternate society in which GDL still exists, but domestic labor and wage labor are seen as equally valuable, it seems plausible that patriarchy would not exist.

So, to sum up this discussion about commodity fetishism: Marx's commodity fetishism could show that the oppressive power of patriarchy was not catalyzed by a difference in the actual *value* of each type of labor, but just a difference in how the actual value of each labor was *recognized* and *rewarded*. I argue that the way to account for male-dominant relations of patriarchy is to see that productive labor was arbitrarily favored above reproductive labor, even though in absolute terms, each type of labor is equally valuable to human society.

One might just think that my discussion in this subsection has been irrelevant, because one of Farrelly's basic premises is flawed. He argues that reproductive labor and warfare labor were vital to early communities, but it is not clear why he believes the former to be necessary. He seems to take as given that human needs and human interests are intergenerational. In other words, Farrelly assumes that humans instinctively care not only about their own survival, but the survival of their immediate communities, the future of those communities, and even the human species as a whole. The classical Marxist view of basic materialism, on the other hand, seems to be self-centric: humans labor to satisfy needs that are straightforwardly good for the individual, and it is not clear that any particular person *needs* the group to reproduce.²⁴ If early humans did not have that instinct, then it seems unlikely that they would have made such a large investment in reproductive/caring labor in the first place. In that case, there must be a different explanation of GDL. More generally, Farrelly's arguments suggest that he understands what humans have needed and wanted throughout history. He suggests that he understands what is inherent to sex or gender. These sorts of trans-historical claims are highly contestable.

Farrelly might initially respond to this charge by referencing Marx's thesis of human collectivity: "humans have a distinctive history of acting to produce the means for meeting their material needs, and they do so in classes" (8). In other words, part of satisfying individual needs must be satisfying group needs. There are other instances in which Farrelly's assumptions about human desires might be problematic, but I expect he would solve them with this same line of reasoning. Or he might just concede that his paper indeed turns on uncertain claims about what is inherent to sex and gender, but argue that such claims are not as contestable as they seem. Such a response would turn the inquiry empirical, and Farrelly does not explicitly offer any evidence that we should take up his claim. So, given the empirical nature of the question, and the lack of evidence offered up on either side, it seems that as it stands, the contestability of Farrelly's trans-historical claims about sex and gender is uncertain.

Conclusion

In this essay, I have explained Farrelly's purpose for applying Marx's historical materialism to the important feminist issue of patriarchy, and outlined his arguments from historical

²⁴ Marx, "Theses on Feuerbach," 223.

materialism for the origins, persistence, and evolution of patriarchy. I find Farrelly's arguments for the persistence and evolution of patriarchy particularly compelling; however, I think that he has work to do to convincingly account for the origins of patriarchy. I think that Marxism can help explain the transformation of GDL into patriarchy, and I've suggested an alternate way to think about this. Overall, I conclude that patriarchy probably can be explained by historical materialism—but that Farrelly's essay fails to achieve this goal.

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How Epistemic Exploitation Contributes to Active Ignorance and Epistemic Injustice

Jo-Anna Hagen Schuller
University of Edinburgh

Abstract

Instances of epistemic exploitation, where a privileged person demands a marginalized person to educate them about the nature of their oppression, perpetuate active ignorance and perpetrate epistemic injustices in many ways, two of which will be explored in this paper. First, epistemic exploitation often involves displays of epistemic vices, such as epistemic arrogance and laziness, which feed into the creation and maintenance of active ignorance. Second, some cases of epistemic exploitation result from epistemic injustices that involve credibility excesses to the marginalized, and have the potential of creating even further epistemic injustices, because of the associated opportunity cost and the double-bind that often results.

Introduction

In this paper, I will home in on two of the many ways in which cases of epistemic exploitation perpetuate active ignorance and perpetrate epistemic injustices, which are either only implicitly mentioned or under-explored in Nora Berenstain's paper 'Epistemic Exploitation'. First, epistemic exploitation often involves displays of epistemic vices, such as epistemic arrogance and laziness, which feed into the creation and maintenance of active ignorance.¹ Second, some cases of epistemic exploitation result from epistemic injustices that involve credibility excesses to the marginalized, and have the potential of creating even further epistemic injustices. Before looking at these two ways, I will spend some time defining the concepts at hand.

¹ Medina, *The Epistemology of Resistance*, 39.

Epistemic Exploitation, Active Ignorance, and Epistemic Injustice

Epistemic exploitation occurs when privileged persons demand that members of marginalized groups educate them about the nature of their oppression.² There are plenty of ways in which this can happen, such as on social media, in academic settings, and in casual conversation. For instance, posts made by marginalized persons on social media, even when not directly related to liberation struggles, are frequently marked by (mostly anonymous) commentators who will either play devil's advocate by calling into question the existence of the structures of oppression or attempt to make an analogy with seemingly absurd consequences and publicly demand that the original poster respond and correct their misunderstanding. In academic settings, epistemic exploitation is usually subtler but will manifest itself through tokenistic invitations to serve on committees and panels concerning under-representation and marginalization, with no action taken on a deeper systemic level.

These demands are usually exploitative in at least three ways. First, responding to them often involves uncompensated and unrecognized effort, both emotional and intellectual, by the compelled marginalized person(-s).³ This leaves the marginalized worse-off, whilst the privileged might become better-off, in part because it prevents them from engaging in other more useful and fulfilling activities. Second, the demands usually create a double-bind around the oppressed.⁴ They face a choice between engaging in tiring labor that might not even be fruitful or running the risk of being seen as shirking dialogue, which might be used to put into doubt whether they are being oppressed. Third, these demands are often accompanied by default skepticism about the testimony of experiences of oppression, or about how these fit into wider structures of oppression.⁵ This leads to the need for more labor, a tightening of the double-bind as it heightens the risks caused by disengaging, as well as other potential harms. Importantly, epistemic exploitation can occur even if the demands are well-meaning.⁶ Indeed, good intentions do not preclude anyone from displaying skepticism, which is usually (mis)interpreted by the privileged as simply participating in balanced debate, and the work of

² Someone may be marginalized along some axis of their identity, whilst privileged by another (Fricker, *Epistemic Injustice*, 153); Berenstain, "Epistemic Exploitation," 570.

³ Berenstain, "Epistemic Exploitation," 570.

⁴ Ibid., 575.

⁵ Ibid., 578.

⁶ Ibid., 571.

explaining one's oppression with little compensation or recognition is tiring no matter how receptive the audience is.⁷

The harms of epistemic exploitation go beyond the individual psychological harms done to those who have either given up their time and energy to respond to the demands of the privileged or faced backlash for refusing to do so. Indeed, the broader harms consist in entrenching the very structures of oppression that the privileged are inquiring about, as epistemic exploitation comes with an associated opportunity cost for the marginalized person, and rarely leads to widespread systemic change. This places epistemic exploitation within a broader system of epistemic oppression in which marginalized groups are either prevented from creating knowledge, or the knowledge they do have is not recognized as knowledge, which ties into active ignorance.

Active ignorance is not simply 'pockets' of ignorance, whether in the form of absence of true beliefs or the presence of false beliefs, that someone might have about a certain topic; it cannot be remedied by filling in gaps of knowledge with facts.⁸ Instead, it is a system of beliefs that presents itself as knowledge, where the subject is unaware of their own ignorance and participates in its perpetuation by misinterpreting the world around them.⁹ Furthermore, active ignorance is connected with systems of oppression and helps to keep them in place. For example, white ignorance, as characterized by Charles Mills, stems from, and upholds, white supremacy, and an analogous case could be made about 'male ignorance' and patriarchy.¹⁰ Such ignorance protects itself from refutation by building a narrative that excludes the possibility of other perspectives, through a distortion of epistemic resources such as perception, testimony, and memory.¹¹ Getting rid of it would thus require a complete overhaul of someone's system of beliefs, which would presumably necessitate wider social change.¹²

The literature identifies at least three more crucial features of active ignorance. First, it is never an isolated case of a single subject's ignorance, but is instead necessarily shared pervasively in order to gain its oppressive force and resilience. Second, although it is active, it is

⁷ Not all demands for education about oppression need inherently be exploitative, but they have the potential to be. A non-exploitative demand would be made in a tone and context where there is the option to withdraw safely, and the demander would recognise that they are not the ones doing a favour (Davis, "Typecasts," 495).

⁸ Berenstain, "Epistemic Exploitation," 587; Mills, "White Ignorance," 20.

⁹ Medina, *The Epistemology of Resistance*, 39.

¹⁰ Mills, "White Ignorance," 15-22.

¹¹ Ibid., 19-23

¹² Medina, *The Epistemology of Resistance*, 39.

often not conscious.¹³ It is mostly possessed by those who are privileged by a system of oppression, and they benefit from not being aware of its existence and mechanisms.¹⁴ Although they might in some sense be epistemically worse-off, this ignorance helps them remain better-off because the need for change, which would require giving up certain privileges and perhaps even revisiting their whole identity, is dismissed by simply not being recognized. This is different from situations in which someone is content in their ignorance. Furthermore, this implies that it need not be based on bad faith, as someone can have perfectly good intentions whilst unconsciously acting in ways that are oppressive¹⁵. Third, it is not only and necessarily possessed by the privileged.¹⁶ White ignorance is not simply ignorance that white people have, just as male ignorance is not just any and all ignorance that men have, or false beliefs men have about women. Some privileged persons may to some extent overcome it, whilst some of those who are not could also manifest it.¹⁷ For example, many women do not recognize the patriarchy and the plethora of negative experiences that arise because of it, such as sexual harassment and date rape, in spite of much evidence.

Epistemic injustices are harms done to someone specifically in their capacity as a knower.¹⁸ The two main forms identified by Miranda Fricker are testimonial and hermeneutical injustice, and they often go hand-in-hand.¹⁹ The former occurs when someone's testimony is not believed due to them being attributed a deficit of credibility, stemming from an identity-prejudice against the social group they are a part of.²⁰ For example, a woman's presentation of her scientific research at a male-dominated conference might be dismissed because she is not given the credibility she deserves, due to her male colleagues being prejudiced against women in science. Emmalon Davis argues convincingly that there can also be cases of testimonial injustice that stem from credibility-excesses, as positive stereotyping and tokenism can lead to further epistemic oppression.²¹ For example, an Asian-American pupil might be asked and expected by her peers to help them with their mathematics

¹³ Mills, "White Ignorance," 21.

¹⁴ Medina, *The Epistemology of Resistance*, 39.

¹⁵ Mills, "White Ignorance," 21.

¹⁶ Ibid., 20.

¹⁷ Ibid., 22-23.

¹⁸ Fricker, *Epistemic Injustice*, 1.

¹⁹ Ibid.; Ibid., 160; Medina, *The Epistemology of Resistance*, 77.

²⁰ Testimony is here taken in a wide sense; Fricker, *Epistemic Injustice*, 26.

²¹ Davis, "Typecasts," 486.

homework even if she is not actually that mathematically gifted, because there is a positive stereotype that all Asian-Americans excel at mathematics.

Hermeneutical injustice happens when someone is prevented from making sense of a social experience because of structural identity-prejudices, which exclude certain social groups from fully participating in the creation and shaping of the collective hermeneutical resources.²² Women who were experiencing what is now called sexual harassment or post-natal depression in the 1950's were not able to make sense of this at the time, because their interpretations of experiences only marginally influenced the shaping of hermeneutical resources. There is a variety of hermeneutical injustice where a marginalized group's experience is already well-understood by them, but is not taken up by the privileged to become part of the collective resources.²³ This ties into willful hermeneutical ignorance, which can be thought of as a combination of active ignorance and epistemic injustice.²⁴ Dominantly situated knowers dismiss the hermeneutical resources created by marginalized groups, because integrating them would require a radical overhaul of their own resources and revision of what they think of as knowledge.²⁵ As a result, the dominant group remains ignorant of how the world works, whilst the marginalized group's knowledge is not recognized as such, which is an epistemic injustice insofar as they are harmed in their capacities as knowers.

