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# SCRIPTABLE

A Bispectral Review of Recent Books



Robert Tenor, editor  
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## EDITORIAL

[Scriptable](#) is an irregular review of what was once called the belles-lettres, where we essay upon a wide assortment of current books and articles with an eye open for “the beautiful jumble of discordant congruencies” derived from the authors and titles under discussion. We cast a wide academic net through the social sciences and humanities, with a strong orientation toward current events, social theory, religious and cultural studies.

With this number we move away from simple reportage of current scholarship to something more ambitious. The body of each issue includes editorial essays examining themes inspired by the works under consideration. The sum of our reviews are carefully pruned excerpts from the books themselves so as to preview the style and technicality of the text itself.

Our purpose is to inform and entertain. Through the review essays we hope to visit new and timeworn places through unsettled ideas in currency newly minted. Perhaps to see the outlandish as intimate and to show up the familiar as stranger than before thought. Each issue should surprise.



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## **THE PHILOSOPHY AND SCIENCE OF PREDICTIVE PROCESSING** edited by Dina Mendonça, Manuel Curado, Steven S. Gouveia [Bloomsbury Academic, 9781350099753]

This book explores how predictive processing, which argues that our brains are constantly generating and updating hypotheses about our external conditions, sheds new light on the nature of the mind. It shows how it is similar to and expands other theoretical approaches that emphasize the active role of the mind and its dynamic function.

Offering a complete guide to the philosophical and empirical implications of predictive processing, contributors bring perspectives from philosophy, neuroscience, and psychology. Together, they explore the many philosophical applications of predictive processing and its exciting potential across mental health, cognitive science, neuroscience, and robotics.

Presenting an extensive and balanced overview of the subject, **THE PHILOSOPHY AND SCIENCE OF PREDICTIVE PROCESSING** is a landmark volume within philosophy of mind.

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Excerpt: Predictive processing (PP) is the focus of this edited collection. This approach can be seen as the last conceptual effort to understand and explain everything related to the human mind. In this way it stands as a promise for a unique theoretical background that will unify the various sciences that study the brain, the mind, and its psychology into one systematic framework. In sum, PP is announced as being the final revolution needed to achieve a full explanation of our complex mental life standing as a sort of Holy Grail for the conscious brain. Is this claim exaggerated? This volume will debate that and other relevant questions.

While the theoretical framework is being progressively elaborated to attain its ambitious unifying goal, it works as a wonderful way to revise and identify central problematic issues concerning understanding the mind and the functioning of the brain. It offers a new philosophical conceptual notation to reevaluate longstanding problems of a variety of research areas that are being reconceptualized due to the impact of the novel approach.

PP overcomes the model of passive conception of the brain and, turning the perceptive process upside down, shows how minds are complex engines of prediction constantly anticipating the bottom flow of information. Though PP is often taken as an outcome of the Bayesian brain theory, it can also be seen as deriving from information theory and using the predictive payoff as an organizing concept (Thornton 2017), and its philosophical roots can be traced back to Immanuel Kant (Swanson 2016, Wiese and Metzinger 2017: 2).

PP proposal offers to be a unifying overarching theory of the mind, which may ultimately serve as a general framework for the psychological phenomenon and the neuronal activity of the brain. The proposal has been decisively adopted by cognitive science because it can be applied to perception, action, cognition and emotion and their relationships (Wiese and Metzinger 2017: 2) and, more importantly, it shows that there is a way to conceive the mind that could be adopted by a wide variety of disciplines. Given the certainty that PP could be applied to a wide variety of phenomena and fields, the understanding of its core conceptual theory is crucially important. Therefore, it is fundamental to grasp how it emphasizes the active role of the mind, its dynamical function, and how it offers a set of ideas capable of being understood by experts of various areas of research.

The present anthology offers an interdisciplinary array of essays from scholars and researchers of cognitive science from a variety of disciplines, both from well-recognized scholars as well as promising younger researchers, and hopes to be a unique contribution focusing on critically examining PP and its promises. In addition to showing the wide range of application of this novel



intellectual proposal, it includes a critical examination of some of the problematic issues surrounding the new approach, and can be used both as a thorough introduction to PP framework, as well as an insightful collection for a more detailed and critical reading.

The book has three parts that cover different aspects of PP theory. It begins with the first part that focuses on Predictive Processing and philosophical approaches, including four chapters. The first is a chapter by Thomas van Es and Erik Myin entitled "Predictive Processing and Representation: How Less Can Be More" that analyses the connection between PP and the representational foundations arguing that the theoretical framework is most coherent and strong in its nonrepresentational version, and consequently that the research efforts will be most fruitful by furthering exploring it under its non-representational version.

It is followed by a chapter by Colin Klein, "A Humean Challenge to Predictive Coding," which argues that the PP coding is best understood within a Humean philosophical outlook. Despite the fact that some authors have argued that the philosophical roots of PP are Kantian (e.g., Swanson 2016), Klein's chapter shows that when its Humean strike is highlighted it demonstrates how predictive coding reveals an interesting issue about value learning.

Then, in the chapter "Are Markov Blankets Real and Does It Matter?" Richard Menary and Alexander James Gillett show how a reevaluation of the concept of Markov Blankets could provide a way to see in a new light several questions concerning PP philosophical commitments. Among other things they point out how certain descriptions of the framework emphasize the role of embodied action while others stress the internal brain processes more in isolation, revealing how internalism and externalism about the mind are at stake in this different philosophical emphasis.

The last chapter of this section was written Klaus Gartner and Robert Clowes. With the title "Predictive Processing and Metaphysical Views of the Self," they show how PP can be seen to endorse different accounts of the self; moreover, the authors argue that further critical reflection identifies the pre-reflective view of the situational self as the most adequate to fit the PP framework.

The second part of the collection covers the connection of Predictive Processing with approaches in Cognitive Sciences and Neuroscience. In the first chapter of this part, Laurent Perrinet explains in "From the Retina to Action: Dynamics of Predictive Processing in the Visual System" how PP offers a unified theory to explain a variety of visual mechanisms, and what future directions are required to provide the complete design of the generic PP circuit.

The following chapter, "Predictive Processing and Consciousness: Prediction Fallacy and Its Spatiotemporal Resolution", by Steven S. Gouveia, discusses the PP framework and its explanatory power regarding consciousness, if any at all. Building upon how spatiotemporal dynamic account suggests that consciousness can be traced to the spatiotemporal dynamics of the brain's neuronal activity, the chapter concludes that PP requires a wider context of dynamic spatiotemporal mechanisms to account for both contents and their association with consciousness.

The seventh chapter, "The Many Faces of Attention: Why Precision Optimization Is Not Attention," by Madeleine Ransom and Sina Fazelpour, focuses on the connection of PP with attention. The authors argue that PP needs to go beyond the precision weighting of prediction error to accommodate the full range of attentional phenomena.

The section concludes with a chapter by Chris Thornton entitled "Predictive Processing: Does It Compute?" which considers PP from a computational and engineering perspective, and, after

identifying a number of technical problems, advances a number of ways in which PP could successfully eliminate them.

The third and final part of the book unfolds the not easily understood connection of Predictive Processing with Mental Health. The first chapter of this section by Lorena Chanes and Lisa Feldman Barrett further elaborates how PP could help to understand the ways the brain works both in healthy and in dysfunctional conditions. In their chapter, "The Predictive Brain, Conscious Experience and Brain-related Conditions", they describe how PP contributes to understand the precise way the global structure of the information flow is disrupted and the unified field of experience altered in mental disorders and brain damage.

The following chapter on "Disconnection and Diaschisis: Active Inference in Neuropsychology" by Thomas Parr & Karl J. Friston outlines a discrete formulation of active inference and shows how it can improve our understanding of neurological disease enabling the rewriting of the notion of functional diaschisis.

Right after this, the chapter "The Phenomenology and Predictive Processing of Time in Depression" by Zachariah A. Neemeh and Shaun Gallagher describes how recent analyses in PP complement the phenomenological approach to intrinsic time and reinforces understanding how the alterations in the intrinsic temporal structure of the experience of time occur in depression.

Finally, to close the section, "Why Use Predictive Processing to Explain Psychopathology? The Case of Anorexia Nervosa," a chapter written by Stephen Gadsby and Jakob Hohwy, applies the PP framework for mental disorder by applying it to anorexia nervosa, an eating disorder that is characterized by a complex set of symptoms. The authors defend that this framework can valuably contribute for future better explanations in the field of psychopathology.

As claimed by Anil Seth in the preface to this book, the PP approach has a long history and a bright future. Hopefully, this anthology will leave the reader with the intellectual desire to continue reading about PP and its promising outcomes while it will also help to set an agenda for future research on this valuable theoretical evidence-based framework.

**The Brain as a Prediction Machine by Anil Seth, Sackler Centre for Consciousness Science, Department of Informatics, University of Sussex, UK.**  
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How does the brain work? Gather enough philosophers, psychologists, and neuroscientists together (ideally with a few mathematicians and clinicians added to the mix) and I guarantee that a group will rapidly form to advocate for one answer in particular: that the brain is a prediction machine. This is an idea with a long history, many current variations—the Bayesian brain, predictive coding, predictive processing, the free energy principle, active inference, to name a few—and, if the advocates are to be believed, a bright future. At times, it seems that the prediction machine view—let's call it the "PM view" for short—can explain everything and anything. At other times it seems hard to isolate any empirical data points that unambiguously support the PM view over alternative theories. This is why this impressive and enlightening collection—"The philosophy and science of predictive processing"—is both timely and valuable. Its chapters cover three main topic areas that are each central to the PM view of mind and brain: the philosophy, the neuroscience, and applications to clinical disorders. Importantly, the divisions are not strict: many lines of argument and evidence reverberate among the sections. Equally important is that there are contributions from

both supporters and critics of the, PM view, providing a balanced perspective and allowing the reader the opportunity to draw his or her own conclusions.

The essence of the PM view is that the brain is continually engaged in formulating predictions, or hypotheses, about the causes of its sensory inputs, and in testing these predictions against incoming streams of sensory signals—thereby shaping perceptual content, guiding action, and driving learning. On most interpretations, the brain accomplishes this by implementing some approximate form of Bayesian inference, wherein sensory signals are combined with "prior" expectations or beliefs, to form "posterior" representations. Whether neural systems actually perform Bayesian computations, or whether they merely behave as if they do, is one of many intriguing questions that permeate the PM dialogue and which are explored in the chapters of this collection. (See in particular the chapters by Erik Myin and Thomas van Es, and Colin Klein.)

The historical roots of the PM view are rich and varied. For me, they trace most directly to earlier theories of human perception. These theories reach all the way back to Plato with his Allegory of the Cave; they have prominent echoes in Kantian theories of perception, but perhaps the most relevant historical anchors are found in Hermann von Helmholtz's notion of perception as "unconscious inference" and in Richard Gregory's description of perception as brain-based hypothesis testing (Gregory 1980, von Helmholtz 1867). Both Helmholtz and Gregory recognized that perception must involve a process of active interpretation—or "best guessing"—in which noisy and ambiguous sensory signals are combined with prior expectations about the way the world is, to form the contents of what we perceive. Yet their insights went rather against the grain, at least in the latter part of the twentieth century. The standard view of perception in this period was as a process of hierarchical feature detection, in which the perceptual content is "read out" from incoming sensory signals in a bottom-up or "outside-in" direction. The dominance of this view was not surprising, given its (at least superficial) match to experimental data, and since to many people it "seems as though" perception happens in this outside-in direction: a brain-based window onto an external world.

Things started to change at the turn of the century, and the PM view has now gained considerable visibility and momentum. This ascendancy has been driven by many factors, one of the more significant being the development of mechanistic (process) theories which describe how neural systems might actually implement predictive perception and control. The central idea here is that the brain implements approximate Bayesian inference through a process of "prediction error minimization." In this picture, top-down signals within perceptual hierarchies convey predictions, while bottom-up signals report "prediction errors"—differences between what the brain expects and what it gets—at each level in the hierarchy. Perception becomes a process of continual minimization of prediction error, with the consequence that the top-down predictions settle on an approximate Bayesian posterior, this being the "best guess" of the hidden causes of sensory inputs. Intuitively, predictive perception happens from the inside-out, just as much—if not more—than from the outside-in.