Two Ways in Which Epistemic Exploitation Contributes to Active Ignorance and Epistemic Injustice

Berenstain does draw attention to the fact that epistemic exploitation, through its associated default skepticism, reinforces active ignorance.²⁶ When privileged persons demand new epistemic perspectives to then discard them, they are rejecting evidence that compromises their own world-view, and entrenching the false beliefs on which it relies.²⁷ However, it is worthwhile expanding her analysis by examining how the demands for education by privileged people involve so-called epistemic vices. Epistemic vices are attitudes that uphold active ignorance by getting in the way of knowledge. José Medina develops three such vices, and corresponding virtues: epistemic arrogance and humility, epistemic laziness and curiosity, and

²² Fricker, *Epistemic Injustice*, 155.

²³ Medina, *The Epistemology of Resistance*, 82.

²⁴ Pohlhaus, "Relational Knowing," 722.

²⁵ *Ibid.*, 715.

²⁶ Berenstain, "Epistemic Exploitation," 586.

²⁷ *Ibid.*, 588.

closed- and open-mindedness.²⁸ Very roughly, someone is epistemically arrogant when they think that they are cognitively superior and authoritative but overestimate their epistemic capacities; epistemically lazy when they display a lack of curiosity towards certain domains they have the privilege of not needing to know about; and closed-minded when they ignore certain domains and perspectives that they need not to know about in order to maintain their privilege and keep benefitting from it.²⁹ These three epistemic attitudes upkeep the ignorance and blind-spots of the privileged, as they limit not only what kind of contributions they can make knowledge-wise, but also what they can learn from others.³⁰

Epistemic vices are pervasive in occurrences of epistemic exploitation and demands for education, although they are not always immediately obvious because they often disguise themselves as virtues. For instance, the act of questioning itself is often characterized by the privileged as a virtuous act of epistemic curiosity, of engaging in rational debate. However, as noted above, it is not the privileged who are doing the oppressed a favor, even if they end up going on to educate themselves further and work towards dismantling the structures of oppression that they benefit from. Instead, it is the marginalized who are doing the privileged a favor, as the education the latter could gain, if they listened, would help them dismantle their active ignorance and become better epistemic agents. As Pohlhaus points out ‘dominantly situated knowers [...] rely on the epistemic labor of other knowers’.³¹ Demanding to be educated by marginalized persons is therefore not usually virtuous epistemic curiosity, but rather a combination of epistemic laziness and arrogance that manifests itself through the entitlement and skepticism that typically underlie the demands.

Feeling entitled to someone’s time and energy in order to be educated about their oppression betrays attitudes of laziness and arrogance. It is epistemically lazy because it puts the burden of proof on the oppressed. It is arrogant because it ignores the fact that it is the privileged, and not the oppressed, who are responsible for their own cognitive shortcomings. Default skepticism, just as the act of demanding, is often also disguised as epistemic modesty or virtue and critical ripostes to claims of oppression are portrayed as necessary for good epistemic practice. However, by putting into question someone’s experiences of oppression, or

²⁸ Medina, *The Epistemology of Resistance*, 39-42.

²⁹ For example, many men display epistemic laziness towards the workings of domestic up keeping; they are ignorant of the work that goes into maintaining a household, partly because it benefits them not to know (Ibid., 32); Ibid., 30-34.

³⁰ Ibid., 31.

³¹ Pohlhaus, “Relational Knowing,” 110.

their connection to overarching structures of oppression, the privileged person is placing more importance on their own intuitions and judgment about these matters.³² This is epistemically arrogant because they think themselves more cognitively capable of making correct and impartial judgements, when they are in fact in a worse-off position to do so. Again, they place the burden of proof on the marginalized to correct their web of false beliefs, whilst making little effort to do so themselves. Furthermore, their ignorance stems from epistemic laziness or closed-mindedness, as they have failed to take into account other people's experiences and interpretations.³³

I now turn to the second way in which epistemic exploitation interacts with epistemic injustice and active ignorance. As hinted to above, asking someone to provide insight into their oppression to then dismiss their testimony, because of either conscious or subconscious identity-prejudices against them, combines epistemic exploitation with testimonial injustice. In most cases, this results from a credibility deficit. However, it sometimes involves credibility excesses, and although Davis briefly connects this kind of testimonial injustice to epistemic exploitation, which Berenstain does acknowledge in a footnote, it is worth exploring in more depth.³⁴

Credibility excesses can lead to tokenism, where a member of a marginalized group is called upon simply in virtue of their identity to act as a representative of the group.³⁵ Credibility excesses in contexts of epistemic exploitation can have several impacts. First, tokenizing marginalized people places an extra burden of labor on those who are compelled to provide education about their oppression, and reinforces the aforementioned double-bind. Second, giving excess credibility to the tokenized marginalized person assumes that a) the experience of oppression of the group is homogenous, and b) that they are all able to utilize the hermeneutical resources available in an intelligible way. This creates an added layer to the double-bind, where engaging in the exchange could result in failure to make themselves understood, because they are either not familiar enough with the hermeneutical resources connected to their own experiences, or with those of other members of the group.

This points to something that Davis does not explicitly mention in her analysis, namely that credibility excesses do not only lead to more unrecognized labor or tighter double-binds,

³² Berenstain, "Epistemic Exploitation," 579.

³³ Ibid., 579.

³⁴ Ibid., 581.

³⁵ Davis, "Typecasts," 491.

but are often also accompanied by skepticism, just as with most other cases of epistemic exploitation. Again, this skepticism is damaging, even when not malicious, especially because of the tension it creates with the attribution of excess credibility. When a marginalized person is compelled to respond on behalf of their group, and does so in an unintelligible manner because they are unable to draw on the necessary hermeneutical resources to do so, the privileged are likely to interpret it as a confirmation of their own way of viewing the world, exacerbating their willful hermeneutical ignorance. Furthermore, it is worth noting that this last type of skeptical response that follows from attributions of credibility excesses is quite often found in academic contexts, where the demands might be quite subtle and focused on a narrow facet of a group's oppression. It is not unusual that academics who are members of marginalized groups are asked to participate in panel discussion that explore oppression and marginalization, even when their actual area of expertise might be concerned with a completely different topic. In addition to being time and energy consuming and to the dangers that refusing might entail, they could end up not even being able to properly articulate their arguments, making the sceptic's counter-arguments seem superior to a willfully ignorant audience.

Conclusion

In conclusion, I have expanded on two ways in which epistemic exploitation interacts with active ignorance and epistemic injustice that Nora Berenstain only alludes to in her paper. First, I have explicitly drawn the link between epistemic exploitation and the various epistemic vices that are to be found in the perpetrators of such exploitation. These attitudes are integral to active ignorance and can also result in testimonial and hermeneutical injustices. Second, I have looked at the ways in which credibility excesses lead to exploitative demands for education that involve tokenism. This is potentially damaging not only because of the opportunity-costs and double-binds associated with such demands, but also because of the skepticism often held by the privileged even when attributing an excess of credibility to the marginalized person they are asking.

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Skillful Teaching of Dao: The Language Use of Zhuangzi

Yuka Kamamoto
Nanyang Technological
University

Abstract

This research aims to show that Zhuangzi's use of language is skillfully formulated to encourage a transformation in the reader's perspective, by appealing to new perspectives that neither affirm nor reject the reader's position. Current literature does not fully explain how Zhuangzian language helps readers to reach an understanding of *Dao*. I suggest that Zhuangzian language does so by encouraging the reader to generate new meanings to transform the reader's viewpoint. This is best contrasted with Plato's use of dialectic for discovering truth, which is representative of classical Western rhetoric. Through a comparative analysis of the ontological differences between Zhuangzi's *Dao* and Plato's Form of the Good, and their distinct rhetorical strategies, I discover different effects of their language use on readers. While Plato's dialectic might not persuade dogmatic readers to change their views, Zhuangzian language would, at minimum, weaken the readers' conviction in their position, and possibly transform their viewpoint into a deeper perspective. This finding challenges the traditional method in philosophy that disagreements can be resolved by dialectic argumentation and proposes Zhuangzian language as a more effective alternative.

1 Introduction

Zhuangzi is a Daoist philosopher known for the view of *language skepticism*, which is “the belief that language is somehow inadequate for expressing certain facts about reality, at least in propositional form”.¹ Specifically, it refers to Zhuangzi's skepticism about “the ability of words to express *Dao*”.² As such, there is an assumption that *Dao* is a kind of ‘intuitive’ knowledge that can only be conveyed through Zhuangzi's creative and flexible use of language.³ However, even if we define knowledge of *Dao* as a kind of intuitive knowledge, it still does not fully explain how Zhuangzi's flexibility with words can help readers to reach an understanding of

¹ Ivanhoe, “Zhuangzi on Skepticism, Skill and the Ineffable *Dao*,” 641.

² *Ibid.*, 648.

³ *Ibid.*, 648-649.

. I suggest that a more nuanced account of Zhuangzi's unique rhetorical strategies is needed to better understand the transformative effects it has on readers.

In this paper, I will argue that Zhuangzi's use of language is skillfully formulated to encourage a transformation in the reader's perspective, by appealing to new perspectives that neither affirm nor reject the reader's position. This is best contrasted with Plato's use of dialectic for discovering truth, which is representative of classical Western rhetoric. First, I will compare the ontological differences between Plato's Form of the Good and Zhuangzi's *Dao*, and show how that influences their rhetorical strategies. Next, I will compare their rhetorical strategies and show how that has different effects on readers. Lastly, I will consider some possible objections with regards to the clarity of Plato's dialectic over Zhuangzian language. Furthermore, I hope to show that ultimately, Zhuangzi's use of language is more effective than Plato's dialectic in transforming one's perspective and thus in resolving disputes.

2 Form of the Good vs. *Dao*

In this section, I will compare the ontological differences between Plato's Form of the Good and Zhuangzi's *Dao*. The point for comparison is to show that the ontological basis of their philosophy results in distinct rhetorical strategies. While the Form of the Good functions as a standard for measuring what is right from what is wrong, *Dao* functions as a rotating axis that blurs and harmonizes the distinction between what counts as right and wrong. As such, for Plato, dialectical argumentation is the preferred strategy for determining who is right in a disagreement. On the other hand, Zhuangzi uses a skillful rhetorical approach to harmonize the opposing claims that are generated in disagreements.

2.1 *Plato's Form of the Good*

In *The Republic*, the Form of the Good is the supreme source of truth and knowledge, and the basis for distinguishing what counts as true knowledge from false opinion.⁴ The Forms and other abstract objects exist in the intelligible realm, as opposed to physical objects, which exist in the changing world of the senses. It is the human faculty of reason that allows us to discern perfect Forms and mathematical objects from imperfect sensible objects.⁵ As such, if two or more parties hold contrasting points of view and have a disagreement, argumentation and

⁴ Plato, *Republic*, 508e.

⁵ Ibid., 511b-c.

dialectic reasoning (i.e. Socratic method) is the method Plato employs to determine whose point of view is the right one.⁶ The underlying assumption here is that the person who holds the correct perspective, for example the character Socrates in Plato's works, will be victorious in the discourse, because his arguments would survive all attempts of cross-examination by his interlocutors.