In the neuroscience of perception, mechanistic proposals of this sort first came to prominence in an influential paper about "predictive coding" in the visual system (Rao and Ballard 1999). They achieved bandwagon status a decade later through the extraordinarily impactful work of two neuroscientifically oriented philosophers, Jakob Hohwy (2013) and Andy Clark (2013), who each articulated persuasive—though somewhat conflicting—views of how the brain uses predictions to shape perception, cognition, and action. At the same time, steadily gaining momentum in the background was another and at first glance distinct line of work which has since become equally influential. Karl Friston's "free energy principle" starts not with the challenge of inferring a perceptual

world from a barrage of ambiguous sensory signals, but from an insight about what it means for a biological system (or on some readings, any system) to exist (Friston 2010). For Friston, predictive perception is a consequence of a more fundamental imperative for living systems to minimize (information-theoretically) surprising events. An exploration of the synergies and tensions between these alternative versions of the PM view, and other perspectives too, is one of more valuable gifts of the present collection (see, for example, the chapter by Richard Menary and Alexander Gillett).

Having followed and in small ways contributed to the PM view for a number of years, I am convinced that its insights readily justify its current prominence, fuel enthusiasm for its future trajectory, and demand the sort of incisive analysis that this book provides. I'll summarize just a few of these insights, as they appear to me.

The PM view of perception is transformational because it reveals perception to be an active, constructive process, rather than a passive registration of an external, objective reality. This amounts to a kind of "Copernican inversion" in the way we think about perception. Even though it may "seem as though" we perceive the world from the outside-in, it is in fact the other way around, and recognizing this both changes everything, and leaves everything seeming the same way it always did. Practically, the PM view helps explain subjective features both of normal, neurotypical perception, and of aberrant perception in psychiatric conditions such as schizophrenia—where there is now a lively debate about the brain basis of hallucinations (see, for example, A. R. Powers et al. 2017 as well as the excellent chapters in Part III of this book).

The PM view also reframes how we think about "attention" in perception. The now standard story is that attention becomes a process of adaptive "weighting" of sensory prediction errors (Feldman and Friston 2010) through optimization of the inferred precision of sensory signals (though see the challenging chapter by Sina Fazelpour and Madelaine Ransom). The PM perspective also helps reunite perception with action under a single process, since prediction errors can be quashed both by updating predictions and by performing actions that (are predicted to) furnish the anticipated sensory data. The suppression of prediction error through action is called "active inference" (Friston et al. 2010)—an idea which reanimates both the unfairly neglected "perceptual control theory" of William Powers (W. T. Powers 1973) and ideomotor theories of action proposed by William James and others, long ago. The chapter by Laurent Perrinet covers much of this terrain, exploring predictive processing accounts of perception all the way from the retina to the expression of action, while the chapter by Thomas Parr and Karl Friston applies the concept of active inference to shed new light on disconnection syndromes in neuropsychology.

Then there's the relevance for how we conceive of the "self." A straw-man view might conceive the "self" as "that which does the perceiving," perched behind the windows of the eyes (or the ears)—the recipient of wave-upon-wave of incoming sensory data. On the PM view, the self itself is a perception, another active interpretation of sensory data—but this time the data comes from the body as well as from the world. In my own work I've considered how emotion and embodied experiences of selfhood might depend on predictive perception of interoceptive signals (Seth 2013, Seth and Tsakiris 2018, Seth et al. 2011) [see also Barrett and Simmons 2015 and the chapter by Lisa Feldman Barrett and Lorena Chanes in this book], but there is much more to be said here. In particular, the role of predictive control in prospectively regulating self-related processes may go a long way toward explaining why perceptions of selfhood "feel" different, phenomenologically speaking, from perceptions of the world around us. The philosophical relevance of the PM view for selfhood is insightfully explored in the chapter by Robert Clowes and Klaus Gartner, and its applications to psychopathology in the chapters by Jakob Hohwy and Stephen Gadsby, and Zachariah Neemeh and Shaun Gallagher, as well as in the other chapters in Part III.

The mechanistic basis of predictive perception in approximate Bayesian inference has also led to new synergies with artificial intelligence and machine learning. While much of current machine learning remains dominated by powerful feedforward "deep learning" architectures trained by backpropagation (LeCun et al. 2015), increasing attention is being paid to neural networks that incorporate "generative models" of the sort implicated in prediction error minimization schemes. These generative models—which are able to "generate" sensory signals corresponding to predicted causes—in fact have a long history in artificial intelligence, extending back at least as far as the appropriately named "Helmholtz machines" first described by Geoffrey Hinton and Peter Dayan in the 1990s (Hinton and Dayan 1996). Today, algorithms based on generative models are being explored for their potential to learn from smaller quantities of data, to generalize effectively to new situations, and even to autonomously select what new data to learn from, in order to improve. In this collection, the chapter by Chris Thornton expertly examines the computational aspects of predictive processing, arguing that predictive processing can in principle accomplish any computational task.

Finally, there is the ever-present question of consciousness. If the PM view is indeed a comprehensive theory of mind and brain, what does it have to say about this most central but most recalcitrant of phenomena? Here, I see a difference in the remit of the PM view as compared to theories such as global workspace theory (Baars 1988, Dehaene and Changeux 2011), integrated information theory (Tononi et al. 2016), and higher-order thought theory (Lau and Rosenthal 2011). These theories offer themselves first and foremost as theories of consciousness—in other words, they have subjective experience, in one form or another, as their primary explanatory target. In contrast, the PM view may be better understood as a theory for consciousness science, rather than as a theory of consciousness. It provides a potent set of concepts and experimental methods for mapping neural mechanisms to the subjective, phenomenological properties of conscious perception—but it does not (at least not obviously) explain how or why consciousness happens in the first place. Perhaps, though, the piece-by-piece building of explanatory bridges between the physical and the phenomenological will turn out to be the most productive objective for any science of consciousness (Seth 2016). The contentious subject of consciousness is insightfully discussed in the pages of this book, most directly in the chapters by Steven S. Gouveia, and by Lisa Feldman Barrett and Lorena Chanes—but in many other places too.

More than any other contemporary perspective on brain and mind, the PM view is exercising both philosophers and scientists, and in doing so creating new spaces in which ideas from each tradition come into direct contact. This close interaction presents new challenges and opens new opportunities, both of which take the stage under the expert curation of the Editors of this collection. Within its pages you will find a great deal to ponder about the ways in which the brain is, or is not—or both is and is not—a prediction machine. <>

## **A HISTORY OF DATA VISUALIZATION AND GRAPHIC COMMUNICATION** by Michael Friendly and Howard Wainer [Harvard University Press, 9780674975231]

A comprehensive history of data visualization—its origins, rise, and effects on the ways we think about and solve problems.

With complex information everywhere, graphics have become indispensable to our daily lives.

Navigation apps show real-time, interactive traffic data. A color-coded map of exit polls details election balloting down to the county level. Charts communicate stock market trends, government spending, and the dangers of epidemics. **A HISTORY OF DATA VISUALIZATION AND GRAPHIC COMMUNICATION** tells the story of how graphics left the exclusive confines of scientific research and became ubiquitous. As data visualization spread, it changed the way we think.

Michael Friendly and Howard Wainer take us back to the beginnings of graphic communication in the mid-seventeenth century, when the Dutch cartographer Michael Florent van Langren created the first chart of statistical data, which showed estimates of the distance from Rome to Toledo. By 1786 William Playfair had invented the line graph and bar chart to explain trade imports and exports. In the nineteenth century, the “golden age” of data display, graphics found new uses in tracking disease outbreaks and understanding social issues. Friendly and Wainer make the case that the explosion in graphical communication both reinforced and was advanced by a cognitive revolution: visual thinking. Across disciplines, people realized that information could be conveyed more effectively by visual displays than by words or tables of numbers.

Through stories and illustrations, **A HISTORY OF DATA VISUALIZATION AND GRAPHIC COMMUNICATION** details the 400-year evolution of an intellectual framework that has become essential to both science and society at large.

## Reviews

“The invention of graphs and charts was a much quieter affair than that of the telescope, but these tools have done just as much to change how and what we see.”—Hannah Fry, *The New Yorker*

“A masterly study of graphic innovations, their context, and their scientific use. This brilliant book, without equivalent, is an indispensable read.”—Gilles Palsky, coauthor of *An Atlas of Geographical Wonders*

“Friendly and Wainer are the Watson and Crick of statistical graphics, showing us the history of the DNA structure that is the code of life for innovative visualizations.”—Ben Shneiderman, founder of the Human–Computer Interaction Lab, University of Maryland

“Data expertise is a fundamental prerequisite for success in our digital age. But exactly how, and when, have we learned to draw conclusions from data? For decades, Michael Friendly and Howard Wainer have been studying how data has informed decision-making, through visualization and statistical analysis. Replete with mesmerizing visual examples, this book is an eye-opening distillation of their research.”—Sandra Rendgen, author of *History of Information Graphics*

“Michael Friendly and Howard Wainer have given us a wonderful history of the dazzling field of data visualization. They bring new life to ancient death statistics and describe the artistic poetry used to display numbers. An intriguing story of how we have learned to communicate data of all types.”—Stephen M. Stigler, author of *The Seven Pillars of Statistical Wisdom*

“Two of the most distinguished scholars of data visualization give us a glimpse of ancient attempts to quantify the world, before revealing the century-long revolution that led to the invention of modern statistics and many of the graphical methods we use today. I learned a lot from this book, and I think you will too.”—Alberto Cairo, author of *How Charts Lie: Getting Smarter about Visual Information*

“Friendly and Wainer demonstrate the amazing progress that has been made in data graphics over the past two hundred years. Understanding this history—where graphs came from and how they



developed—will be valuable as we move forward.”—Andrew Gelman, coauthor of *Regression and Other Stories*

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Excerpt: We live on islands surrounded by seas of data. Some call it “big data.” In these seas live various species of observable phenomena. Ideas, hypotheses, explanations, and graphics also roam in the seas of data and can clarify the waters or allow unsupported species to die. These creatures thrive on visual explanation and scientific proof. Over time new varieties of graphical species arise, prompted by new problems and inner vision of the fishers in the seas of data.

Whether we’re aware of this or not, data are a part of almost every area of our lives. As individuals, fitness trackers and blood sugar meters let us monitor our health. Online bank dashboards let us view our spending patterns and track financial goals. As members of society, we read stories of outbreaks of wildfires in California or extreme weather events and wonder if these are mere anomalies or conclusive evidence for climate change. A 2018 study claimed that even one alcoholic drink a day increased health risks,<sup>1</sup> and there is considerable debate about the health benefits or risks of green tea for lowering cholesterol, vitamin C for mitigating the common cold, marijuana for chronic pain, and (sadly) even childhood vaccination. But what do all these examples mean? As a popular t-shirt proclaims: “We are drowning in data, but thirsting for knowledge.”

These illustrations are really about understanding something systematic or the strength of evidence for a claim. How much does my blood sugar go up if I skip my morning run or eat a Krispy Kream donut? Are there really more wildfires in California or more extreme weather events worldwide in recent years? Exactly how much does my health risk increase from drinking one or two glasses of wine a day, as others had long recommended, compared with total abstinence?

For such questions, evidence can be presented in words, numbers, or pictures, and we can try to use these to evaluate the strength of a claim or argument. The purpose of scientific research is to gather information on a topic, turn that into some standard form that we can consider as evidence, and reason to a conclusion or explanation. A graph is often the most powerful means to accomplish this because it provides a visual framework for the facts being presented. It can answer the important, though often implicit, question, “compared to what?” It can also convey a sense of uncertainty of evidence for the validity of a claim. Yet it also enabled viewers to think more deeply about the question raised and challenge the conclusion. A diagram can also provide a visual answer to a problem and graphic displays can communicate and persuade.

As we illustrate in this book, graphs and diagrams have often played an important role in understanding complex phenomena and discovery of laws and explanations. To truly understand the impact of a visual framework, we must not only look at contemporary examples, we must also learn how it changed science and society. We must learn history.

## A Long History

This book recounts a long history, a broad overview of how, where, and why the methods of data visualization, so common today, were conceived and developed. You can think of it as a guided tour of this history, focusing on social and scientific questions and a developing language of graphics that provided insights, for both discovery and communication.

This book has a long personal history as well. It began in October 1962, when we met as undergraduates at Rensselaer Polytechnic Institute. Sequentially we became math majors, house mates, and friends. We then did our graduate work at the same university (Princeton), both supported by Educational Testing Service's Psychometric Fellowship. There we came into contact with John Tukey, Princeton's widely celebrated polymath, who was in the process of revolutionizing the field of statistics with the idea that the purpose of data analysis was insight, not just numbers,<sup>3</sup> and that insight—seeing the unexpected—more often came from drawing pictures than from proving theorems or deriving equations.

Tukey's guidance proved important and prophetic as we found that whatever substantive topic we worked on, our ability to understand and communicate the evidence we gathered almost always involved viewing the data in some graphic format. Our research led us both to gravitate toward aspects of the use and development of data visualization methods. This interest spanned their applications in scientific exploration, explanation, communication, and reasoning, as well as the creation of new methods for illuminating problems so that they can be understood better.

Remarkably, for both of us, our studies of graphical methods, took us back ceaselessly into the past for a deeper and more thorough understanding. Much of what seemed commonplace today turned out to have deep historical roots.

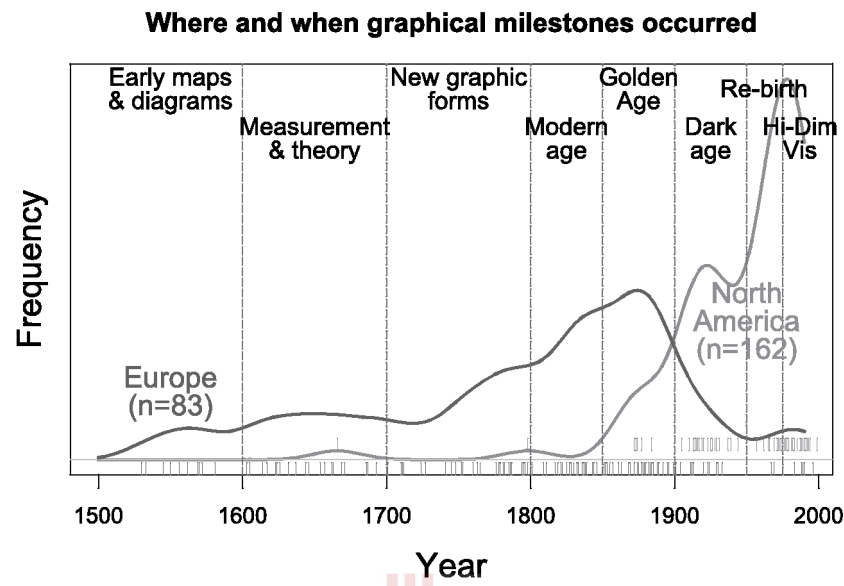
There is also a long history of research, collaboration, and writing that informed this book and prompted this account. One initial foray was the 1976 National Science Foundation Graphic Social Reporting Project directed by Wainer.

One of the project's tasks was to assemble a coherent group of international scholars who worked on the use of graphics to communicate quantitative phenomena and create a social network to facilitate the sharing of information. This led to several conferences, a fair number of scholarly articles (e.g., Beniger & Robyn's 1978 history of graphics,<sup>4</sup> and the English translation of Bertin's iconic *Semiologie Graphique* [1973]).<sup>5</sup> Once republished in English, Bertin's ideas spread more broadly and became useful for the work of many other scholars, most importantly, Edward Tufte's transformative books. Data visualization, as a field of study, was off to the races.

A second key event was Friendly's Milestones Project. It has been substantially revised and now appears at <http://www.datavis.ca/milestones/>, which began in the mid-1990s. At that time, previous historical accounts of the events, ideas, and techniques that relate to modern data visualization were fragmented and scattered over many fields.<sup>8</sup> The Milestones Project began simply as an attempt to collate these diverse contributions into a single, comprehensive listing, organized chronologically, that contained representative images, references to original sources, and links to further discussion—a source for “one-stop shopping” on the history of data visualization. It now consists of an interactive, zoomable timeline of nearly 300 significant milestone events, nearly 400 images, and



350 references to original sources, together with a Google map of authors and a milestones calendar of births, deaths, and important events in this history.



**FIGURE I.I TIME LINE OF MILESTONE EVENTS: CLASSIFIED BY PLACE OF DEVELOPMENT. TICK MARKS AT THE BOTTOM SHOW INDIVIDUAL EVENTS. THE SMOOTHED CURVES PLOT THEIR RELATIVE FREQUENCY, IN EUROPE AND NORTH AMERICA. SOURCE: © THE AUTHORS.**

A happy, but unanticipated, consequence of organizing this history in a database was the idea that statistical and graphical methods could be used to explore, study, and describe historical issues and questions in the history of data visualization itself. This approach can be called statistical historiography. Each item in the milestones database is tagged by date, location, and content attributes (subject area, form of the development), so it is possible to treat this history as data.

For example, Figure I.I shows the frequency distribution of 245 milestone events classified by continent. We can immediately see that most early innovations occurred in Europe, while most after 1900 occurred in North America. The bumps in the curves reflect some global historical trends that deserve explanation. The labeled time periods provide a framework of what we consider to be the major themes driving advances in data visualization.

## Overview

The earliest event recorded in the Milestones Project is an 8,000-year-old map of the town of Catalhöyük, near the present Turkish city of Konya. The prehistory of visualization goes back even further. But, as you can see in Figure I.I, most of the key innovations occurred only in the last 400 years and showed exponential growth in the last 100 years.

Our central questions in this book are “How did the graphic depiction of numbers arise?” and more importantly, “Why?” What led to the key innovations in graphs and diagrams that are commonplace today? What were the circumstances or scientific problems that made visual depiction more useful than mere words and numbers? Finally, how did these graphic inventions make a difference in comprehending natural and social phenomena and communicating that understanding?

Looking over the history portrayed in the Milestone Project, it became clear that most of these key innovations occurred in connection with important scientific and social problems: How can a

mariner accurately navigate at sea? How can we understand the prevalence of crime or poverty in relation to possible causal factors such as literacy? How well are passengers and goods transported on our railways and canals, and where do we need more capacity? These are among the questions that illustrate the descriptive labels we apply to the time periods in Figure I.I.

But the story of the rise of data visualization is richer than the stimulating problems. Questions like these provide the context and motivation for many graphic inventions in this history, but they don't fully answer the question "Why?" Principal innovations over the last 400 years arose in conjunction with a cognitive revolution we call "visual thinking," the idea that some problems and their solutions can be much more clearly addressed and communicated in visual displays, rather than just words or tables of numbers. Einstein, who was better known for theories of physics expressed in words and equations, captured this visual sense in his statement, "If I can't picture it, I can't understand it."

The history we relate here is exemplified in the stories of some key problems in the history of science and graphic communication, but told as an appreciation of some of the heroes in this history, for whom visual insight proved crucial. But this begs the larger question of how such visual thinking itself developed. We provide some context for this in the initial chapters, but the essential idea is that this was bound to a concomitant rise in "empirical thinking"—the view that many scientific questions could better be addressed by gathering relevant data than by applying even the best abstract or theoretical thinking.

## Re-Visions

The historical graphs we describe in this book were created using the data, methods, technology, and understanding that were current at the time. We can sometimes come to a better understanding of the intellectual, scientific and graphical questions by attempting a reanalysis from a modern perspective.

Sometimes we come up sadly short because the software tools we have today don't allow us or make it very difficult for us to reproduce the essential ideas or the artistic beauty of important historical graphs and their stories. The hand-crafted graphs, thematic maps, and statistical diagrams of our heroes in this history often show that the pen is mightier than any software sword.

Our conscientious best efforts sometimes yield only a pale imitation of an original; in other words, we are unable to advance the understanding of the problem through reanalysis or the redrafting of graphs. One consequence is that we learn to admire the thoughtful and skillful work of our predecessors and the challenges of pen-and-ink drawings or copperplate engravings. Another consequence is that we can learn to appreciate the context of historical problems and the graphs created to present them, from both our modern successes and our failures.

We refer to these attempts as Re-Visions, meaning "to see again," possibly from a new perspective. We don't intend merely to try to see the past through present-colored glasses. Rather, we hope to shed some light on the strengths and weaknesses of the landmark developments in data visualization or understand them better in historical context. One small example illustrates this point: In Chapter 4 we show how John Snow could have made a more compelling graphic argument for cholera as a water-born disease originating at the Broad Street pump.

## Chronology versus Theme

The structure of this book requires a little explanation. In most nonfiction narratives there is considerable tension between chronology and theme, with chronology typically winning. The chronological narrative wants to move linearly from moment to moment, whereas topics scattered

across eras sometimes cry out to be collected together by theme. Nevertheless chronology usually dominates, and has done so at least since narratives were recorded on papyrus scrolls.

In this book chronology dominates, but we tried to hold its force in check, fearing that if we didn't, the reader would be thematically left at sea, with the next instance far off on some foreign shore. The great themes of epistemology, scientific discovery, social reform, technology, and visual perception move with time, but not in lockstep. Consequently, much of our narrative is structured around key problems of a given time and the individuals—our graphic heroes—whose visual insight and innovations led to advances in data visualization and science.

### **What follows is a synopsis of the book.**

Chapter 1, “In the Beginning ...,” is an overview of the larger questions and themes that provide a context for the book. We consider the relations among numerical data and evidence for an argument and graphs, and then describe some of the prehistory of the visual representation of numbers and the early rise of visualization itself. The story continues to the rise of empirical thinking in philosophy and science around the sixteenth century and the concomitant remarkable development of the visual representation of numbers to communicate quantitative phenomena.

From there we explore a fundamental and difficult problem of the seventeenth century: the determination of longitude at sea. In Chapter 2, “The First Graph Got It Right,” we show how Michael Florent van Langren had the idea to make a graph of historical determinations of the longitude distance from Toledo to Rome, in what is arguably the first graph of statistical data.

In Chapter 3, “The Birth of Data,” we trace the role of data in the initial rise of graphical methods around the early 1800s. We focus attention on one important participant in this story: André'-Michel Guerry [1802–1866], who used an “avalanche of data” and graphical methods to help invent modern social science.

A short time later, analogous widespread data collection began in the United Kingdom, but this was in the context of social welfare, poverty, public health, and sanitation. In Chapter 4, “Vital Statistics,” we see two new heroes of data visualization, William Farr and John Snow, who worked independently trying to understand the causes of several epidemics of cholera and how the disease could be mitigated.

Chapter 5, “The Big Bang,” details how, at the beginning of the nineteenth century, nearly all the modern forms of data graphics—the pie chart, the line graph of a time series, and the bar chart—were invented. These key developments were all due to a wily Scot named William Playfair. He can rightly be called the father of modern graphical methods, and it is only a slight stretch to consider his contributions to be the Big Bang of data graphics.

Among all the modern forms of statistical graphics, the scatterplot may be considered the most versatile and generally useful invention in the entire history of statistical graphics. It is also notable because William Playfair didn't invent it. Chapter 6, “The Origin and Development of the Scatterplot,” considers why Playfair was unable to think about such things, and it traces the invention of the scatterplot to the eminent astronomer John F. W. Herschel. Scatterplots achieved great importance in the work of Francis Galton [1822–1911] on the heritability of traits. Galton's work, visualized through statistical diagrams, became the source of the statistical ideas of correlation and regression and thus most of modern statistical methods.

In the latter half of the nineteenth century, enthusiasm for graphical methods matured and a variety of developments in statistics, data collection and technology combined to produce a “perfect storm”

for data graphics. The result was a qualitatively distinct period that produced works of unparalleled beauty and scope, the likes of which would be hard to duplicate today. In Chapter 7 we argue, as the chapter title implies, that this period deserves to be recognized as the “Golden Age of Statistical Graphics.”

Chapter 8, “Escaping Flatland,” discusses the challenges of using displays of data. Displays are necessarily produced on a two-dimensional surface—paper or screen. Yet these are often, misleading at worst or incomplete at best. The representation of multidimensional phenomena on a two-dimensional surface was, and remains, the greatest challenge of graphics. In this chapter we discuss and illustrate some of the approaches that were used to communicate multidimensional phenomena within the existing limitations.