2.2 *Zhuangzi's Dao*

In contrast, *is the basis for harmonizing the distinctions we make from 'this' and 'that', from 'right' and 'wrong'. While the Form of the Good is the standard for determining whether a claim is true knowledge ('right') or false opinion ('wrong'), *has the opposite function: it blurs the distinction between right and wrong by showing that these two ideas contradict but generate each other, and they change depending on the context of the situation. As such, Zhuangzi thinks that argumentation does not necessarily resolve disputes as evident from this passage:**

Suppose you and I get into a debate. If you win and I lose, does that really mean you are right and I am wrong? If I win and you lose, does that really mean I'm right and you're wrong? Must one of us be right and the other wrong? Or could both of us be right, or both of us wrong? If neither you nor I can know, a third person would be even more benighted. Whom should we have straighten out the matter? Someone who agrees with you? But since he already agrees with you, how can he straighten it out? Someone who agrees with me? But since, she already agrees with me, how can he straighten it out? Someone who disagrees with both of us? But if he already disagrees with both of us, how can he straighten it out? Someone who agrees with both of us? But since he already agrees with both of us, how can he straighten it out? So neither you nor I nor any third party can ever know how it is—shall we wait for yet some "other"?⁷

The Form of the Good is like a third party that determines which side is right, and then the party that is judged to be wrong is obliged to agree with the winning side. But this does not truly even out the disagreement between two parties, because it is just endorsing one party and rejecting the other. Yet the disagreement still remains. What will settle disputes once and for all is the art of "harmonizing [ourselves] with them by means of their Heavenly Transitions".⁸ In other words, it is to understand the opponent's way of seeing the world, to appeal to what

⁶ *Ibid.*, 499a.

⁷ *Zhuangzi, Zhuangzi: The Essential Writings*, 19.

⁸ *Ibid.*, 20.

they value, and possibly blur the distinction between what they count as valuable and not valuable. Only in this way, can disputes truly be resolved because gaining insight to our opponent's perspective puts them in a less defensive stance and creates an opportunity for transforming their perspective, thereby dissolving the disagreement.

3 Dialectical vs. Skillful Use of Language

In this section, I will compare Plato and Zhuangzi's rhetorical strategies. While Plato's key strategy is his dialectical use of language, also known as the Socratic method, Zhuangzi's overarching strategy is the use of *zhiyan* or 'goblet words', coupled with the practical approaches of *yuyan* 'dwelling words' and *zhongyan* 'weighty words'.

3.1 *Plato's Dialectical Use of Language*

Plato mainly employs the Socratic method, which is "the process of eliciting the truth by means of questions aimed at opening out what is already implicitly known, or at exposing the contradictions and muddles of an opponent's position".⁹ The structure of the dialectic can be seen as follows:

1. The interlocutor, "saying what he believes," asserts *p*, which Socrates considers false, and targets for refutation.
2. Socrates obtains agreement to further premises, say *q* and *r*, which are logically independent of *p*. The agreement is *ad hoc*: Socrates does not argue for *q* or for *r*.
3. Socrates argues, and the interlocutor agrees, that *q* and *r* entail $\sim p$.
4. Thereupon Socrates claims that *p* has been proved false, $\sim p$ true.¹⁰

In the *Symposium*, for example, Agathon asserts that Love is beautiful because "the gods' quarrels were settled by love of beautiful things, for there is no love of ugly ones".¹¹ Socrates targets this assertion and gets Agathon to agree with the new premises that "Love is the love of something" and that "he loves things of which he has a present need".¹² Going back to Agathon's initial assertion, Love desires beauty and never ugliness. However, if Love needs beauty, then it is not beautiful. Thus, Socrates has revealed a contradiction in Agathon's premises and rejects his account of Love. From here, Socrates goes on to argue for a new

⁹ The Oxford Dictionary of Philosophy, "Dialectic."

¹⁰ Lee, "The Rhetoric of the Way," 140.

¹¹ Plato, *Symposium*, 201a.

¹² Ibid., 200e.

definition of Love as “reproduction and birth in beauty”.¹³ This new definition of Love follows from the new premises that Agathon agreed with previously, thus Socrates’ argument is deemed as more tenable. In the end, Socrates receives a loud applause, clearly having given the best speech at the symposium.

3.2 *Zhuangzi's Skillful Use of Language*

Zhuangzi employs three main rhetorical strategies, namely (1) dwelling words (*yuyan*), (2) weighty words (*zhongyan*), (3) goblet words (*zhiyan*), which are mentioned in the opening of Chapter 27 of the *Zhuangzi*:

Almost all of my words are presented as coming from the mouths of other people (dwelling words), and of those the better part are further presented as citations from weighty ancient authorities (weighty words). But all such words are actually spillover-goblet words (goblet words), giving forth [new meanings] constantly, harmonizing them all through their Heavenly Transitions.¹⁴

Dwelling words refer to “the use of parables, figurative descriptions, imaginary conversations” which “become the lodging or dwelling places for ideas, meanings, implications”.¹⁵ An example of this can be found in Chapter 4 of the *Zhuangzi*, in which a tree talks to a carpenter in a dream to express Zhuangzi’s ideas about value, judgment, uselessness, etc. This strategy is distinct from traditional philosophical texts, which conventionally employ direct discursive language. Another definition of dwelling words is “putting one’s words into the mouths of other people” such as “fictitious characters, talking trees, ancient kings”.¹⁶ As such, weighty words are a more specific type of dwelling words as it makes use of the weight of authority to convey ideas. For example, when Zhuangzi puts his own idea into Confucius’ mouth to give it more weight. In a sense, Plato also employs the same strategy by using Socrates, a venerable figure to represent his ideas. However, there is a fundamental difference in their approach of using authoritative figures as a rhetorical strategy, and we will need to understand Zhuangzi’s use of goblet words to identify this difference.

While dwelling words and weighty words are used the most to present Zhuangzi’s ideas, they are all actually considered goblet words because they are used for the deeper purpose of

¹³ Ibid., 206e.

¹⁴ Zhuangzi, *Zhuangzi: The Essential Writings*, 114.

¹⁵ Wang, “Strategies of Goblet Words,” 202.

¹⁶ Ibid., 203.

generating multiple perspectives to the effect of harmonizing opposing viewpoints.¹⁷ Goblet words are likened to a goblet because it “tips when full and rights itself when empty”.¹⁸ They balance out right-wrong or this-that (*shi-fei*) distinctions by generating new claims that reverse the original meaning of opposing claims. Take an example from Chapter 2 of the *Zhuangzi*:

Now I am going to make a statement here. I don't know whether or not it fits into the category of other people's statements. But whether it fits into their category or whether it doesn't, it obviously fits into some category. So in that respect, it is no different from their statements. However, let me try making my statement. There is a beginning. There is not yet beginning to be a beginning. There is a not yet beginning to be a not yet beginning to be a beginning. There is being. There is nonbeing. There is not yet beginning to be nonbeing. There is not yet beginning to be a not yet beginning to be nonbeing. Suddenly there is being and nonbeing. But between this being and nonbeing, I don't really know which is being and which is nonbeing. Now I have just said something. But I don't know whether what I have said has really said something or whether it hasn't said something.¹⁹

This passage consists in a string of negations, yet no claim is being affirmed or rejected in the process of negating. There is a constant pattern of ‘neither p nor q’ e.g. neither beginning nor end, neither being nor nonbeing, neither saying nor silence, etc.²⁰ There is also a pattern of self-questioning since he says that he is going to make a claim, but immediately questions if he really is making any claim. Yet Zhuangzi is not simply advocating any counter-claim, because he even negates the counter-claim again. For example, he negates ‘not yet beginning to be a beginning’ to generate ‘not yet beginning to be a not yet beginning to be a beginning’. This use of language seems to be modeling after *or the ‘void’ that is beyond the duality of ‘being’ and ‘nonbeing’. To claim that there is ‘being’ is also to generate the counterclaim that there is ‘nonbeing’. But even that counterclaim is not the final conclusion that Zhuangzi rests upon. We could negate ‘nonbeing’ again and it will still generate something. We could name it *, the great void, ‘not yet beginning to be nonbeing’, etc. But we could still continue negating that name and generating a new name for it. There is an infinite regress that paradoxically self-generates multiple claims.**

¹⁷ Zhuangzi, *Zhuangzi: The Essential Writings*, 114.

¹⁸ Wang, “Strategies of Goblet Words,” 197.

¹⁹ Zhuangzi, *Complete Works of Zhuangzi*, 12-13.

²⁰ Wang, “Strategies of Goblet Words,” 207.

This reverses the original meaning of 'being' and 'nonbeing', because 'nonbeing' can also mean 'being' when you contrast it with 'not yet beginning to be nonbeing'. So on the first level, 'being' and 'nonbeing' are conflicting ideas that generate each other. But when we negate 'beginning' to generate a new yardstick, 'not yet beginning to be a beginning', we can negate 'nonbeing' to generate a completely new claim 'not yet beginning to be nonbeing'. This new claim demonstrates that on a deeper level, 'being' also means 'nonbeing' and 'nonbeing' also means 'being'. The original meaning of 'being' and 'nonbeing' are reversed, thereby harmonizing the two opposing concepts.

4 Different Effects on Readers

In this section, I will show how Plato's and Zhuangzi's language use has different effects on their readers. Since Plato's arguments are systematic and clearly developed, most readers cannot help but agree with his conclusions. However, Plato's assertion of one point of view being right might put some readers in a defensive stance, since their viewpoint is being challenged. Rather than encouraging them to change their mind, it might lead readers to dogmatically hold on to their own views. On the other hand, Zhuangzi's skillful use of language explores multiple viewpoints and affirms all of them, which liberates the reader from having to defend one right perspective, and possibly transforming the reader's viewpoint to see things on a deeper level.

4.1 *Effects of Dialectical Language on Readers*

From the passage in *Symposium*, it is obvious that Plato is trying to convince his reader of his own claim and position on the concept of love. He does consider his opponent's position, but only for the purposes of rejecting it later on by revealing a contradiction in ideas. As a reader, we have our own assumptions about the nature of love. It may be different from Plato's thesis, or similar. As such, we can divide readers into two 'camps': the supporting reader and the opposing reader. The supporting reader identifies that Plato's thesis is on their side, and takes a supportive stance. When Plato analyzes his opponent's position, the supporting reader may temporarily sympathize with the opposing view, but expects Plato to disprove it later on. The supporting reader feels that his initial assumptions about love are endorsed by Socrates, a venerable figure, and settles with Plato's conclusion.

On the other hand, the opposing reader identifies that Plato's thesis is against them, and takes on a defensive stance. They might feel cautious when Plato starts interrogating their assumptions about love, and look for a way to counter his claims. Another good example of an opposing reader is Thrasymachus in the *Republic*, who still refuses to accept Plato's argument, even though Plato has successfully disproven his thesis. In either case, readers from both camps are limited to their initial point of view and experience no transformation in their perspectives.

4.2 *Effects of Skillful Language on Readers*

Likewise, for Zhuangzi, we can also divide his readers into two 'camps': reader X who has *p* assumptions about the nature of existence, and reader Y who has not-*p* assumptions about the nature of existence. Referring back to Zhuangzi's passage about the nature of being and nonbeing, it is not apparent that Zhuangzi is trying to convince the reader of his own position. In fact, the reader is unable to identify his position because he is making multiple claims that lead to no definite conclusion. This has an unsettling effect on reader X and Y, because they cannot tell if Zhuangzi would endorse or disapprove their views. As such, readers are not thrown into a defensive or supporting stance. If the reader wishes to get more out of Zhuangzi's passage, or generate some meaningful interpretation, they must start negating their own position and consider the opposing claim. Through this back and forth reasoning of how his own position generates a counter position, the reader becomes increasingly aware of how opposing claims generate and complement each other.

If the reader wishes to generate even more interpretation out of the passage, the reader has to go a step further, beyond the dualistic reasoning of opposing claims e.g. the dichotomy of being and nonbeing, good and bad, beneficial and harmful, etc. As such, the reader must negate the opposing claim again, not to the effect of generating his own claim again, but to generate a new claim that cancels out the duality of his own claim and his opponent's claim. For example, if we study Zhuangzi's passage again, he has successfully cancelled out the differentiation of being and nonbeing because "between this being and nonbeing, I don't really know which is being and which is nonbeing". And he does this by negating "nonbeing" to produce a second "nonbeing" (new claim), which effectively blurs the line between being and nonbeing and harmonizes these two opposing ideas. If a reader succeeds in taking this further step, then his perspective on the nature of existence has been transformed, because he reaches

a conclusion that is radically different from his previous assumptions. And this applies to both supporting readers and opposing readers.