Chapter 9, “Visualizing Time and Space,” explores two general topics in the recent history of data visualization. First, graphical methods have become increasingly dynamic and interactive, capable of showing changes over time by animation and going beyond a static image to one that a viewer can directly manipulate, zoom, or query. Second, the escape from flatland has continued, with a variety of new approaches to understanding data in ever higher dimensions.

Graphs are justly celebrated for their ability to accurately present phenomena in a compact way while simultaneously providing their context. If this were all that they did, their place in scientific history would be secure. But with suitable data and the right design, they can also convey emotion. Indeed, in some instances graphs provide an emotional impact that can be likened to that of poetry. In Chapter 10, “Graphs as Poetry,” we imagine a collaboration between the civil rights activist W. E. B. DuBois and the canonized graphic designer C. J. Minard to depict the Great Migration of 6 million African-Americans fleeing the racism and terror in the post-Confederacy South to the industrial North. The result of this gedanken collaboration provides a vivid example of how we can profit from studying the past to help solve the problems of the future. A final section, “Learning More,” lists additional resources for those who wish to explore a topic in greater depth.

This print edition necessarily omits some materials that enrich our stories but fell to the cutting-room floor. Moreover, publishing constraints limited the number of color images. To partially compensate, we created an associated web site, <http://HistDataVis.datavis.ca>, containing all images in color, some of our more extended discussion, and biographical notes on some of our dramatis personae in this history. A happy consequence is that we can continue to keep this topic active with additional essays on related topics.

Thus, this book invites you to consider the history of data visualization from a larger perspective: a journey that began with the earliest visual inscriptions and progressed to social and scientific problems that could be understood in graphs and diagrams. Along this path, many innovations were forgotten or underappreciated, as Harry Truman noted in the opening quote. The following chapters highlight contributions that are imperative to the history of visual thinking and graphic communication. <>

# ARISTOTLE ON PRESCRIPTION: DELIBERATION AND RULE-MAKING IN ARISTOTLE'S PRACTICAL PHILOSOPHY by Francesca Alesse [Series: Philosophia Antiqua, Brill, 9789004385382]

The focus of **ARISTOTLE ON PRESCRIPTION** is Aristotle's reflections on rule-making. It is widely believed that Aristotle was only concerned with decision-making, understood as a deliberative process enabling a person to arrive at particular, contingent decisions. However, rule-making is fundamental to Aristotle's ethical texts. Establishing rules means indicating patterns for action that are sufficiently specific to meet situational difficulties and sufficiently constant in time to provide us with a code of behaviour to be used in similar situations. When we prescribe rules, we demonstrate the ability to direct not only our own life but also other people's lives. Alesse's book explores Aristotle's deep reflections on the nature and functions of prescription, and on the relationship between rules and individual decisions.

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- The Reasons for This Research
- Problems and Debates
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- Prescription and Architectonic Order
- Conclusions
- Bibliography

The secondary literature on Aristotle's practical philosophy is massive. A great number of illuminating studies have been provided on practical reasoning, deliberation, choice *vel* decision, the so-called practical syllogism, as well as legislation and political authority. All of these are key notions in Aristotle's ethics and politics and somehow related to the concept of rule and the act of prescribing a particular action or a line of conduct. Besides, Aristotle's treatment of the modalities and causes of human behaviour arguably implies the possibility of *codifying* types of action and establishing, to a certain extent, regular and constant rules of conduct. Human "movement" is a very special kind of animal movement, in that it is dominated by "practical calculation", i.e. weighing several opportunities, evaluating situations and circumstances, imagining the future.

Nonetheless, the question of rule-making in Aristotle's practical philosophy has not received the attention it deserves. It is widely believed that Aristotle was only concerned, at the most, with *decision*-making, meant as a general psychological process that enables man to arrive particular and contingent choices (or decisions). In my opinion, *rule*-making firmly underpins Aristotle's ethical and political texts. Defining a rule means indicating a course of action to solve a practical problem and to get a clear aim. This course of action has to be both sufficiently specific to meet situational difficulties, and sufficiently general and constant over time to offer a code of behaviour to be used in similar situations. Furthermore, when we establish rules and prescribe them, we demonstrate the ability of directing not only our own life but also, more importantly, other people's lives. In the latter case, we assume ends which are not of our immediate concern, in the same way that a doctor is concerned only with others' health. My thesis is that Aristotle has deeply reflected on this problem,

distinguishing rules and prescriptions from individual, episodic choices and decisions, and admitting a prescriptive reasoning which is formally equal to any syllogism, but substantially different from a scientific explication. Prescriptive reasoning does not aim at explaining a fact or an action, while revealing its final cause and agent's intention; prescriptive reasoning is a special kind of reasoning which indicates the best thing to do (the most feasible, or the most honorable, depending either on the quality of the end for the sake of which an action is to be pursued, or on the circumstances).

Some recent scholars attribute to Aristotle the idea that action is mainly the result of experience and sensible understanding of every contingent situation. From such a standpoint, Aristotle would be a "particularist" philosopher. My aim is to show that Aristotle, on the contrary, has recognized the need for codifying practical rules which, although pertinent to instable and accidental reality, may be sufficiently constant over time. Aristotle is at least in part induced to think about the need for both stable and flexible rules by the celebrated criticisms Plato addresses to the "written law", i.e. political law. But what characterizes Aristotle's reflection about prescription is his enlarging the horizon of investigation. The prescriptive limits Plato recognizes to the written *nomos*—its generality with respect to different situations and human characters; its fixity with respect to changing circumstances—lead Aristotle to a total rethinking of the prescriptive issue in order to grasp its foundations in the conception of deliberate choice, the theory of reasoning, and that of the structure of human soul. My intention is precisely to bring to light that the premises of Aristotle's notion of political and legislative prescription reside in some of the fundamental parts of his practical philosophy. At least two factors emerging from the inquiry seem to have confirmed my working hypothesis. First, the possibility that deliberation, which is a heuristic search for the means to an end and a kind of hypothetical reasoning, can be converted into a deduction, that is, into a syllogism. This syllogism may be defined as prescriptive because it is able to deduce a choice, or decision, from a premise expressing either a desired end or an agreed norm, so revealing in the conclusion the appropriate action to the end. Second, Aristotle admits that, although human action is caused by desire, it is possible to deliberate about the means to an end without the desire for that end being *in act*. Deliberating subjects may both (a) consider an end which is *not* object of their own actual desire as desirable by someone else or in given situations, thus reasoning about the appropriate means to it and without coming to an action; and (b) consider a certain purpose for which it is necessary to deliberate, as an intermediate step to achieving a higher end. In both cases, deliberating subjects may prescribe for other people the performance of what they, and not those other people, have deliberated. This is the proper work of legislators when deliberating and prescribing particular rules of conduct for the sake of particular ends in various fields of social life. They do not actually desire those ends for the sake of which they prescribe. They desire *in act* just the ultimate end, the common good, and consider the ends for the sake of which they prescribe as the intermediate stages and instrumental conditions in view of the ultimate end. Prescription as guiding own and others' individual actions provides the model for rule-making at the level of society and political community. <>

## **THE ENIGMA OF ART: ON THE PROVENANCE OF ARTISTIC CREATION** by Gino Zaccaria [Series: Studies on the Interaction of Art, Thought and Power, Brill, 9789004448704]

In this book, Gino Zaccaria offers a philosophical meditation on the issue of art in light of its originary sense. He shows how this sense can be fully understood provided that our thinking, on the

one hand, returns to the ancient Greek world where it must heed the voice and hints of the goddess Athena, and, on the other hand, listens to “artist-thinkers” close to our current epoch, such as Cézanne, van Gogh and Boccioni. Indeed, the path of this meditation has as its guide the well-known sentence by the painter from Aix-en-Provence, which reads: “*Je vous dois la vérité en peinture, et je vous la dirai !*”. What will finally appear in this way will not be an abstract or historical notion of art, but its enigma; that is to say, the promise of “another initiation” of art itself.

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## Excerpt: Φύσις as Assurgency

Φύσις, as we know, is usually translated as “nature”, and is normally understood in light of the traits of productivity and production; in particular, one might reckon that φύσις means “autonomous production of forms” (or even “productive principle of the universe”).

By following this consuetude, one also simultaneously thinks of τέχνη in reference to the Aristotelian *dictum*:

ἡ τέχνη μιμεῖται τὴν φύσιν

—unanimously translated as:

art imitates nature

or even

τέχνη is an imitation of φύσις.

According to the “logic” of this interpretation, one is also careful to specify (and in a manner not completely incorrect) that the Stagirite does not, in fact, intend to claim that art resides in a “representation” of “reality”, but rather in the imitation of nature itself, that is, in the replication of its “substance” as a productive principle, of its “essence” as a production of forms. Thus, art—according to the Aristotelian sentence, interpreted and translated in this manner—would be, in turn, a (principle of the) production of forms. Nature: *autonomous* principal formative force.

Art: *human* principal formative force. [Note, “princi-pia-l” (with an “i” inserted between the “p” and the “a”) means that which has the character of a principle; constituting a source or origin.] Therefore, it stands that nature and art would be united by the original trait of *principal formativity* in the following sense: with regard to φύσις, this trait would lie in the incessant producing of its own forms: stars and light, wind and clouds, rain and storms, oceans and mountains, lakes, rivers and plains, plants and animals (of the sky, land and sea), gods and men, and so forth; in relation to τέχνη, the aforesaid trait would reside in the bringing its specific formations to light: tools of every shape and kind, and works of art of every sort and for every purpose and taste (from dance

and theatre performances to architecture, from paintings to sculptures, from musical compositions to poetry, and so on).

*However:* are we certain that Aristotle's *dictum* means all of this? That it is sufficient to produce a form so that a work of art may appear? In reality, what we are certain of is the opposite: the philosopher cannot speak this "language", and for us to sustain this thesis it is sufficient to recall that φύσις does not mean "autonomous (principal) production of forms" at all. Indeed, φύσις has nothing to do with production and formativeness, or with an *entia*-creating force, or with a "universal productive principle". *This is the problem!*

The "explanation" of *physis* that has just been presented is simply an abstract conceptual format that appears so convincing because it leans heavily—unknowingly—on one of the "cheap versions" of Nietzsche's metaphysics (to which we are now accustomed). Only when the scope of being, or rather the *being-beënt*, is pre-comprehended as the will to potency and power—and, as a consequence, thought through values is imposed—will one hear within the Greek word φύσις the ancient denomination of nature as a "field of forces", and nature itself as a force or principle, to wit, as principal *per-formative* energy.

Φύσις—what does this word mean, however, when thought of *in Greek*? "To think of φύσις in Greek" means, primarily, to hear it independently of the metaphysics of the will to potency-power (we hinted at this issue in note 356, XX). Indeed, in the Greek pre-understoodness of the scope of being, potency only bides *germinally* (to wit, according to that "germ of potency" or "gene of power" that will go on to render Nietzsche's philosophy geniturally conceivable and trustworthy)—and this is simply and solely due to the fact that being is experienced and perceived primarily as φύσις. If, therefore, we interpret φύσις by (implicitly or explicitly) assuming Nietzschean metaphysics as our guide, we bring about an undue conceptual retro-projection because we attribute traits and tones to Greek thought that are extraneous to it (because it cannot geniturally know them). Nothing but a single way remains for us: to elucidate the *initial*-Greek sense of φύσις. (I will now reformulate it in a different manner to how I clarified in §§ 17.2–18.1.)

What sooth do the Greek philosophers envisage within the word φύσις? With this word, they denominate a percept of the beënts *in (the dimension of) their being*, and not a perception of an *ens*—as the force of principal performative energy would, in fact, be: indeed, a force—above all, when it is (reckoned to be) invisible or not directly perceptible, or only conjectured or hypothesised—already bides as something "forced" to contingentment; that is, as something intrinsically contingentable, and, therefore, as a contingent "by nature". So, the word φύσις—as a name of the scope of being—cannot be discovered or noticed in a certain beënt or thing, like a river or a plant. The circumstance that a certain river appears in its own determined and circumscribed form, or that a certain plant appears in one manner or another, well, all of this (the appearance of appeared things according to what each thing is) is due to the fact that man—and *herein lies the sense of the conception of φύσις qua being*—has already pre-comprehended, as a "fragrance" of the *ingeny* of being, the sense of φύσις, thus adopting it *ab origine* not as the autonomous production of forms but rather as the originary discontingent dimension, thanks to which every *thing* comes to assume its own while-biding configuration. If we remain on the plane of the scope of being (and a-being)—as is necessary here to avoid all forms of confusion and misunderstanding—we are called to translate the title φύσις with a word capable of clearing its schismatic tone. In a certain sense, we have to take the occasion of translating to save φύσις—as a word of being—from its formatisation.