Perhaps another way to illustrate the transformative effect of Zhuangzi's writing is to identify the different levels of meaning that readers might interpret from the text. This is apparent in texts that employ the strategy of dwelling words, for example, in the very first chapter of *Zhuangzi* that begins with a fable about the fish, Kun, transforming into the bird, Peng. The effect of this strategy is that readers are non-defensive and non-judgmental, because they take it as if Zhuangzi is merely telling a story. It is non-defensive because readers do not feel that their existing beliefs are being challenged, and it is non-judgmental because they feel that they are free to interpret the text however they want. By taking on this approach of reading, this story appeals to the reader's imagination, as it evokes a powerful imagery of metamorphosis, freedom, and grandiosity in the reader's mind.

Following this passage, Zhuangzi introduces the character Liezi, who also relies on the wind for travel. This might make the reader even more intrigued, since this is not a bird, but a human figure that possesses supernatural powers of flight. But he does not end here. On top of that, Zhuangzi introduces the possibility of a character that does not depend on the wind for travel, but "chariot upon what is true, both to Heaven and to earth, riding atop the back-and-forth of six atmospheric breaths" and never stopping.²¹ There is no definite conclusion about whether or not this new character is to be preferred above all the other characters, so at the very least, most readers would keep an open mind about how they want to interpret the text.

Although the ultimate message of this fable is ambiguous, Zhuangzi is clearly guiding the reader to progressively think about Peng, Liezi, and the last character. The readers need to generate their own interpretation of what the transformation of Peng means, in order to progress to a deeper analysis about Liezi and the last character. So in addition to encouraging readers to be open-minded about what the ultimate message of the story is, there is also an element of rigor and systematic thinking involved. Thus, Zhuangzi's use of language is able to engage the reader in a rigorous philosophical discourse without he himself positing or concluding any definite claims. As such, even the most dogmatic readers cannot hold on to just one position or interpretation, but forced to consider all alternatives with depth.

²¹ *Zhuangzi, Zhuangzi: The Essential Writings*, 5.

5 Limitations of Skillful Language

Although Zhuangzi's skillful use of language has a more transformative effect on readers, there are certain limits to his indirect and flexible use of language. First, it may be argued that Zhuangzi's use of weighty words is no more effective than Plato's use of wise historical figures to add more legitimacy to his own ideas. Just as Zhuangzi employs Confucius as a spokesperson for his own ideas of "fasting of the mind", Plato uses the character of Socrates as a mouthpiece for his own philosophical positions.²² However, Zhuangzi's use of Confucius as a character serves more than just the function of adding credence and weight to his words. As a reader, we find it funny when Confucius preaches un-Confucian-like ideas. We do not have that kind of response towards the character of Socrates in Plato's writings, because it is more or less consistent with what we know of the historical Socrates.

Another effect of Zhuangzi putting his own words into Confucius's mouth is that it challenges "the readership's traditional understanding of the canon".²³ By portraying an inaccurate version of Confucius, we are forced to check our understanding of Confucian texts, rather than just accepting it as the wise words of an elder. So while Plato uses the same strategy of weighty words, the effect it has on readers does not progress to a level of transformation, because he only uses it for the practical effect of persuasion. On the other hand, Zhuangzi's use of weighty words is guided by the deeper strategy of goblet words, thus creating multiple ways in which the reader can interpret the text and possibly transform their perspectives on it.

Secondly, there is a danger that a weak reader might be lost in Zhuangzi's text, or unsure of how to interpret meaning from his words. In contrast, Plato's writing is clearer and more persuasive. However, I think that the *Zhuangzi*'s greatest strength is that it encourages the reader to generate their own interpretation, rather than trying to convince the reader of one position or point of view. In order to bring about a change in someone, and to change their point of view, it is necessary to harmonize with the person's sensibilities, rather than force him to agree to the arguments of a critical discourse. I think that we might not necessarily be convinced of Plato's point, even if it is well argued. For example, in Plato's *Symposium*, seven speakers attempt to give a speech about the nature and purpose of Love. Socrates argues that Love is "reproduction and birth in beauty" and that the purpose of Love is to be a lover of

²² Ibid., 26.

²³ Morrow, "Metaphorical Language in the Zhuangzi," 183.

wisdom, i.e. a philosopher.²⁴ However, I think that although readers might agree with the logic of Socrates' arguments, one might find Aristophanes' speech more convincing, because it appeals to our emotional understanding of Love as a longing to be "whole" again.

In the *Zhuangzi*, the story of the monkey trainer could be seen as employing goblet words to avoid resorting to right-wrong arguments:

A monkey trainer was distributing chestnuts. He said, "I'll give you three in the morning and four in the evening." The monkeys were furious. "Well then," he said, "I'll give you four in the morning and three in the evening." The monkeys were delighted. This change of description and arrangement caused no loss, but in one case it brought anger and in another delight. He just went by the rightness of their present "this." Thus, the Sage uses various rights and wrongs to harmonize with others and yet remains at rest in the middle of Heaven the Potter's Wheel. This is called "Walking Two Roads."²⁵

The monkey trainer does not argue about the correctness of eating three chestnuts in the day and four in the night, but concedes to the monkeys' protests by adjusting to their present perspective. However, the passage does not settle on the monkey trainer's rhetoric technique, but introduces an image of a potter's wheel. It distracts the reader from the words uttered by the monkey trainer, to a visualization of the potter's wheel, which guides readers towards a deeper understanding of how the monkey trainer harmonized with the monkeys' perspective. Since Zhuangzi withholds any explanation about the monkey trainer, the reader is forced to draw their own connection between the monkey trainer and the potter's wheel, so as to understand why and how the monkey trainer's arrangement satisfied the monkeys.

According to Wim De Reu's interpretation of this passage, just as a skilled potter is able to locate the center of the wheel and continually re-adjust his position to balance and even out the shape of the clay, the monkey trainer manages to understand the monkey's demand(s) and resolve the situation by shaping his response according to those demands.²⁶ If he were to work against the monkey's perspective, he would fail to find the center of the potter's wheel and would not be able to even out the clay or mold a proper pot at the end. So this passage is multi-layered and there are various levels of interpretation a reader can gain from analyzing it. At the minimum level, a beginner reader has a vague sense of the rhetorical strategy that Zhuangzi is

²⁴ Plato, *Symposium*, 206e.

²⁵ Zhuangzi, *Zhuangzi: The Essential Writings*, 14.

²⁶ Reu, "How to Throw a Pot," 52.

trying to illustrate here and interpret the strategy as merely switching “three in the morning and four in the evening” to “four in the morning and three in the evening”. On a deeper level, a more advanced reader might try to connect the seemingly random image of the potter’s wheel to the insight of the monkey trainer. The reader takes on an active role regarding how far he wants to interpret the passage. He has to give equal consideration to various explanations and possible conclusions, since Zhuangzi does not give away his own position. It promotes an attitude of open-mindedness and more rigorous thinking. This is radically different from Plato’s dialectic, which directs the reader to consider only two perspectives: either to affirm or deny one position.

6 Conclusion/ Applications of Zhuangzian Language

In conclusion, I have shown that Zhuangzi’s skillful use of language has a more transformative effect on readers, as compared to Plato’s use of dialectic. To understand *, one must transcend the dualistic thinking of right and wrong, being and nonbeing, etc. Zhuangzian language is more effective at helping readers reach an understanding of *, since it encourages them to cooperate with their opponent’s position without undermining their own position, giving them the flexibility to respond to multiple points of view.**

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Is There Something It Is Like to Sleep?

Dhruv Raman
Ashoka University

Abstract

Are we conscious in deep sleep? In Indian Philosophy, two schools of thought have opposing views regarding this issue. While Advaita Vedanta philosophers believe that we are conscious in deep sleep, Nyaya philosophers believe that we are not. In this paper, I present two claims given by the Advaita Vedanta philosophers and object to them. First, they claim that we are able to report the quality of our sleep because we remember how we slept. This report from memory indicates that we are conscious in sleep. However, I argue that this report about the quality of our sleep is from inference and not memory. Second, they state that embodied self-experience is present immediately after waking up and this indicates that such awareness is carried forward from before sleep. However, I claim that this instant awareness does not necessarily indicate that it is carried over from sleep. There are two other explanations: this awareness is present whenever we are conscious, or it is an intuitive inference and thus, seems continuously present. Thus, this paper supports the claim that there is no consciousness in deep sleep.

Introduction

Are we conscious in deep sleep? In Indian philosophy, two schools of thought have opposing views regarding this issue. The Advaita Vedanta school of philosophy states that we are conscious in deep sleep. They argue that we remember traces of consciousness from sleep which allows us to make comments about the quality of our sleep. For instance, we say, “I slept peacefully.” The Nyaya school of philosophy states that we are not conscious in deep sleep. They claim that the statements about sleep quality are made through an inference. Thus, we know we claim that we slept peacefully not because we remember it but because we infer it

from being relaxed after waking up.¹ In this paper, I argue that we are not conscious in deep sleep by objecting to two arguments given by the Advaita Vedanta school.²

Section 1 presents the Advaita Vedanta argument which states that we are conscious in deep sleep because we recall and report the quality of our sleep. My objection is that our report of having slept well is not a memory but an inference. Section 2 presents the argument that on waking up, we have an instant bodily self-awareness and this awareness is being continued from deep sleep. I will show that it is not necessary that this self-awareness is being continued from sleep.

First, however, I will clarify the use of *consciousness* and *deep sleep* in this paper. Block distinguishes between two types of consciousness: access consciousness and phenomenal consciousness. Access consciousness refers to the availability of mental faculties for use and guidance.³ Phenomenal consciousness, however, is the qualitative character of our consciousness or the “what it’s likeness” of being conscious.⁴ Thus, there is something it is like to be Bob which is different from what it is like to be Clara: while both may watch the same movie, their subjective experience of it will be different. Similarly, there is something it is like to be awake, which is different from what it is like to be dreaming. In this paper, consciousness will refer to phenomenal consciousness. Our central question can be reframed to state: Is there something it is like to be in deep sleep? Further, this paper uses deep sleep to refer to a state of dreamless sleep.⁵ This distinction is important because most philosophers agree that we are conscious while dreaming.⁶

Section 1

Thompson in his book, *Waking, Dreaming, Being: Self and Consciousness in Neuroscience, Meditation and Philosophy*, presents the Advaita Vedanta argument for the presence of consciousness in deep sleep. The argument states that if there was no consciousness in deep sleep then we could have no memory of the experience of sleeping. However, on waking up we

¹ Thompson, “Dreamless Sleep,” 5-7.

² These claims are understood as presented by Thompson, “Dreamless Sleep”.

³ Van Gulick, “Consciousness”

⁴ Nagel, “What is it like to be a Bat?” 436.

⁵ Thompson, “Are we conscious in Deep Sleep”

⁶ *Ibid.*

recall the quality of our sleep—*how* we slept. We say, for instance, “I slept well.” This memory indicates that consciousness is present in deep sleep.

The Nyaya school of Indian philosophy objects to this argument. They state that our knowledge of not knowing anything in our sleep is an inference. The reason for this, they say, is that while sleeping we are in a special state. Thompson lists out a five-step inference for their argument. Their inference, however, seems circular. Their conclusion rests on the premise that while sleeping one is in a special state. However, this knowledge about being in a special state can only be affirmed through memory and not inference.⁷

Similar to Nyaya school philosophers, I argue that our report of the quality of our sleep is not from inference. This inference instead, is based on our previous conscious states—before sleeping—and our present conscious state—after sleeping. I will first show that our knowledge of the fact that we were sleeping—which is a precondition to report the quality of our sleep—is an inference. Unlike the Nyaya claim, however, I appeal to a thought experiment.

Imagine two opposing instances. First, in which you go to bed at night, turn off the lights and close your eyes in an attempt to sleep. Gradually, you fall asleep. Second, an instance where you are reading something while traveling in a car after a heavy lunch. Unintentionally, you fall asleep and wake up an hour later. Further, imagine that in both cases you had a deep dreamless sleep. Now, what happens when you wake up? In the first case, when you wake up you are instantly aware that you were sleeping and you may even say that you slept well. In the second case, however, you are confused when you wake up. There is a delay in becoming aware that you were sleeping. However, if the knowledge that you were sleeping and that you slept well is drawn from memory, then there should not be a delay in this awareness. Why is there an apparent confusion and delay in “recall” in the second case?

This difference is accounted for by the previous waking state. In the first case, you close your eyes intending to sleep. In the second case, however, you fall asleep unintentionally. Thus, in the first case, you infer by referring to your previous waking—and conscious—state that you had intended to sleep and had fallen asleep. Since time has elapsed from when you intended to sleep (your previous conscious state) to when you are awake (your present conscious state), it is clear that you were sleeping. You were undisturbed during this period—you did not wake up several times in the night, nor did you have dreams—and your body feels much more relaxed

⁷ See Thompson “Dreamless Sleep,” p.7, for detailed discussion.

than when you were last awake. This leads you to further infer that you slept well. Also, since this is an everyday routine, the speed of the inference is quick.

In the second case, things go differently. You refer to your previous waking state and remember that you were reading a book. You now see that book lying on the car mat and feel a strain in your neck. You also recall that you had eaten a heavy meal prior to reading and had been feeling drowsy. You check the time and realize that an hour has passed since you last checked the time. Now, you infer that you probably slept while reading the book. Also, you now feel refreshed compared to the drowsiness you felt in your previous waking state. From this you infer that you slept well.

It is important to note that these inferences do not happen as explicitly as stated in the example. The point is that our report of—“I was sleeping” and “I slept well”—is through inference. Further, this example can be generalized to any two cases wherein the first case the person intends to sleep, and in the second case the person unintentionally falls asleep. Factors in a given situation that may interfere with the speed of “recall”, will, therefore, not be relevant.

Thus, the awareness that one was sleeping is quicker when we intend to sleep than when we fall asleep unintentionally. Only once we infer that we were sleeping can we infer the quality of our sleep. Now, there is a delay in awareness of *how* we slept in the two cases. This shows that the previous waking state has an effect on the speed of the awareness. If we were simply recalling from our sleep, this would not be the case. Thus, the knowledge that we were sleeping and that of the quality of our sleep is inferred and not recalled. Further, since it is an inference and not a memory, it does not show that we are conscious in deep sleep—countering the claim of Advaita Vedanta philosophers.

Section 2

Another argument for consciousness in deep sleep is about embodied self-experience. On waking up, we have two kinds of self-experience: embodied and autobiographical. Embodied self-experience refers to being alive in the present moment. It entails having bodily self-awareness. Autobiographical self-experience, on the other hand, refers to our experience of being a person that has a storyline and travels in time. This includes information about where we are in space and time, and what we were doing before.⁸ For example, on waking up, we do

⁸ Thompson, “Dreamless Sleep,” 4.

not have to ask, “Who was sleeping?” But we may ask ourselves “*How long* has it been since I slept?” or “*Where* am I?” The first question is about embodied self-experience, whereas the other two are about autobiographical self-experience.

The proponents of the Advaita Vedanta argument claim that the embodied self-experience is present instantly. We have an “intimate and immediate bodily self-awareness.⁹” This instant awareness, they argue, suggests that the embodied self-experience is continued from before i.e. when we were sleeping. If this self-awareness is present in deep sleep, then we are conscious in deep sleep.¹⁰

Before replying to this claim, I would like to clarify that the embodied self-experience will not be different for the cases presented in the previous section. In both cases, in the previous waking state, we were aware of who was going to sleep or who was reading. Consequently, when we wake up, we will be immediately aware of *who* was sleeping. However, there will be a difference in relation to our autobiographical self-experience. In the first case, we will be immediately aware of the time and space we slept in, whereas, in the second case there might be a delay.

Now, turning to this argument, what explains the immediate embodied self-experience? I argue that the immediate embodied self-experience on waking up does not necessarily indicate that it was present when we were sleeping. There are other possible explanations. I will suggest two. First, it might be that embodied self-experience is inseparable from conscious experience. Whenever there is awareness, there is *someone* who is aware. Alternatively, embodied self-experience might be an intuitive inference and thus, seems to be continuously present. Borrowing Nagel’s analogy—we infer that the view we have is from somewhere and belongs to someone. That someone, we conclude, is us.

Consider that Ira fainted due to a heat stroke. Now, when she wakes up, she is aware that *she* is awake. The embodied self-experience is immediately present. However, this does not necessarily mean that she had the embodied self-experience when she had fainted. It could mean that this awareness is an inseparable part of conscious experience such that she has it whenever she is awake.

Alternatively, it is possible that as she opens her eyes, she understands that there is something that is awake—something that can see or something whose head is spinning—and

⁹ Ibid.

¹⁰ Ibid.

she makes an intuitive inference that the something is her. This inference seems necessary to make sense of our thoughts as well as experiences. Thus, it may be hidden from our awareness.

These two explanations seem more plausible than the explanation that embodied self-experience is carried over from sleep. This is primarily because there is no memory of having the embodied self-experience in deep sleep. Further, as in the example, this immediate awareness is also present in cases of fainting or what we commonly refer to as being ‘unconscious’. Which of the two suggested—or other—explanations are better is a question for further exploration. However, it seems unlikely that our immediate bodily self-awareness on waking up suggests that the awareness is present while sleeping.

Conclusion

Advaita Vedanta philosophers argue that we are conscious in deep sleep, whereas, Nyaya philosophers argue that we are not conscious in deep sleep. I objected to two arguments given by Advaita Vedanta philosophers for the presence of consciousness in deep sleep. The first objection is that our report of having slept well is an inference and not a memory. The second objection is that immediate bodily self-awareness on waking up does not necessarily imply its presence in deep sleep. Thus, this paper supports the claim that there is no phenomenal consciousness in deep dreamless sleep.

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Moving Towards a Transsexual Metaphysics: An Account of (Trans)sexed Embodiment and (Gender) Dysphoria

Sofie Vlaad
Queen's University

Abstract

This paper seeks to develop a new framework for discussing transsexual subjectivities. Drawing on Karen Barad's theory of Agential Realism, I posit sex not as an immanent quality, but one that exists through its relations. Agential Realism as a theory presents us with a framework for discussing things-in-phenomena, and the material-discursive practices from which they arise. Under this paradigm, I mark a distinction between transsexuality qua process as a natural function of sex by which determinate (sexed) boundaries are (re)articulated, and transsexuality qua subject as the determinate categories that boundary-making practices, such as sexology and state institutions, bring into being. Adapting Jay Prosser's theory of transsexuality as a form of autobiography to Barad's framework, I delineate the ways in which sex acts as a process of becoming. Finally, using the language of Freud's *Mourning and Melancholia*, I describe gender dysphoria as both constructed and melancholic, existing as the psychic feeling of loss incurred when the determinate boundaries of sex are rendered legible to state institutions, but illegible to transsexual subjects themselves.

An Agential Realist Account of Sex

Queer theory is often known for its inexhaustible appetite to subvert normative readings of sexuality and to challenge naturalized categories of sex and gender. Not even the realm of metaphysics is immune to this process. Karen Barad's new materialist framework of Agential Realism serves as the *de facto* example of how one would go about queering the universe itself. However, queer theory has a long history of erasing trans subjectivities, oftentimes painting transsexuality as a transgressive act without accounting for the various lived experiences of embodiment of transsexual individuals themselves.¹ In her critique of queer theory, particularly the work of Judith Butler, transsexual theorist Vivian Namaste argues that “. . .

¹ It is the schema of “all gender is drag” to which I here refer. See Butler, *Gender Trouble*.

since Butler has reduced . . . transsexuality to an allegorical state, she cannot conceptualize the specificity of violence with which transsexuals, especially transsexual sex workers, are faced.”² While I might be accused of committing a similar act of reductionism in light of my decision to focus on the metaphysical in addition to the social, by exploring what it might mean to offer a transsexual critique of the universe I hope to provide trans and queer theorists with new ways of exploring transsexual subjectivities.

In this paper, I propose a new way of considering transsexuality, not solely as an embodied experience specific to individuals, but also as a dynamic process by which we are always already in transition. Taking cues from Karen Barad’s agential realism, the work of Jay Prosser, and psychoanalytic theory, I will delineate a new theory of transsexuality which considers both transsexuality qua process as a natural function of the universe, and transsexuality qua subject as a contingent category. Under this new framework, I will be looking at the ways in which the material-discursive practices of state institutions (re)configure transsexual subjects into those subjects that are intelligible to said institutions, while simultaneously rendering them unintelligible to transsexuals themselves. I will then employ a psychoanalytic lens to explore the creation of this aforementioned unintelligibility as a site of production of (gender) dysphoria. If Barad presents us with a queer metaphysics, drawing on the work of Judith Butler and notions of performativity, then it is my goal to incorporate her ideas into my own formulation of a transsexual metaphysics.

Before veering into such unexplored territory as a transsexual metaphysics, I would like to provide a brief overview of the ways in which both phenomenology and posthumanist philosophy trouble the supposedly bounded nature of the body/sex. Drawing on the work of Maurice Merleau-Ponty, Gayle Salamon provides us with a phenomenological analysis of sex and the body as being both indeterminate and unbounded in her monograph *Assuming a Body: Transgender and the Rhetorics of Materiality*. Salamon invokes the notion of the sexual schema in her assessment of identity formation, noting that as a precursor to sexuality, the sexual schema is “neither *one*, that which might describe the presumptively masculine, nor *two*, that might encompass the excluded feminine . . . [but] *strictly individual*.”³ By problematizing the duality of masculine/feminine in favor of a sexual schema that exists outside such classifications, Salamon (re)opens sexual subjectivities that would otherwise be

² Namaste, *Sex Change, Social Change*, 214.

³ Salamon, *Assuming a Body*, 48.

ignored. The sex of the body is not determined within the context of a binarist ontology, but rather one which is relational and subjective. Sex then, is neither a binary system nor hylomorphic in nature, but uniquely individual in its becoming. Furthermore, given the primacy of subjectivity on this account, the supposed boundedness of the body is cast into doubt. Neither the body nor the world in which it resides are granted ontological priority, leaving us with a subject whose sex and whose body are indeterminate and unbounded.

In the realm of biology, we see that sex is neither binary nor bounded. Mushrooms have thousands of sexes, and several organisms, including many different species of fish, freely travel from one sex to another.⁴ Furthermore, there exists a plethora of organisms *without* sex chromosomes, who rely on their environment for sex determination.⁵ Might we consider these environmental factors to be the product of nature or culture? Perhaps we can conceptualize them as being informed by both, for it is our humanist projections that (falsely) lead us to believe that the so-called “natural order of things” consists solely of the bounded sexed categories of male and female. We occasionally leave space for a stigmatized “other” in the form of intersexuality, although for many species, most notably plants, intersexuality is the norm.⁶ As it turns out, the more one studies the genetic diversity of life on Earth, the more absurd it becomes to hold onto such notions as static sexual binarism being the norm.