Above, I stated that we had but a single way. Here is one of its plausible beginnings: we must remember that in the word φύσις the verb φύω speaks, and φύω means “to give birth” and “to let provene to light”, “to disclose oneself”, “to (let) originate”, “to let emerge and appear”, “to let surge”. Let us first look at the verb and not the noun form and understand φύσις *in light of* φύειν, since the verb has the intrinsic capability to maintain thinking within the schism, whereas the noun remains ambiguous in that respect because it evokes a “substance”, a determinate “reality”, to wit, a certain *ens*. In the word φύσις, heard in the Greek manner, we can perceive the sense of surging, that peculiar and salient surging—which is, at the same time, a “pervening-against-towards” and an involving, a referring to and a being pertinent to; in short, a regarding and concerning the mortal’s biding in a world. Indeed, is human biding not that being which is regarded from that which surges, like a certain appeared river (which runs broad and quiet) or an appeared plant (which provides shade and gives fruit), but also like a certain appeared sudden impulse of fear or consternation, or as an appeared gesture of friendliness or affection or hatred, and so forth, for every thing and for every likely sense which reveals itself while-bidingly? Does the surging of every “surgent” not perhaps concern man’s *biding* (*ingeny of being, a-being*)? Thus, since φύειν, which is implicit in φύσις, is simultaneously a letting surge *and* a coming and pervening-towards in the sense of concerning, and since concerning (let us say: the concerning towardness) can be indicated through the Latin prefix *ad-*, I shall translate the verb φύειν with the form “to let *adsurge*”, and the noun φύσις with the form “*adsurgency*” (Latin *assurgere* < *as-* [= *ad-*] + *surgere*).

Φύσις: *to assurge and to let assurge into assurgency*—this is the meaning of the primary and originary pre-understoodness of the scope of being, or *human ingeny of being*, that characterised the Greek initiation of thought. *To assurge and to let assurge within assurgency*—this is the crucial grounding-trait of that genitural perception and apperception of the scope of being that *subsisted in* and *suited* ancient Greekness.

To the Greeks (that is, to the Greek *thinkers*, not “the ancient Greeks” in general), the fact that mortals could understand a tree as such—that is, a tree in its rising from the earth, where it is rooted, towards the sky, where it flowers and bears fruit—is due to the originary condition that they have always-already understood the scope of being as assurgency. It is the scope of being as assurgency that guides the understanding (in one instant) of the tree as assurged in its own manner, and (in another) the river that assurges along the assurged valley, and (in another still) the stars that assurge in the sky, which, in turn, assurges thanks to them, and (now) the plants and animals, and (finally) man, who also assurges—and lives and exists—in different manners from those in which other living beings come to light and “are”.

The circumstance that φύσις is a name of the scope of being, and, therefore, that its sense (assurgency) and its *biding* (i.e. the concern in relation to man’s being) cannot be obtained through the production of “ontic” proofs (i.e. observations of *entia*, their measurements or descriptions), because they (sense and biding) are necessarily presumed in every understanding of the beënt, and are, therefore, simply *flagrant*. Nothing else but this irrefragable circumstance is unequivocally recalled by Aristotle in Book B of *Physics* (193 a 3–7):

ὥς δ’ ἔστιν ἡ φύσις, πειρᾶσθαι δεικνύναι γελοῖον · φανερόν γάρ ὅτι τοιαῦτα τῶν ὄντων ἔστιν πολλά. τὸ δὲ δεικνύναι τὰ φανερὰ διὰ τῶν ἀφανῶν οὐ δυναμένου κρίνειν ἔστι τὸ δι’ αὐτὸ καὶ μὴ δι’ αὐτὸ γνῶριμον (ὅτι δ’ ἐνδέχεται τοῦτο πάσχειν, οὐκ ἄδηλον · ...).

I shall translate in the following explicating manner:

But the circumstance that φύσις is, to wit, that it *bides*—the will to produce a proof of this event (and advent) is ridiculous [this (i.e. the scope of being as φύσις) is “something” which shows itself by itself, which comes to light (dis-conceals itself) by its own sooth, i.e. it is something flagrant]; in truth, a multiplicity of beēnts is indigenous to it [to φύσις]. Now, to produce proof of something flagrant and to produce this proof even by means of that which did not show itself [that is, through that which is non-flagrant] constitutes the behaviour of a man incapable of conceiving the scissure between that which is knowable by its sooth and that which is not (and in observing this, we do not exclude that this incapacity may occur).

We are now able to grasp *the essential point, or the gist*, of the elucidation of φύσις. Let me attempt to put it into focus.

When the scope of being lets itself be perceived as assurgency, thinking becomes accustomed to the idea that the assurgency of every assured beēt—assurgency as a mountain or star, animal or plant, man or god—is already, in itself, a self-entruing, a self-averring, a self-clearing: in assurgency, every assurgent disconceals itself as already constituted in itself and for itself. Without fully conceiving it (and, therefore, unknowingly), man notices φύσις, assurgency, as *already* being clearance, *already* being (the) truth. In the dimension of φύσις, there is no “space”, so to speak, for the abeyance of and hope for being. A tree is not a hoping-abeyant thing, just as the river is not, nor is man, nor a god: nothing abeyant hopes to be since everything is always-already something assured-cleared by itself, through its own intrinsic concreteness, “thinghood” (see above § 2.3 and § 3.2). Certainly, assurgency is *a scope of being*, and the scope of being (the Greek thinkers have taught us this) needs man in order to bide as such. Nevertheless, the scope of being’s “need for man”, when φύσις reigns, is that for which mortals are uniquely called to *recognise* something assured as something that is “already autonomously cleared”, and since mortals are called in this manner, they are finally capable of understanding what is assured as such (τὸ ὄν ἧ ὄν, as Aristotle states). *Every assurgent is spontaneously self-clearing. Φύσις means assurgency as spontaneous clearance.* Here, as we have already seen in §§ 17.3–18.1, the trait of spontaneity emerges. Everything assurges and, in assurgency in spontaneous self-clearing, calls the mortals to recognise the “self-clearing” trait of all that is assured and of every assurgent.

The discerning perception of the spontaneity of clearance is the primary or fundamental stance, which φύσις imposes on the thinking that aspires to found a knowledge capable of constructing a human habitation on earth (a πολιτεία). This is why Aristotle defines τέχνη as the μίμησις of φύσις. In the word μίμησις, we must not hear “imitation”, “representation”, or “reproduction”, but rather the traits of *convening* (convenience), *conforming* (conformity) and *adapting* (adaptation, adaptability): assuming a measure and becoming commensurate. Τέχνη (which, as we know, is not “technique”, in the hodiernal meaning of the word, but, first and foremost, a form of knowledge) primarily consists in *con-formity* to assurgency, in *commensuration* to the spontaneity of clearance; and all this implies that *art* (in every sense) can only be generated when man has already understood—before every productive act and every manipulative, designing or “ideational” or “ideative” ability—the trait of *self-con-forming to assurgency as spontaneous self-clearing*. This means, for example, that the fabrication of a tool, or the creation of a work of art—the “letting surge” a vase, a chair, or even a temple or a poem or a tragedy—must unfold in modalities that conform to and commensurate themselves with the assurgency of seas and rivers, mountains and valleys, lands and islands, animals and plants, as well as the assurgency of man and of the assurgent traits of his or her bidding.

*Art—in the sense of φύσις experienced and thought of in the Greek onset—is measured conformity to assurgency as the spontaneity of clearance.* This is the fundament of the creating actions of artisans and

of the artistic creatorship of painters and sculptors, of poets and architects, of musicians and dancers. In φύσις, art finds its unique and sure guide. So, Aristotle, with his *dictum*, brings to light and interprets that which the Greek experience of the scope of being implicitly indicates.

## Art and Art

The preceding clarification permits us to become aware of: 1. the unconceivability of the current explanation for φύσις (an *autonomous* principal formative force or energy that would find its *human* imitation in τέχνη); and 2. the “import” of the essential point thus brought to light, that is, the circumstance that φύσις is a name for the scope of being in the sense of assurgency as *the spontaneity of clearance*—a name that betrays the oblivion of the trait of the abeyance of and hope for being.

The word “import” does not simply suggest that this point is significant or relevant. The word should be taken to the letter: the above-clared essential point has an *import* in the sense that it “ports”—conducts—thought to that dimension where it can recognise a *constitutive scissure*, by which geniture, to which the Hesperidean progeny is indigenous, is scinded into two constitutive epochs, into two worlds—the Alpha and the Omega.

Alpha: *over here*, on the “versant” of—and towards—the Greek onset, the epoch of the scope of being as assurgency (and, therefore, of its thought and its foundation) bides; it is that world in which the acceptability and conceivability of the abeyance of and hope for being—as a “habitual state”, or as the “first concreteness” of every beënt, every selving thing, every instressed inscape—remains ineluctably absconded, nay-said and denied, and in which, as a consequence, art is designed, instituted and “practiced” as *conformity to truth qua φύσις*, to *φύσις-already-clearance* (here, art is, in the end, recruited and conscripted from and within the regime of factuation [See Heidegger, *Besinnung*, 30–42.]); Omega: *over there*, on the “versant” of—and towards—another genitural onset, another initiation, that is only just presaged, the epoch of the schism of the scope of being (and, therefore, of its foundations and apperceptive acceptations) bides; it is that world in which the conceivableness and trustworthiness of the abeyance of and hope for being breaks forth amongst the beënts as their nullibiquitous invisible fulcrum, and in which art is configured as the (disquieting) *quieting* of the call to the scope of being that resonates and fulgurates from the (latent) hoping abeyants—a quieting that consists, as we know, in setting-to-work (into a work of art) the truth of being *qua* clearance (scinded from φύσις). [See § 2.2, where I recall Heidegger’s “definition” of art as the setting-itself-to-work of truth or the setting-of-verity-into-the-work.] Hence, art becomes: the letting an abeyant thing bide in the clearing of (its) sooth: the art of (carency towards) chastity, the art of errantry—according to the more antique and ever more advening wink of the schismatic goddess Athena.

We now have before our eyes the constitutive genitural scissure of Hesperidean art (the Alpha and the Omega):

φύσις: art *qua* close-fitting conformity

versus

schism: art *qua* clearing quieting (in its dis-quietude)

---

(meta-)physical art

versus

schismatic art

### Groundlessness

To conclude, I propose a last observation on the aforementioned Aristotelian *dictum*

ἡ τέχνη μιμεῖται τὴν φύσιν.

One of its likely translations is as follows:

Art bides in the conformity to assurgency as the spontaneity of clearance.

The *dictum* indicates the state of need in which art finds itself when the scope of being is perceived as self-cleared-clearing assurgency: if the scope of being “is” assurgency, then art must necessarily envisage and project itself as an act conforming to and with self-assurgency; all that is *artistically* adducible cannot but conform to φύσις, otherwise it would collapse into non-truth.

The hand of man, to be capable of truth, must, in its creating act, assume the measure from all that comes to light without its intervention. This is the law of being that reigns within the progenies that are indigenous to the epoch of φύσις.

This law has already been widely expressed and prescribed in various manners, from the Greek onset onward. It is a law, so to speak, of long and great geniture, whose signs are patent throughout our world. However, in the sphere of this law, the schism is never perceivable because it remains retracted and absconded; nor is it, therefore, perceptively acceptable. It can be sensed, experienced in some manner, hinted at or sketched out, but it can never be explicitly admitted; that is, it can never self-clear “to” thought by convoking it to a suitable and devoted *acting and operating*. It bides as the unthinkable and the unnameable.