What does this mean for a theory of (trans)sexual embodiment? To account for the myriad ways in which bodies/sexes are indeterminate and unbounded, we require a reworking, or perhaps a queering, of our current metaphysical framework. Due to the ways in which Karen Barad’s theory of Agential Realism conceptualizes the universe itself as being a process of becoming, it becomes a suitable lens through which we can view (trans)sexual embodiment. This is true especially considering the problems arising from the way phenomenology challenges the notion of a body/sex which is both bounded and determinate, and the way posthuman philosophy points towards sex as being a dynamic spectrum in constant flux. Agential Realism is a framework in which neither culture nor nature is granted ontological priority. Material phenomena and discursive practices are reimagined as entangled material-discursive practices in which matter has meaning and words have materiality. On this account, the universe can be seen to be made up of various agents, both human and non-human,

⁴ Hird, “Animal Trans,” 159.

⁵ Nurka, “Animal Techne,” 159.

⁶ Hird, “Animal Trans,” 159.

engaging in various “intra-actions” with themselves. Drawing from quantum physics and the work of Niels Bohr, Barad gives us the following example:

... the notion of “position” cannot be presumed to be a well-defined abstract concept, nor can it be presumed to be an inherent attribute of independently existing objects. Rather, “position” only has meaning when a rigid apparatus with fixed parts is used. . . furthermore, any measurement of “position” using this apparatus cannot be attributed to some abstract independently existing “object” but rather is a property of the *phenomenon*—the inseparability of “observed object” and “agencies of operation.⁷

According to Barad, position is not an immanent quality, but one which is relational. It arises from the phenomena of interaction between the measured object and the apparatus engaged in measurement. In this explication, knower and known are inseparable, hence Barad’s creation of the term “intra-action”. The object and the apparatus which studies it are not wholly separate entities, but an entanglement of material-discursive phenomena. For our purposes, we can envision sex as being analogous to position in the aforementioned example.

For a collection of intra-actions to be rendered intelligible to a given local, as opposed to universal, perspective, Barad illustrates for us the notion of the “agential cut”, in which several indeterminate intra-actions are rendered determinate vis a vis a given local perspective. This is not a product of human intervention, Barad argues, but the performative nature of the universe itself:

... [t]he universe is agential intra-activity in its becoming. The primary ontological units are not “things” but phenomena—dynamic topological reconfigurings / entanglements / relationalities / (re)articulations. And the primary semantic units are not “words” but the material-discursive practices by which boundaries are constituted. This dynamism *is* agency.⁸

Material-discursive practices carve out determinate local boundaries via agential cut. Agency, on this account, is held neither by human nor non-human agents but a distinct property of the universe itself, dispersed throughout the cosmos. With this framework established as our new metaphysical paradigm, we can begin to theorize transsexuality as an ongoing process against which sexed boundaries are being continuously (re)articulated and (re)negotiated. Following from our posthuman, phenomenological, agential realist foundations, we can thus

⁷ Barad, “Posthumanist Performativity,” 22.

⁸ Ibid., 20.

conceptualize sexed embodiment as being inherently indeterminate and undecidable, only to be made legible to given perspectives via various boundary-making processes. One such boundary-making process is that of writing autobiography. This example is helpful, as it can help shed light on both transsexuality qua process and transsexuality qua subject.

Autobiography and Psychiatry: Transsexuality qua Process, Transsexuality qua Subject

In Jay Prosser's text, *Second Skins*, transsexuality is compared/contrasted with autobiography, a relationship which may help with the conceptualization of transsexuality qua process. On Prosser's account, “[t]he conventions of transsexuality are thoroughly entangled with those of autobiography, this body thoroughly enabled by narrative”.⁹ In this way, transsexuality and narrative are two sides of the same coin. Autobiography tells a story of becoming, illustrating key moments in an otherwise continuous process. This can help the reader imagine the ways in which something may be both static and dynamic at once. At the beginning of the story, a transsexual individual will be dissatisfied with their situation, or perhaps confused about their feelings. An epiphany will prompt a series of events resulting in a change of sex, from man to woman or vice versa. It is not an instantaneous change, however, but a sexed process of becoming. It is not a matter of one surgery constituting an ontological change unto itself; hormones cause some changes to sexed embodiment, followed by perhaps *multiple* different gender confirmation surgeries. However, this process is not limited to transsexual subjects, for example, I would argue that puberty constitutes a change of sex, from adolescent to adult. It is a transformative process both material, in the sense that the body undergoes a physical change, developing the ability to reproduce, as well as discursive, in the sense that the subject is categorized as an adult instead of as a child. Is this not the work of transsexuality qua process? The narrative which typically accompanies such a supposed ontological transformation is that of “becoming a man” or “becoming a woman”. Is this not how we articulate sex in the case of transsexual individuals undergoing transition? Why is the legibility of one case unambiguous, whereas in the other, the case of transsexual embodiment, it is contested?

Before we can discuss degrees of (il)legibility, we must first articulate what it means for sex to be made legible in the first place. Considering the case of the transsexual subject, I will examine *how* sex is made legible and *to whom* it is made legible. This will lead into a

⁹ Prosser, *Second Skins*, 103.

discussion of the ways in which sex is sometimes legible to state institutions, but not transsexual individuals themselves. Prosser argues that sex is twice, or perhaps thrice, if we are to consider the act of doctor assigning to the subject a sex at birth, legibly written into the transsexual subject. It is first written after the transsexual subject has sex reassignment surgery, as well as a second time when the transsexual subject writes themselves *as transsexual* in a narrative/memoir, tying together their two distinct lives (pre/post transition). Thus, the transsexual subject occupies the space of their assigned sex, their identified sex, or a nebulous space in-between the two, depending on the given perspective. What makes embodied sex *legible* to these perspectives are the corresponding material-discursive acts of organizing sex into boundaries; assignment, surgery, and autobiography, respectively. The act of assignment at birth renders a given sex, we can call it “male”, legible to the world at large but not to the subject themselves. The act of reassignment surgery renders a given sex, in this case “female”, legible to the subject in addition to the world at large. Applying the lexicon of Agential Realism, these organizations can be conceptualized as various agential cuts. It is important to consider to whom these articulations of sex are legible. I would argue that the first two expressions are legible to state institutions, whereas the expression of a transitional sex is legible to the transsexual subject themselves, but not state institutions at large.¹⁰

When transsexual bodies are rendered intelligible to medical and other state institutions, they are often rendered *unintelligible* to transsexual individuals themselves. I will explore this phenomenon by regarding the actions of state institutions as material-discursive practices that create determinate boundaries that are only intelligible to said institutions. One such institution, that of sexology, was largely developed by psychiatrists and medical practitioners engaged in answering questions about the nature of sex and sexuality. Throughout its history, sexology has paid particular attention to transsexual individuals, pathologizing transsexuality, and theorizing about its cause. Here I will provide a historical example of the ways in which sexology renders transsexual subjects only intelligible to the perspective of state institutions, as well as a modern example of the ways in which sexology continues to exert such an influence on the lives of transsexual individuals today. In an infamous article entitled “Psychopathia Transexualis”, medical practitioner David O. Cauldwell asserts that “[a transsexual’s] condition usually arises from a poor hereditary background and a

¹⁰ While it is beyond the scope of this paper, this may prompt a discussion of “posttranssexual” embodiment, in which the transsexual subject is written and read as illegible. See Stone, “The Empire Strikes Back”.

highly unfavorable childhood environment".¹¹ This is sometimes in conflict with the experience of transsexual individuals themselves.¹² In this manner, we can see sexology as a material-discursive practice that (re)articulates local boundaries/(transsexual) bodies that are intelligible to medical and psychiatric institutions.

It is not just medical institutions that engage in boundary-making practices which render the transsexual subject intelligible to a given local perspective which differs from their own. The state also employs the law as a material-discursive practice to (re)organize (trans)sexed boundaries. In her monograph, *Assuming a Body*, Gayle Salamon illustrates this practice by focusing on a specific case in New York in which transsexual individuals were able to change all of their sexed documentation outside of their birth certificates. These transsexual individuals would then receive what are called "no-match letters". These letters would indicate to them that their documentation did not match their identity.¹³ Even though the transsexual in question may embody and experience a certain gender, if it conflicts with what is on their birth certificate it is rendered illegitimate in the eyes of the law. This act of boundary-making is another way in which the state arbitrates to which given local perspective a boundary is intelligible. In this case, much like in the previous examples involving sexology, the transsexual body is intelligible to state institutions, while being rendered unintelligible to the transsexual subject.¹⁴

Gender Dysphoria as Melancholia

If sexed embodiment is merely the (re)organization/(re)articulation of determinate boundaries, what then, constitutes the material-discursive phenomena that is gender dysphoria? Gender dysphoria is typically defined as the dissonance that is felt when a subject's felt sense of their sex does not match their physical sex.¹⁵ I would argue that it cannot be located solely in the body, and neither is it a purely discursive phenomenon, as Agential Realism as a framework imbues the discursive with materiality and the material with discursive agency. I will argue that gender dysphoria is the name we give to the occurrence of boundaries being rendered unintelligible to the subject themselves. To make sense of what is

¹¹ Cauldwell, "Psychopathia Transexualis," 40-41.

¹² Serano, *Whipping Girl*, 116

¹³ Salamon, *Assuming a Body*, 191.

¹⁴ Bettcher, "Evil Deceivers and Make-Believers," 50-51.

¹⁵ American Psychiatric Association, *DSM-5*, 451.

happening in this scenario, I defer to the tools of psychoanalysis, particularly those articulated by Sigmund Freud, to study the subjectivity of the self.

What follows is merely a primer for one of the ways in which we may conceptualize dysphoria given our agential realist inspired framework. Some may find it ironic that I have decided to take up a psychoanalytic perspective to engage with the concept of dysphoria. Taking cues from both Patricia Elliott and Patricia Gherovici, I wish to show that psychoanalytic theory, despite its history of pathologization, need not be at odds with transsexuality qua subject.¹⁶ While sexology and psychoanalysis have the potential to (re)articulate boundaries which render the subject unintelligible to the self, they need not do so necessarily. This analysis will show that there is potential for psychoanalysis as a site of knowledge production that is complimentary to trans epistemologies, rather than antagonistic towards them.

Freud famously postulated the existence of an Ego, which is “. . . first and foremost a bodily ego; it is not merely a surface entity, but is itself the projection of a surface”.¹⁷ Some, most notably Jay Prosser in his reading of Didier Anzieu, have taken this to mean the Ego is material, specifically that it resides within the skin.¹⁸ Others conclude that the phantasmic projection exists ontologically prior to the material body and plays a not insignificant role in its constitution.¹⁹ Here we witness a hermeneutic battle between the ontological primacy of the material versus the discursive. For our purposes, we shall consider both as being entangled. The Ego is both material, and discursive. When the various intra-actions which make up the body are articulated in such a way that they are rendered legible to the subject, or the Ego, there do not exist feelings of psycho-physical dissonance. However, when the body is articulated in such a way in which it is rendered unintelligible to the Ego, these feelings of dissonance emerge.

Turning to Freud’s work in “Mourning and Melancholia”, we can develop a conceptual framework to explain what this lack of intelligibility means for the subject. In “Mourning and Melancholia”, Freud describes two distinct but related psychic states. The first, mourning, occurs when the subject loses what Freud terms a “beloved object”.²⁰ This could be anything

¹⁶ See Elliott, “A Psychoanalytic Reading.”, and Gherovici, “Psychoanalysis Needs a Sex Change.”

¹⁷ Freud, *The Ego and the Id*, 16

¹⁸ Prosser, *Second Skins*, 64.

¹⁹ Salamon, *Assuming a Body*, 28-29.