This implies that truth can never be fully disclosed as clearance and clearage; instead, it remains “snagged” and “entangled” in contingency, and thus compromised in itself. And this, in turn, cannot but leave art in a state of dismay—a dismay that can never let itself be perceived or recognised as such.

(Meta-)physical art is geniturally destined to persist concealedly without foundation—to wit, groundless. <>

## IMAGINATION AND ART: EXPLORATIONS IN CONTEMPORARY THEORY edited by Keith Moser and Ananta Ch. Sukla [Series: Value Inquiry Book Series, Philosophy and Religion, Brill, ISBN: 9789004435162]

This transdisciplinary project represents the most comprehensive study of imagination to date. The eclectic group of international scholars who comprise this volume propose bold and innovative theoretical frameworks for (re-)conceptualizing imagination in all of its divergent forms.

**IMAGINATION AND ART: EXPLORATIONS IN CONTEMPORARY THEORY** explores the complex nuances, paradoxes, and aporias related to the plethora of artistic mediums in which the human imagination manifests itself. As a fundamental attribute of our species, which other organisms also seem to possess with varying degrees of sophistication, imagination is the very fabric of what it means to be human into which everything is woven. This edited collection demonstrates that imagination is the resin that binds human civilization together for better or worse.



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Building upon the renewed interest in the Philosophy of Imagination sparked by recent seminal works including *Models as Make-Believe: Imagination, Fiction and Scientific Representation* (2012), *The Cultural Imaginary of the Internet: Virtual Utopias and Dystopias* (2014), *Art and Imagination: A Study in the Philosophy of Mind* (2015), *Imagination and the Imaginary* (2015), *The Routledge Handbook of Philosophy of Imagination* (2016), and *Handbook of Imagination and Culture* (2017), this transdisciplinary project represents the most ambitious and comprehensive study of imagination to date. The eclectic group of international scholars who comprise this volume propose bold and innovative theoretical frameworks for (re-) conceptualizing imagination in all of its divergent forms. Moreover, as the title unequivocally implies, this collection explores the complex nuances, paradoxes, and aporias related to the plethora of artistic mediums in which the human imagination manifests itself.

As a fundamental attribute of our species, which other organisms also seem to possess with varying degrees of sophistication from a biosemiotic standpoint, imagination is the very fabric of what it means to be human into which everything is woven. Whether we like it or not, “Human beings are imaginers, we play games of make-believe, we enter into fictional worlds of stories.” In simple terms, “we are fundamentally imaginative beings” with a heightened biological predilection for recounting, disseminating, and perpetuating imaginative metanarratives that influence our way of being-in-the-world in addition to how our sense of Self is constituted. Given that the products of our imagination through which many of our quotidian experiences are filtered affect how we relate to others and the biosphere to which we are inextricably linked, the imagination is the resin that binds human civilization together for better or worse.

As evidenced throughout the volume, one of the many unique contributions of this book is its radical transdisciplinarity that epitomizes what Sydney Lévy refers to as an “ecology of knowledge” that strives to reconnect the disciplines in an effort to understand what is at stake in discussions revolving around the imagination more fully. Taking advantage of what Edgar Morin terms “ecologized thinking,” which is one of the basic tenets of his larger approach to engaging in philosophical inquiry that he labels “complex thought,” *Imagination and Art* weaves connections between different ways of knowing that cannot be contained within the narrow confines of one specific field. In this regard, the study of imagination is a quintessential interdiscipline



bifurcating in all directions that seemingly knows no bounds. For this reason, this collection unapologetically transgresses traditional disciplinary demarcations in an attempt to offer fresh new perspectives about imagination. From an interdisciplinary standpoint, a few of the novel frames of reference that stand out in comparison to the aforementioned previous investigations of imagination are reflections concerning the “gendered imagination” (a concept developed by researchers such as Belinda Leach, Deanna Smid, and Patricia Mohammed, see Chapters 4 and 5), the biosemiotic imagination (Chapter 21), the Sufi Imagination (Chapter 32), and Carol Gould’s insights into the highly charged notion of “imaginative resistance” inspired by Freud’s theory of repression (Chapter 6).

In addition to these theoretical strengths, *Imagination and Art* incorporates ecological considerations that are often overlooked (Chapters 5 and 21). Furthermore, this present exploration is the first academic publication that directly gives a platform to contemporary artists in the final section “Artists Reflect on Imagination: An Imaginative Epilogue.” Given that novelists, poets, sculptors, musicians, painters and other kinds of artists appear to be endowed with the sharpest and most powerful imaginative attributes of all, this non-theoretical portion of the book could be described as a form of “imagination in action” that allows us to catch a glimpse of true artistry conceived by those “who are widely recognized as having special powers of imagination.” Nonetheless, this brief section is merely a point of departure for creating a dialogic space between researchers who study the imagination and artists who possess even more of it than the so-called average person. Other scholars from varied academic backgrounds are thus encouraged to continue to fill this significant research gap in the future.

Another especially noteworthy feature of this volume, which is underrepresented in the prior studies mentioned above, is its strong postmodern-avant-garde focus (Chapters 15–18) that is a crucial component for understanding how human identity is mediated, constructed, and renegotiated through imagination. Unfortunately, many forms of the social imaginary exploit our innate penchant for generating imaginative visions of the world and our relationship to it to the alarming point of creating what intercultural theorists like Amin Maalouf and Issa Asgarally term “les identités meurtrières” (deadly identities) linked to an incessant cycle of violence, xenophobia, persecution, and exploitation. However, David Collins, Michel Dion, Samuel Kimball, and Chandra Kavanagh demonstrate that the products of our imagination are in a constant state of evolution. As opposed to being static, our imaginary ideological structures, which the pioneer of the interdiscipline of Ecolinguistics Arran Stibbe calls the *stories-we-live-by*, can be modified over time and replaced with more beneficial discourses. Whereas it was once deemed acceptable by philosophers like Aristotle to terminate the life of an “abnormal child,” as Kimball highlights in “The Infanticidal Logic of Mimesis as Horizon of the Imaginable,” Kavanagh underscores how the social imaginary eventually paved the way for a more humane treatment of members of society who suffer from a given disability.

Given that postmodern thought incessantly implores us to “go back to the drawing board,” it represents an invaluable counter-hegemonic tool for *deconstructing* problematic discourses. Postmodern philosophers like Jacques Derrida, Jean-François Lyotard, Gilles Deleuze, and Félix Guattari realize that “[s]uch imaginaries both make possible social life and are themselves social entities carried in stories, myths, practices, visual representations, and institutional structures.” Moreover, many postmodern thinkers also recognize that only through imagination can we explore “the manifold of other possibilities.” Owing to its very nature that problematizes and challenges accepted boundaries, Derrida’s concept of *limitrophy* offers a concrete example of how postmodern theories can help to reshape the social imaginary. In *The Animal That Therefore I am*, Derrida proposes the following operational definition for his notion of limitrophy:

Limitrophy is therefore my subject. Not just because it will concern what sprouts or grows at the limit, around the limit, by maintaining the limit, but also what feeds the limit generates it, raises it, and complicates it. Everything I'll say will consist, certainty not in effacing the limit, but in multiplying its figures, in complicating, thickening, delinearizing, folding, and dividing the line precisely by making it increase and multiply.

In this collection of posthumous lectures, which has become a seminal text in Environmental Ethics in addition to *The Beast and Sovereign* series, Derrida provides insights into how the moral community can be expanded through the imaginative, moral exercise of limitrophy. In essence, "the imagination is a consequential steering mechanism in how humans make their own future realities. Imagining new aspects of oneself ... can lead to an expanded identity, new social relations, and changed sense of self." By harnessing the veritable force of imagination, which allows us to envision new borders that are more inclusive, Derrida suggests that we will be able to extend the doctrine of moral considerability to more human and other-than-human "fellows" who have traditionally been left in the shadows.

Not only does the postmodern rethinking of imagination have much to contribute to the interdiscipline itself as a whole, but Baudrillard's radical reworking of symbolic exchange in contemporary consumer republics (a term coined by the historian Lizabeth Cohen) is also a key source of inspiration for philosophical debates centered on what could be defined as the *simulacral imagination*. In a global landscape in which many of our imaginings are now mediated through a plethora of divergent screens, the question of how the Self is currently being reformulated and (re-)appropriated through technology is of the utmost importance. As I will more systematically outline soon in my succinct discussion of the major theories presented in the "Postmodern Perspectives" section, Baudrillard's concepts of "hyperreality" and "integral reality" provide an intriguing lens from which to view the evolution of human imagination in both society and art in general.

On a final note concerning the originality of this project, the "Non-Western Perspectives" portion is intentionally designed to highlight important cultural differences in terms of how the social imaginary manifests itself in non-occidental civilizations around the world. In *The West and the Rest: Discourse and Power*, the cultural theorist Stuart Hall reminds us that the very notion of the West is a "short-hand generalization" with "no simple or single meaning." For Hall, not only is the idea of Western society a social construct that reinforces hegemonic power structures, but it is also predicated upon a type of simplistic, reductionistic oppositional thinking pitting *Occidentalism* against *Orientalism*. As Edward Said theorizes in *Orientalism*, the West-Orient binary is emblematic of a "colonial discourse"-a discourse that presents the Orient as Other." Even if the words "West" and "Western" are inherently problematic, which is a position that is difficult to refute, I am employing this terminology in the absence of better alternatives. Regardless of the imperfect phrasing that one finds to be the least flawed, Arindham Chakrabarti, Yangping Gao, Amy Lee, and Ali Hussain all note that there are legitimate differences related to how the social imaginary is constructed, shared, maintained, and renegotiated in Arabic, Indian, Chinese, and Japanese culture. Specifically, Amy Lee persuasively contends that there are unique cultural elements that are an integral part of the contemporary Japanese imagination which are usually relegated to the periphery (if mentioned at all) in academic publications with an evident Western bias. For this reason, this section is another example of how *Imagination and Art: Explorations in Contemporary Theory* deliberately broadens ongoing discussions about the imagination.

Owing to the wide-ranging nature of the theoretical frameworks presented in this volume representing many different philosophical, cultural, and artistic traditions, some of which are often ignored, these diverse viewpoints are sometimes conflicting. Nevertheless, even if exactly *how* we

engage with art and what it means to inhabit the elaborate fictional (sometimes counter-factual-Chapter 28) worlds into which we breathe life remain contentious subjects that are open to debate, art does indeed appear to be a catalyst for stimulating the imagination. Hence, it could be argued that art has a major role to play for those who are in search of more beneficial *stories-to-live-by* connected to our stable sense of Self and our fragmented understanding of the world in which we live and die. According to the educational theorist Maxine Greene and the American philosopher Richard Rorty, this is precisely why Imagination (or Imagination Studies) is such an essential interdisciplinary that should be a staple of numerous fields instead of being reduced to the “pariah of the philosophy of mind.”

In her promotion of the gradual evolution of the “social imagination” through the implementation of what she calls the “theater of the oppressed” into the classroom, Greene posits that the arts serve “as a catalyst for nudging learners toward a more relationally imaginative way of being-a being that is part of, not simply in, the world.” Greene also argues that “the arts have the potential to provoke, inspire, and, most of all, to move.” Greene’s vision of the imagination places the arts at the fore of social reformation, due to their ability to transform the reader, listener, spectator, or viewer by revealing other perspectives. Likewise, Rorty “claims that literature exposes us to many different types of people with different ways of being in the world and different points of view.” From a Derridean angle, Greene and Rorty maintain that the power of art is linked to the ethical imperative of limitrophy.

Although many theorists would undoubtedly take issue with the veracity of the claim that the imagination should be tapped into and honed for moral purposes in a systematic fashion through art leading to an expanded identity, all of the contributors to this present investigation strive to rehabilitate imagination and art in a bleak and unreceptive intellectual landscape. In spite of the fact that “[t]hese early years of the twenty-first century have witnessed a groundswell of philosophical interest in imagination,” far too many academicians still do not consider the study of imagination to be as vital as many other kinds of inquiry. As Charles Altieri explains in Chapter 11, the passionate call launched by David Norton for a “renewed vigor” connected to the importance of imagination as a valid discipline in 1968 has been answered, but much work remains to be done. Even when we are seemingly only “having fun” (see Chapter 29) or playing what appears to be a banal game (see Chapter 27), the products of our imagination should be taken seriously.