²⁰ Freud, “Mourning and Melancholia,” 311.

from the loss of a family member, to a job from which one was let go. Melancholia, on the other hand, is characterized by the loss of a love-object that is less literal in nature: "The object may not really have died, for example, but may instead have been lost as a love-object . . . In yet other cases . . . the patient cannot consciously grasp what he has lost".²¹ It is this second state which is of particular relevance to my present line of argumentation. In Melancholia, it is the Ego itself which is displaced, with the love-object taking its place.²² What does this mean in terms of our current framework of Agential Realism? The loss that the subject incurs is none other than the intelligibility of the subject's boundary. When state institutions render the various intra-actions that are supposed to constitute the subject into a boundary that is unintelligible to the subject, the ego becomes the target of the grief. It is this manifestation of Melancholia that we come to recognize as gender dysphoria.²³

This is a particularly useful lens through which to examine gender dysphoria, as it can account for the varying degrees to which it is felt, including sometimes not at all. Due in part to the myriad ways in which gender is culturally embodied, transsexual and non-normatively gendered individuals experience a loss of intelligibility to various degrees. For example, if what we might consider to be a transsexual subject were living in a culture that had a normative paradigm of gender that included non-binary identities, the subject conceivably might not suffer from Melancholia as dysphoria.²⁴ However, that same subject, were they to be placed in a culture which did not have a coherent space for non-binary individuals within the collective conscious, may indeed experience a degree of gender dysphoria, as various material-discursive practices would render them unintelligible to a given local perspective: their own.

In this paper, I have sketched an outline for what might be called a transsexual metaphysics. This framework opens new ways of articulating trans subjectivities, such as that which I have taken up vis a vis my analysis of gender dysphoria. It is my hope that this outline may be further explored in the future, delineating other aspects of (trans)sexed embodiment and/or transsexual experience. This is by no means a comprehensive exploration of the topic,

²¹ Ibid., 312.

²² Ibid., 314.

²³ Later thinkers, such as Judith Butler, have taken up discourses of mourning and melancholia in their work, which may be fruitful to a longer, more in-depth analysis.

²⁴ Many cultures have a more expansive system of gender that goes beyond a simple binary. For example, the ball scene in Detroit celebrates six distinct genders, whereas the pan-indigenous term two-spirit has come to represent a plethora of gender and sexual identities.

and I intend for it to serve more as an introduction to what a transsexual metaphysics might look like, and what types of questions about transsexuality qua subject it might help us answer.

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Of A Like Mind: Exploring Interpretations of Ibn Rushd's Monopsychism

Abigail E. Whalen
University of Notre Dame

Abstract

In this paper, I explore the tension between Ibn Rushd's monopsychic theory of a single intellect containing universal intelligibles for all humans and the intellectual agency of individual humans as causal and agential actors in their own cognitive processes. I begin by defining Ibn Rushd's monopsychic theory in contrast to the Neoplatonist portrayal of universals as distinct and real forms that precede particulars. I define the role of a human *intellecta speculativa* within the Material Intellect. Given the relationship outlined by Ibn Rushd in his *Long Commentary on De Anima*, I then assess competing interpretations of this relationship as they relate to and integrate individual agency in understanding. I address specifically the movie model proposed by Deborah Black, the "common instrument model" suggested in Thomas Aquinas' 'common eye' analogy. I then suggest an additional strategy for making the common instrument model more plausible by considering humans as instruments of the Agent Intellect prior to their using the Material Intellect instrumentally and propose that the common instrument model has the most potential for further nuance and exploration.

Introduction

One of the greatest classical Islamic philosophers to emerge on the Iberian Peninsula, Abū l-Walīd Muhammad ibn Ahmad ibn Muhammad ibn Rushd, or Averrōes as he was later designated by the Latin Scholastics, was perhaps best known for his commentaries on Aristotle. In his *Long Commentary on De anima*, Ibn Rushd constructs a monopsychic theory of the intellect: a unicity thesis in which he posits there is only one intellect shared by all human beings.¹ Like most of his philosophical work, Ibn Rushd's unicity thesis was intended to ground Islamic tradition and concepts in Aristotelian philosophy, namely, that there can be real,

¹ The 'unicity thesis' is the proper term for the theory Ibn Rushd posits. 'Monopsychism' refers to a single human psyche, though Ibn Rushd is specifically referring to a single, *Material Intellect* shared by all humans. For the purpose of this paper, I will use the terms interchangeably as they commonly are found in related literature.

objective, and higher truth known through the forms of the universals and available to all mankind through the single body of universals, the Material Intellect. Islam teaches of an objective reality and a moral standard that is available to all righteous and just people. Monopsychism further attacks the idea of a purely physical or naturalistic explanation for human cognition, tying it necessarily to the higher power of the Agent Intellect, which in Islam, can be identified as a penultimate cause to Allah. While embraced at the time by Ibn Rushd's contemporaries, and indeed some of his Christian scholastic counterparts, monopsychism was roundly rejected by Aquinas on religious grounds for the difficulties it caused to the idea of the immortality of the individual soul. In this paper, I will examine the tension between Ibn Rushd's doctrine of a single intellect containing universal intelligibles for all humans and the intellectual agency of individual humans as causal and agential actors in their own processes of cognition. In particular, I will evaluate the competing interpretations of Ibn Rushd's monopsychic theory as they relate to and integrate individual agency in understanding.

Overview of the Monopsychic Theory

Ibn Rushd's monopsychic theory attempts to accommodate Aristotle's claim that "the material intellect does not have some material form" while simultaneously accounting for how universal intelligibles can be widely known by individual humans.² Ibn Rushd accepts the Aristotelian account of hylomorphic forms, in which universals exist as a compound of matter (ὕλη) and form (μορφή). His view, mirroring Aristotle's, directly opposes the Neoplatonist rendering of universals as distinct and real forms that cause plural particulars of themselves in individual instances of a given form. Unlike Neoplatonism which considers forms to *precede* particulars, Ibn Rushd holds that individual substances are primary, i.e., that existence and essence are one; they are not ontologically distinct, as they are in the distinction between Platonic forms and their universals. Again, contra the Platonic theory of forms, "universals remain entirely anchored within the imaginative faculties of individuals, and thereby firmly connected to the particulars in the external world."³ Thus, Ibn Rushd must present a theory that preserves the delicate balance of avoiding the separateness of Platonic forms while still maintaining the Aristotelian complete separation of intellect from matter. By inheriting Aristotle's own weakness on the issue

² McGinnis and Reisman, *Classical Arabic Philosophy*, 346.

³ Black, "Models of the Mind," 332.

of distinct forms, however, Ibn Rushd inadvertently adopts a degree of Platonism in his description of universals by allowing matter to quantify and individuate the individual “this” from the “ness” quality, placing a measure of ontological separateness between the individual and the essence in which it participates. These universals, e.g. “horseness” or “redness,” are immaterial universal intelligibles by which humans understand their experiences of particulars, e.g. this horse or this red object; these intelligibles simpliciter cannot be found in sensible nature. Thus, the universal intelligibles cannot be received into the intellect of individuals, since reception of a universal into a particular individuates that form into particular matter as it is received. Forms that are emmattered become “this”-es and are generable and corruptible—subject to both being created and destroyed—which is at odds to their status as universal essences. To combat this problem, Ibn Rushd presents an elegant solution: a single, Material Intellect for all humans. The Agent Intellect produces the intelligible universals in “the immaterial, universal Material Intellect,” an intellect that is mere pure potentiality and which functions to receive universal forms from the Agent Intellect.⁴

So how do individual humans relate to Ibn Rushd’s model of human intellectual cognition? A human sees and experiences individual particulars of a given object, say, a horse. That person then experiences images of individual horses that she has observed based on sensory input. When that person is trying to determine and understand what horses are in general, these images of horses, as powered by the Agent Intellect, actively cause a universal intelligible of “horseness” within the one Material Intellect. These images (called ‘*intellecta speculativa*’) are the depictions of horses that exist in the person’s imaginative faculties and when actively causing the universal intelligible in the Material Intellect, “acquire ‘subject of truth’ status” by which they actually produce the “horseness” universal.⁵ It is important to note that the sensible “world” of particular horses and the immaterial “world” of universal intelligibles contained in the Material Intellect are separate, but not so separated as to be unrelated through a causal relationship. The existence of this intelligible form allows for human understanding of “horseness,” as Ibn Rushd elaborates in his dual-subject theory. Ibn Rushd posits two subjects for the intelligible “horseness”: (1) the *intellecta speculativa*, or the sensible objects like the individual horses observed that exists as what causes the intellect and (2) the horse-intelligible “as in the

⁴ Cory, “The Agent Intellect.”

⁵ Ibid., 9.

subject of its being" that is in the Material Intellect.⁶ This relationship, by which the two are subjects of intellection, is called a "conjunction." Through the conjunction, the individual's imaginative knowledge (that processing center for the individual's images of the horses) is raised to accommodate a new insight into the relationship of similarity between all particular horses.

Given these relationships between the intellects and between the intellects and humans, Ibn Rushd claims that "it is necessary to attribute these two acts to the [individual] soul in us, namely, to be receptive to the intelligible and...to abstract intelligibles and to intellect them."⁷ His account therefore seems to indicate that despite the common and shared element of the Material Intellect, individual humans still maintain the power to think and cause intellectual cognition. These structures of the separate intellects do not remove the action of cognition from individual humans. This view and assumption causes a fundamental problem for Ibn Rushd's readers: how can these structures and relationships as defined by Ibn Rushd still allow individual humans to think? If it is not a power within humans to think independent thoughts distinct from other humans, what makes some power for acting *our* own power, nonetheless? Intuitively, if a person has power to perform an activity such as thought, it appears that it is her power and her potential for exercising that power that allow her to perform the activity at hand. In Ibn Rushd's account, this power evidently does not come from the person exercising it; rather, the power appears to stem from the Agent Intellect. How, then, can Ibn Rushd's readers reconcile human cognitive agency with intellects as separate entities from the knowers? Can any interpretation of Ibn Rushd allow for an agent external to an action's distinct and separate source of power to be said to "perform" or "exercise" that action? After all, if a portion of the Material Intellect somehow were to be individuated to each of us, then the images it contained would no longer be "ness"-es-universals. They would become particularized "this"-es, eliminating the level of abstract thinking that Ibn Rushd proposes to explain with his theory.

The 'Movie Model' Interpretation

Ibn Rushd's theory inclines his readers towards several possible suggestions for the reconciliation of individual thought and his monopsychic theory. The first of these interpretative models I will discuss is a "movie model" that presents multiple knowers using "the same species

⁶ McGinnis and Reisman, *Classical Arabic Philosophy*, p. 349.

⁷ Ibid.

simultaneously in their own activities in much the same way that many individuals can view the same movie or listen to the same musical performance together without negating the individual character of their experiences.”⁸ This movie model correctly imagines one set of intelligibles to which everyone has access, while still retaining individuality through differing personal *experience* of the same phenomena. This implies an inner-eye type of imagination, one that “reads” the same forms as others, albeit from an individual perspective. Ideally, the inner-eye imagery then allows each person to review the same forms being played and individuate their experiences of the forms to their own person.

However, this metaphor seems to break down because the eye is itself a part of the body. The soul, as the form of the body, directs and uses the body; thus, the “eye” is still directed by you and is a part of you. This is in accordance with Ibn Rushd’s assertion that individual humans will and in fact do generate the universal intelligibles through mental processes. The act of “viewing” the movie, i.e. the intelligibles, requires some form of change in the eye, a focusing, if you will. This change or focusing has to occur to account for when one decides to search for a universal intelligible by ordering one’s images of particulars. A person is not constantly viewing the movie of specific intelligibles; rather, she must decide to look for them, implying a movement from passive viewing to active searching. How can there be a change in the mental faculty of the inner eye if it is general and corruptible, as part of the human body? Such a change would require the acquisition of a form within the eye. This acquisition of the form would individualize it to the given inner-eye of a particular person. The issue with this model essentially is one of connecting to or linking up with the Material Intellect without inuring it or the universals in it to any individual intellect, thus particularizing them. Any view that enables conjunction as an activity involving “streaming” the Material Intellect like a movie or “siphoning off” some of the activity of the separate Intellects”⁹ must be avoided to coherently align with Ibn Rushd’s theory. In fact, Ibn Rushd denies the ability of individuals to be able to exercise the intellection of universals properly, as individuals are themselves corruptible and generable particulars of the form of the human soul. To make this “movie model” a viable interpretation of Ibn Rushd’s monopsychic theory, the inner-eye metaphor would have to overcome the difficulty of instantiating forms

⁸ Black, “Models of the Mind,” 8-9.

⁹ Cory, “The Agent Intellect,” 9-10.

within the inner eye to account for the active state of “focusing” or change within the eye when a person agentially directs it to the forms it aspires to intellect.

The ‘Common Instrument’ Interpretation

A second model for the interpretation of Ibn Rushd’s monopsychism is that of a common instrument. This model forces Ibn Rushd’s readers to think more carefully about the agency and ownership of action in particular. On this view, the Material Intellect, or the instrument, is not “owned” by any particular human, but is readily available for individual use. Because there is no power in individual humans to do intellectual things, humans may use the common instrument to perform an act of thinking. In this interpretation, humans would have to be numerically distinct in some essential and ontological way, such as at the level of form, the soul. Individual humans would also have to possess a level of autonomy to will and to choose to access the common tool for the performance of cognitive functions beyond the abstraction of images from particulars. In essence, this view works like a communal office instrument, say, a wireless printer. I am able to print from the printer, but so are my coworkers and fellow students. When I say “I print my paper,” I do not mean that I have physically done so (for that would be impossible, as I am not the printing machine itself), but rather that I have accessed the common tool and have directed the use of its power, provided by electricity, and its capabilities to perform the task at hand, i.e. the printing of a paper. When applied to thought, the imagery is as follows. I lack the physical capabilities or power to perform intellectual cognition, so instead, I provide the input of my images of particulars, which then is charged or “powered” by the Agent Intellect (which is pure intellect, but does not contain any forms) to translate the images into forms in the Material intellect which are ultimately available to me.

The common instrument model also lends itself to vision analogies. Aquinas creates a “common eye” analogy in an attempt to cast doubt on monopsychism in general. Aquinas describes the intellect: “for all humans there is an eye that is numerically one: it remains to be asked whether all humans would be one who sees or many who see.”¹⁰ He identifies two issues with this model as it portrays Ibn Rushd’s monopsychic theory. First, he argues that if the common eye as a common instrument is external to the viewer, then its seeing cannot be my seeing, in the same way that the act of printing a paper cannot possibly be mine. Deborah Black

¹⁰ Aquinas, *De Unitate Intellectus*, 44-45.

objects to this view. Her objection stems from Aquinas' characterization of the "eye" as a single, principal agent and not as an individual tool simultaneously employed by multiple agents and directed at one common theme or set of forms, like a movie or a concert. She points out that "Aquinas seems blind to the obvious objection that the eye is itself a bodily organ or instrument employed by the soul's visual power, rather than the subject which does the seeing."¹¹ In other words, Black contends that Aquinas is attacking the eye via a mischaracterization of its role in the vision analogy - as though the eye as an instrument is not essentially a direct possession or part of the body. His objection is rendered innocuous with what Black perceives to be a proper conception of the role of the eye within the vision analogy. Aquinas' second objection is that when the common eye sees, everyone who is using that eye (either continuously or at that particular moment in time) would also see, and in fact have the same act of seeing! Supposing that we *could* find a way of attributing the acts of the common eye to human "seers," even then, we would be forced to see each time whatever the common eye displays whenever it is accessed for use by another individual. Aquinas views this as clearly problematic because often, one person can "see," cognize, or understand something that another cannot. He concludes that it cannot be the case that many people could have different acts of seeing when using only one common eye, and so similarly many people cannot have different acts of thinking by one common intellect. Perhaps the difference in knowledge between two people using the common eye could be interpretive ability of the forms "seen" with the eye, accounted for through differences in general acuity. Regardless, Aquinas' common eye objections drive at the heart of the ownership problem within the common instrument model.

In her discussion of the "common instrument model", Black does not elaborate on the use of tools or the role of tools within questions of ownership. Does communal ownership of the action also imply personal ownership? Or can the "property rights" of the action even be assigned to the instrument, its users, or its power source, given that none of the components are supplying all parts of the input? In this analogy, the users of the common instrument only supply one part of the necessary inputs for the process of intellectual cognition: the images. The other input, the "power" from the Agent Intellect that catalyzes the images into intelligible forms is not controlled by the tool, the Material Intellect, or by the user. It is constantly emanating and thus can be accessed whenever the images are "plugged in" to the process, much like an electrical outlet.

¹¹ Black, "Models of the Mind," 5.

Does the act of using the tool, over which an individual has much more agency, suffice for ownership over the total process?

The Common Instrument Model: Two New Approaches

In considering the questions suggested by the common instrument model, there appear to be two approaches in which additional features of Ibn Rushd's monopsychism are added to the common instrument model in hopes of establishing humans as owners of the act of understanding. The first of these views for rounding out the common instrument model as a more plausible explanation of human agency in understanding is to take Black's strategy of denying that the Material Intellect is a thinker. Black, in her characterization of the common instrument model, conceives of the Material Intellect as a place "of forms wherein the intelligible becomes an actual universal."¹² In Ibn Rushd's model of cognition, it is only matter that can provide a place in which the form can exist. The unit given by the conjunction of the intelligible's formal part and individual images is neither the material intellect nor the individual, but something else distinct from its two component parts and necessarily existing through their conjunction. Images are not intelligibles and must be "converted" like computer files to move the Material Intellect to abstract the intelligibles from the Agent Intellect. Because of this, the intelligibles cannot reside in material and individual forms like the soul. Human knowers, while unable to perform the actual abstraction of universals or to 'house' the universals in their souls, nonetheless have access to this "place" since the intelligibles "it contains are nothing but universalized, abstract versions of their own imaginative forms."¹³

Black does not appear to think that the Material Intellect is a thinker. This leaves her with the second option for enhancing her common-instrument interpretation of monopsychism: identifying the Material Intellect as a receptacle for universal intelligibles. This view lends itself well to an account of human agency in understanding regardless of the Material Intellect's status as an individual thinker or not. If one can say definitively that the Material Intellect does not "think" and nor does the Agent Intellect (which is only pure intellect) then we, human beings, are the only source of "thought" as such left. However, a potential fallacy that Black might encounter with this thought is an attributional error. While this method of eliminating options

¹² Ibid., 2.

¹³ Ibid., 34.

until a single remains might be very plausible based on Ibn Rushd's characterization of both humans and the Material Intellect, assuming that humans must think does not necessarily follow merely because the other components of the theory do not think. It could be that we are simply not thinking, and that "thinking" as we conceive of it for this project, is an action that is not proper to any of the entities discussed: essentially, that no "thinking" actually occurs anywhere in the model. In this case, knowledge would be gained through another process, e.g. abstraction, transmission from the Agent Intellect, etc. The likelihood of this complete lack of "thought" aside, it is important to not merely attribute a positive action to one entity because of the exclusion of all other candidates. This strategy appears unhelpful in advancing the likelihood of a common instrument model that accommodates individual human agency in understanding.

A third, but more promising strategy for amending the common instrument model is to consider humans as themselves instruments of the Agent Intellect in its formation of universal intelligibles. This instrumentation would occur prior to humans' instrumentation of the Material Intellect. Perhaps this two-step instrumentation is somehow related to and can further fill out the common instrument model. In this "instrumental human" model, the Agent Intellect uses humans as instruments of intellection to transfer from one order to another. Ibn Rushd defines the Agent Intellect as the first cause of intelligibility that provides the necessary impetus to images to make them into "ness"-es. To abstract something, then, is to make something exist in some other kind of being (the *abstract* kind) rather than to abstract it from the images. But, as Ibn Rushd points out, the human being has some key and necessary role in the process of intellection, as do the human processes of sensation and of forming images with the imaginative faculties. This, even though the actual process of intellection occurs outside of the individual human and individual human's faculties. When my imagination acts to form images of particulars, it becomes an instrument of the Agent Intellect in that it allows the Material Intellect to abstract a universal intelligible. Without the sense images, the movement of the Material Intellect from potency to actually containing the intelligibles would not occur. Thus, when my imagination acts and begins to sort and examine different images of particulars, I become intellectualized because I perform lower-level cognitive functions and am a cause for actuality of universal intelligibles in the Material Intellect. Something changes in my imaginative faculties as a result of my ability to do this, or as Therese Cory describes, it "elevates her [sic] existing

imaginative knowledge.”¹⁴ In this case of the elevation of imagination, it is entirely possible that I will never have the proper concept of the intelligible, even if I am the cause (in a certain way) of it.

To further assess these potential interpretations, both the movie model and the now nuanced forms of the common instrument model, I return to Ibn Rushd’s motivation in creating a monopsychic theory. Primarily, Ibn Rushd sought to show the inadequacy of any and all completely physical accounts of cognitive reception and to thoroughly demonstrate the inadequacy of any form of abstraction theory. Using constraints based on Ibn Rushd’s original intent, I think that there is some flexibility within the common instrument theory for viable interpretation of Ibn Rushd’s theory of monopsychism.¹⁵ Unlike the movie model, which as presented by Black, requires the inuring of forms within the inner eye thus particularizing the form, the common instrument model is not fully developed. Since it is not fully developed and as of yet, not contradictory to an account of human agency in understanding, it offers the most potential for further elaboration and agreement with the relationship outlined by Ibn Rushd.

The most promising aspect of future inquiry into Black’s common instrument model is from further investigation of the causal relationship between human beings as individuals presenting images and the resulting forms that exist in the Material Intellect. While many acknowledge the Agent Intellect as the first cause of intelligibility, it, like human beings, does not provide all of the source material for the creation of forms. It provides the potency and pure intellect that then catalyzes the images into forms in the Material Intellect. As Ibn Rushd points out, without the human contribution of sensation and imagination of particulars, the process of abstraction of images into forms would not occur, even without change to the Agent Intellect. Perhaps Ibn Rushd considered the process of sensation and imaginative organization of particularized images to be a *concurrent* first cause of intelligibility. Such a characterization, even a tacit one, would elevate or emphasize the individual’s role in the process of understanding.

Furthermore, the performance of a relative action requires a form as a kind of perfection through which that objects acts. After all, nothing acts except through its own form. If there were some way to posit the intellects (both Material recipient and Agent efficient cause) as human

¹⁴ Cory, “The Agent Intellect,” 4.

¹⁵ Kogan, *Averroes and the Metaphysics Causation*, 172-206.

forms, then perhaps there could be a stronger degree of human ownership over the act of intellection. Just as the form is the perfection of the body that allows for human action, perhaps the intellection is the form of the being or the soul, tying it transitively to human agency which lies in the soul. This view could be supported by the necessity of imaginative and sensory faculties to the production of universal forms, just as the body is necessary for the form of the soul. The human intellect certainly works through the Material Intellect, for without the Material Intellect, it could not be said that humans can have any grasp on “ness”-es.

Conclusion

In conclusion, I believe that the richness of this search for relation lays at the heart of the further examination of the causal relationship between human imagination, sensation, and the production of forms. Additional reflection on ownership in relation to external tools, i.e., the Material Intellect in Black’s common instrument model, may yield a thicker theory of ownership based on causal relationships with implications relevant to the conjunction of monopsychism and individual thought. Philosophical debates as essential to truth and knowledge as the nature of human thought and ownership continue to evolve with more contributions of thought and conscious evaluation of prior ideas. Only by seriously considering the underlying approaches of various theories and analogies to causation can we accurately formulate new models or “fill out” existing models that align individual thought processes with Ibn Rushd’s unicity thesis.

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