In addition to their staunch defense of the academic value of (re-) examining the imagination, this group of researchers is united by their non-reductionistic approach that transcends the pitfalls of binary logic. In response to the pervasive attitude that “imagination and ‘reason’ are adversaries,” this volume lauds “the polyphony of imagination” that cannot be appropriated in such a simplistic manner. As Rob van Gerwen underscores in Chapter 14, there are many different types of imagination that cannot be compartmentalized so easily into a dichotomous thought paradigm. Even though it would be difficult to advocate in favor of the position that all forms of imagination such as “‘exotic’ daydreams” are replete with philosophical merit, this does not mean that “imagination is (always) the mistress of falsehood and error.”

From a Derridean angle, the problem is the word “imagination” itself that represents a “false singular” in linguistic terms. Similar to how Derrida replaces the word “animal” with the neologism “animot” in *The Animal That Therefore I am* in order to combat “a sin against rigorous thinking,” the “general singular” “imagination” is perhaps too misleading to the point of obfuscating the multiplicity of human imaginings that can be strikingly different depending upon the precise context in question. Derrida’s justification for his new word “animot,” which would be pronounced identically in both the singular and plural forms in French (animot, animots), is clearly part of his larger project to weaken

dominant anthropocentric discourses. Nevertheless, the overall concept of wanting “to have the plural ... heard in the singular” is still applicable to the present discussion of the potentially deceptive nature of the word “imagination” in English and other languages. In this vein, it is worth debating whether one word suffices for accurately describing the wide array of situations in which the human imagination is active. As a result of this linguistic inadequacy, philosophers and other theorists from antiquity to the present have been forced to create meaningful distinctions between *phantasia*, *phantasma*, “productive imagination,” “reproductive imagination,” “transcendental imagination,” “synthetic imagination,” and “creative imagination.” Before having a genuine conversation about the role of the imagination, knowing what sort of imaginings to which someone is referring is a precondition.

Further compounding this confusion associated with the general singular, imagining is often conflated with other mental states like believing, supposing, and conceiving. Without succumbing to reductionistic explanations that do not properly represent the complexity of the relationship between imagination and other mental states, Neil Sinhababu maintains that it is possible in many instances to delineate a clear separation between imagination and belief. Sinhababu explains that imagining one is a superhero like Spiderman or a celebrity differs greatly from the delusion of actually believing it. Arguing along similar lines, Anna Ichino asserts, “imagining that you have won the lottery is not the same as believing that you have won.” As Jody Azzouni (Chapter 12) demonstrates in his nuanced reflection dedicated to the differences between conceiving and imagining (or the lack thereof), “conceivability and imagination ... are in a messy state.” Consequently, Azzouni and other scholars have no choice but to confront the previously mentioned nuances, paradoxes, and aporias directly in an effort to shed light on the thorny distinction between imagining and conceiving.

In addition to embracing the Morinian ideal of ecologized thinking-complex thought by refusing to gloss over the complex quandaries that inevitably rise to the surface in these kinds of discussions, many researchers in this volume also emphasize the epistemological value of certain types of imaginings. To be more precise, several scholars in this collection promote a form of disciplined imagination that leads to important insights about ourselves, others, and the universe. This defense of the epistemological virtues of imagination closely corresponds to Amy Kind’s concept of “imagination under constraints,” David Norton’s theory of the “‘empirical’ imagination,” the notion of “experience projection,” Lynn Holt’s concept of “rational imagination,” and the “gap-filling model” heavily influenced by David Hume. As Warren Heiti (Chapter 13) outlines in his analysis of Simone Weil’s early epistemology, many thinkers including Weil reach the conclusion that imagination is an indispensable pathway for knowledge acquisition.

Far from being “epistemologically insignificant,” many neuroscientists have now confirmed through empirical investigation that imagination is a “process of image making that resolves gaps arising from biological and cultural-historical constraints, and that enables ongoing time-space coordination necessary for thought and action.” When our imaginings are “clear and distinct” in Cartesian terms because they are supported by evidence, Hume’s hypothesis that it is through our imagination that we are able to fill in the missing puzzle pieces in order to create a more global vision of world and our relationship to it is validated. As I explore throughout my aptly named monograph *The Encyclopedic Philosophy of Michel Serres: Writing the Modern World and Anticipating the Future* (2016), Michel Serres also subscribes to this view of imagination. In particular, Serres affirms that honing our imagination is a philosophical exercise *par excellence*, for it enables us to envision probable outcomes based on the current trajectory of society. In fact, it is Serres’s uncanny ability to imagine that has

cemented his legacy as a pioneer who blazed the trail for those who followed in the field of Information Studies, Sensory Studies, and Environmental Ethics.

Jordan Ryan's analysis of the role that imagination plays in historical thinking reflects this same epistemological conviction that Serres espouses beginning with his first publication *Hermès: La Communication* in 1968. Deconstructing the naïve interpretation of history as merely an objective recounting of the "facts," Ryan declares,

What the historian infers constructively from the data is 'essentially imagined'... The imagination fills the gap between them. Imagination without evidence results not in history, but in historical fiction ... There is reciprocity here: the need for evidence places a check on the imagination, while imagination allows the historian to make inferences, discoveries and hypotheses beyond what the evidence directly provides.

In "Jesus at the Crossroads," Ryan clearly recognizes the academic value of a disciplined form of imagination that is fueled by evidence and sound logic. According to Ryan, the most objective reconstructions of past events are rendered possible by the imagination of a historian who is forced to speculate on the basis of proof in an attempt to remove as much bias as possible.

In the first section of the book, David Konstan, Claude Calame, and Allen Speight lend credence to Ryan's theories about the significance of imagination in historical thinking and judgement. Specifically, Speight and Calame pose essential historiographical and philosophical questions related to historical agency. Moreover, in Chapter 4, Mayor's interpretation of what evidence suggests concerning the courageous warrior women commonly referred to as Amazons in Greek Mythology is revealing on multiple levels. First of all, the case of the largely forgotten Amazons illustrates how the official historical master narrative, which becomes engrained in cultural myths linked to nation-building, is part of a larger collective memory that shapes a given society. In the social imaginary, it is often impossible to create a clear distinction between history and art. Furthermore, it is sometimes only through art that the contributions of disenfranchised moral and ethnic minorities become visible. In the biased historical imagination of those whose version of the story is usually disseminated to the masses, minority voices are stifled by a lack of historical consideration or interest. Even if the tales of the Amazons in Greek Mythology contain appalling misogynistic elements, these stories may be the only avenue for expanding the limits of traditional historiography in the absence of adequate documentation about these women-warriors.

The problem is that history has often been written and transmitted in the service of the *gendered imagination*. Explaining that male and female roles, stereotypes, and attitudes are socially constructed in every society through the social imaginary, Patricia Mohammed reveals, "there are no originary narratives without the archetypes of masculinity and femininity, there is no culture without gender and no gender without culture." As evidenced by the cult of the "founding fathers" in the United States for which there is no female equivalent whatsoever, many historical reconstructions need to be collectively (re)-imagined to include the accomplishments, exploits, and discoveries of women. In the Derridean sense, the historical metanarratives that are privileged over competing views tend to be *phallogocentric*. For this reason, Derrida champions a "reorientation of discourse, history and the tradition." The concept of the historical imagination is a useful theoretical tool, because it offers a viable path for multiplying the dimensions through which collective stories are recounted, shared, and preserved. Additionally, reflecting upon the importance of disciplined imagination linked to evidence opens up a dialogic space in which historians, writers, painters, dancers, sculptors, etc. can create a more inclusive version of the metanarratives that are tied to our sense of collective identity and belonging. As opposed to protecting "tooth and nail one of our (cultural) affiliations" to the



exclusion of other viewpoints, Serres beckons us to expand our sense of Self by complicating and multiplying the historical and cultural limits through our imagination.

All of the essays that constitute this volume, including those from the first two sections “Historical Imagination and Judgement” and “Gendered Imagination,” support the point of view that the study of imagination is an interdisciplinary. Instead of being just a subfield of the philosophy of mind, these thirty-two chapters beg us to ponder what does not fall within the purview of human imagination from an academic standpoint. Similar to how historians conceive reconstructions to connect the remaining dots (or fragments), it is a sense of imaginative wonder that seems to be at the heart of the thirst for knowledge in all disciplines. Although it may initially sound paradoxical, scientific explanations of the world derive inspiration from an empirical imagination that seeks possible answers to unexplained phenomena. In essence, “all scientific theories are works of the imagination” that generate “new insights into the familiar natural world.” In the context of Adam Smith’s theories about the scientific imagination, Robin Downey reiterates, “there are gaps in the scientist’s observations, which cause surprise and wonder.” In this regard, Fiora Salis (Chapter 19) explains how the scientific imagination operates leading to monumental breakthroughs by bridging these gaps.

Given that scientists have to rely on evidence in order to make logical hypotheses and inferences, Helen de Cruz and Johan de Smedt describe scientific inquiry as “structured imagination” linked to near and distant analogies. In his research related to the importance of imagination in scientific modelling in both physical and theoretical models, Adam Toon deconstructs “our commonsense view of science” concretized by the misperception that imagination is more of a hindrance, or even a stumbling block, than an indispensable tool for scientists. In *Models as Make-Believe: Imagination, Fiction and Scientific Representation*, Toon hypothesizes that a scientist who knows how to wield the power of a disciplined form of imagination is not that dissimilar from a literary scholar, philosopher, or writer. Adopting the *indirect fiction* view, which stipulates that fictional agents are indirect representations of the world, Toon contends that “scientists sometimes conjure up imagined systems, just as novelists conjure up fictional characters.”

Providing numerous examples to substantiate this claim, Toon observes that “[m]ost models are inaccurate (or incorrect or unrealistic) in some way.” Despite the unheralded discoveries of the twentieth and twenty-first century associated with the dawn of modern medicine, as systematically outlined by the historian Roy Porter in *The Greatest Benefit to Mankind: A Medical History of Humanity*, scale models, theoretical paradigms, and equations still represent the world indirectly. Even in the so-called “exact sciences,” the imagination is the driver of knowledge acquisition. Furthermore, Edward Grant compellingly posits that the “natural philosophers [who] began to use their imaginations in ways that had never been done before in any civilization or culture” in the late Middle Ages served as the initial impetus for the aforementioned unprecedented scientific findings that have radically altered the human condition compared to our not-so-distant human ancestors. The scientific inferences about the theory of atomism made by the pre-Socratic philosophers Leucippus and Democritus in antiquity through meticulous observation and documentation further strengthen Grant’s assertion. In both the humanities and hard sciences, a type of constrained imagination informed by available evidence, experience, and observation is what results in novel ideas and discoveries.

In Chapter 20, Justin Humphreys highlights the pivotal role assumed by the imagination in another field that is usually considered to be part of the hard sciences: Geometry. Humphrey’s discussion related to whether geometrical propositions are analytic or synthetic, which delves into the theories of Aristotle, Syrianus, and Proclus that are later revisited by Kant and Frege in the modern era,



demonstrates the significance of the mathematical imagination in both Euclidian and Non-Euclidian geometry. Not only is “the central role of visualization and hence imagination in ancient geometry” overdue for more recognition, but “cultivating the power of imagination of the mathematician” is how mathematical innovation is fostered. According to Daniel Campos, who builds upon the theories of Charles Sanders Peirce, it is “imaginatively creating framing hypotheses” within “various systems of diagrammatic representation” that separates the most brilliant mathematical minds from the mediocre ones. Many people would not immediately associate either science or mathematics with imagination. However, Salis and Humphreys illustrate that the imagination abounds in scientific and mathematical reasoning.

Another interdisciplinary perspective that is noteworthy is the connections that Michel Dion weaves between Christian prayer and the imagination. Dion elucidates that it is imagination that enables believers to create communicational links between this world and the divine realm. On a basic level, faith is predicated upon the capacity to envision “a world different from the one we experience.” In “Dream Hermeneutics: Bob Marley, Paul Ricœur and the Productive Imagination,” Christopher J. Duncanson-Hales utilizes Ricœur’s framework for understanding the “religious productive imagination” that undergirds various conceptions of the divine. As Michael Paul Gallagher notes, spiritual leaders and Christian thinkers have often warned believers of the alleged perils of letting the imagination run wild based on the conviction that we can easily be misled and deceived by our senses, thereby falling into the trap of hedonistic pleasures. In spite of the complicated and sometimes conflictual relationship between Christian ideology and imagination, there would be no “religious consciousness” at all without our imagination. From a Christian viewpoint, it is “a personal and prayerful encounter with Christ [that] creates a new imagination in us.”

In addition to the scientific imagination, the mathematical imagination, and the religious productive imagination, another vantage point that stands out compared to earlier studies is Wendy Wheeler’s investigation of the biosemiotic imagination. Even if *Homo sapiens* do appear to be endowed with heightened imaginative abilities, as we have clearly established, the main biosemiotic premise that “the essence of the entire life process is semiosis” helps to nuance problematic anthropocentric thought paradigms centered on binary logic. Whereas most mainstream biosemioticians agree that the human primary modeling device of language is the most sophisticated form of communication on this planet, this does not mean that other organisms are incapable of communicating at all. Deeply influenced by the founding father of Biosemiotics, the German biologist Jakob von Uexküll who he cites directly on numerous occasions, Derrida adopts the biosemiotic worldview that semiosis “is synonymous with life” in *The Animal That Therefore I am* and *The Beast and Sovereign* series. As Derrida declares, “Mark, gamma, trace, and différance refer differentially to all living things.” Derrida further clarifies that all of the other sentient beings with whom we share this biosphere have been deemed “poor in the world” owing to their supposed lack of any semiotic faculties at all.

Appealing to scientific logic and recent findings related to the surprising complexity of non-human communication, Derrida disputes the idea that other species do not have “a self, imagination, [or] a relation to the future.” Derrida alludes to a growing body of evidence that unequivocally suggests that other organisms take advantage of their semiotic faculties in order to communicate purposefully and meaningfully and to predict future outcomes through imagination. Even if the human *Umwelt* is the most complex semiotic space of all, biosemioticians contest the notion that other species are totally deprived of communication and imagination. With the notable exception of Robert Mitchell’s essay “Can Animals Imagine?” from *The Routledge Handbook of Philosophy of Imagination*, this subject has rarely been broached by most scholars who explore the imagination. Since Mitchell only

scratches the surface of this vast and inexhaustible subject without mentioning Biosemiotics, Wheeler's study is one of the most original contributions to an area in which research is scant.

Moreover, in a recent paper entitled "Imagination and Event in Uexküll and Bazin," Jonathan Wright appeals to the force of art arguing that it allows us to catch a glimpse of the complexity of communication and imagination in other-than-human societies. First, Wright reminds the reader that von Uexküll's seminal work *A Foray Into the Worlds of Animals and Humans* begins by asking us to imagine the sophistication of the communication that transpires within other-than-human realms. Using André Bazin as an example, Wright speculates that the cinematic medium represents an ideal form of experience projection, in spite of its apparent limitations, for revisiting other-than-human imagination. In her essay "Animal Life in the Cinematic Umwelt," Anat Pick also indicates that the moving image is capable of conceiving a fictional space that bridges the divide between human and animal worlds. Identifying films that "engage with interior animal worlds, rendered, as far as possible from the perspective of the creature itself," Pick maintains that the viewer is struck by the biocentric realization that "animals too are active perceivers of the world" and imaginers. Wright and Pick's theories are reminiscent of Serres's experimental text *Yeux* (2014) in which he implores the reader to reflect upon what it means to see and to be seen by other sentient beings. Furthermore, this view of the transformative power of cinema recalls Rorty's passion for literature that exposes us to different perspectives to the greatest extent possible. In the Anthropocene epoch, it is also a reminder that anthropocentric, *ecosuicidal* identities can be reconstituted and renegotiated through the social imaginary.

In the section "Postmodern Perspectives," the aforementioned postmodern-avant-garde take on how the social imaginary is being reconstructed through technological advances is also highly relevant in the era of information. The plethora of digital tools that allow artists, marketers, politicians, and others to fabricate images that are strikingly realistic has revived classic debates related to the "tension between appearances and reality" for obvious reasons. Additionally, decades before the advent of the digital age, the French *new novel* and avant-garde movements irreverently pushed back against the artistic ideal of mimesis, taking aim at the traditional view in many literary circles that the ultimate goal of an artist is to transmit an image that is a faithful representation of reality within the limitations of the artistic space. In this vein, Roderick Nicholls (Chapter 15) discusses at the end of the preceding section "Phenomenological and Epistemological Perspectives" how avant-garde dramaturgs launched a subversive revolt against theatrical conventions including *la règle (les règles) de bienséance*. In an attempt to break out of the mold and to create plays that were more innovative and original, avant-garde playwrights like Alfred Jarry, Samuel Beckett, and Eugène Ionesco conceived imaginative works that are "non-representational" in the traditional sense. When plays like *Ubu roi*, *La cantratrice chauve*, and *En attendant Godot* were originally performed, they sparked outrage, disbelief, and incomprehension. For playwrights who simply refused to play the game of mimetic representation, the standard tools for literary and theatrical analysis were woefully inadequate.

A salient feature of this "shift away from representational form" in Beckett's theater is a provocative encounter with silence. Far from being mundane, the poignant silence that is ubiquitous throughout Beckett's plays forces us to confront the absurdity of the human condition in the Camusian sense characterized by unavoidable anguish and death. As Dermot Moran explains in "Beckett and Philosophy," "This stark Beckettian world cries out for philosophical interpretation." In Chapter 25, Deborah Fillerup Weagel analyzes how the avant-garde musical composer John Cage's famous "silent" piece "4'33" creates "an open space of possibility" through imagination that compels the listener to think harder about the essence of music. Similar to the overtly hostile reactions triggered

by avant-garde theater, “its initial reception was characterised by puzzlement and irritation.” Given that it is impossible to reproduce a musical composition mimetically comprised of ambient sounds like the wind, coughing, whispering, fidgeting, laughing, and sneezing that will vary during each performance, Michel Remy asserts that “4’33” is non-representational. The fact that Cage was fascinated with silence to the point of spending time in an anechoic chamber at Harvard where he heard his heartbeat and the blood flowing through his veins is why his re-imagining of the omnipresent musicality of life should not be dismissed as a form of fancy. In a world in which complete silence is impossible, Cage argues that music is everywhere. The controversial composer also maintains that it is not as easy as we think to distinguish between music and noise. In his essay *Musique* (2011), Serres encourages us to reattune ourselves to the “musical” sounds of the world endlessly emanating from the chaotic, indiscriminate ecological forces that thrust us into existence starting with a *big bang*. Cage and Serres’s musical vision is indicative of a call to imagine designed to renew our severed connection with the biosphere in an age of globalization and urbanization. For Serres, this primordial musicality is a grim reminder that our “parasitic” relationship with the remainder of the cosmos is untenable.

In the face of “increasingly mediated reality where the object is losing in the competition with its simulation,” Cage tries to reduce or efface “the very gap between art and everyday life” in an effort to resist the “acute crisis of simulation” that is on the verge of eclipsing the real in Baudrillard’s radical *semiurgy*. For a few ephemeral moments, “4’33” attempts to peel back the thick layers of hyperreal artifice that have led to the “collapse ... of the real.” Many theorists would disagree vehemently with Baudrillard’s assertion in his later texts such as *The Intelligence of Evil* and *The Transparency of Evil* that “we are entering into a final phase of this enterprise of simulation” that he refers to as “integral reality” in which commercial simulacra have now substituted themselves for the real entirely. However, even if Baudrillard’s main point concerning our increasing inability to discern between reality and its representation in an atmosphere in which the modern subject is continuously bombarded by an avalanche of signs is perhaps overstated, it is hard to deny that realistically rendered images often stand in for the real in the social imaginary. Dominic Gregory (Chapter 22), Jiri Benovsky (Chapter 23), and David Fenner’s (Chapter 24) reflections related to image-making in photography and cinema support Baudrillard’s central arguments. Even if the “perfect crime” (i.e. the utter implosion of reality) has yet to be committed, the *simulacral imagination* is alive and well.

Lending credence to Baudrillard’s affirmation that the real is often quite disconnected from the carefully manufactured images that transcend commonplace reality, thereby taking on a life of their own, Gregory, Benovsky, and Fenner deconstruct the naïve misperception that the camera is able to capture a moment in time in a perfectly objective manner. In defense of the alleged “neutrality of the camera,” many people assert that the “camera does not lie.” Given the myriad of tools that allow a contemporary artist to manipulate images to such an extent that they only bare a vague resemblance to the original, “there is no innocent eye of the photographer.” Unable to “conserve reality itself,” Benovsky highlights all of the artistic choices that a photographer or director makes that could be more accurately described as a “realistic deception” as opposed to a slice of reality.

Even when images are not distorted beyond recognition by software programs like Adobe Photoshop, the person behind the camera controls the lighting through aperture and shutter speed settings in addition to choosing her or his preferred angles. In his landmark essay *The Stars* (1957), Edgar Morin reveals, “To all of the artifices of makeup and plastic surgery are added those of photography. The cameraman must always control the angles of his shots ... must always eliminate every infraction of beauty from his field of vision. Projectors redistribute light and shadow over the

stars' faces according to the same ideal requirements." Baudrillard and Morin explain how the digital filters that enable photographers and filmmakers to remove perceived corporal imperfections generate an idealistic vision of human sexuality that is grounded in hyperreality corresponding to a "code of beauty" linked to the incessant acquisition of cosmetic products. The endless transmission of deceptive, "seductive" simulacra denoting "perfect happiness" and beauty that are within reach for all "citizen consumers" debunks the supposed neutrality of the camera. In this regard, the concept of the *simulacral imagination* demonstrates that realistically rendered images are far from being a reliable representation of reality.

Even when there is no evident commercial agenda behind the deluge of simulations that concretize the human experience in the age of information, common sense reminds us that people always pose for the camera in certain ways. For instance, social conventions dictate that we smile when being photographed in most situations. Even during the most tragic periods of our lives, we usually play society's game by displaying "characteristic signs of happiness" in front of the camera. Furthermore, nearly everyone knows someone who constantly projected signs of happiness through contrived photographs and videos on social media networks like Facebook before later revealing their profound malaise and anguish that were antithetical to these utopian images. These common examples support Baudrillard's position that the timeless search for happiness and fulfillment has been appropriated and commodified by the *simulacral imagination*, or the skillful imposition of image-based (hyper-) reality representing symbolic fantasies that supersede the real.

Even theorists who do not subscribe to Baudrillard's dystopian rethinking of symbolic exchange, which he maintains is the most powerful form of social control ever conceived (see Chapter 16), underscore how "new technologies are intervening in the core mechanics of identity formation." In simple terms, "our material existence is being reformulated through imagination" in virtual realms that enable us to explore new ways of being in the world and relating to others. In Chapter 27, Ton Kruse attempts to shed light on the importance of the all-encompassing fictional worlds in which millions of people dwell when they play video games for countless hours. Kruse's reflection also reminds us that video games are the most commercially successful art form of the twenty-first century. Specifically, he probes the complicated relationship between these virtual universes in which some individuals are immersed during nearly every waking moment and external reality.

Regardless of whether one accepts or rejects the theory of hyperreality, people all around the planet are undoubtedly renegotiating their sense of Self through cultural technologies. The force of what Alberto Romele refers to as "emagination" has expanded our identity in unprecedented ways. For avid video gamers, an avatar is an extension of the human body permitting us to redefine the parameters of our inner self in a non-Euclidian space. In a recent interview with Hans Ulrich Obrist, Serres argues, "inside the space that is the Internet there exists a law that has nothing to do with the law that organizes the space we previously lived in." According to Serres, living in a different space changes everything entirely. Additionally, Serres identifies virtual technology as one of the greatest forms of exo-Darwinian ingenuity that our species has ever created. As Alan Schrift notes, Serres contends that the process of exo-Darwinian evolution, which now allows us to control certain aspects of our evolutionary destiny, began with the invention of the first tools by our human ancestors. An avatar is an example of a highly-sophisticated type of exo-Darwinian innovation that extends human capabilities. Millions of gamers are redefining what it means to be human in simulated worlds experienced in real time that transform "our possible selves into real selves" in another space that is governed by different laws and constraints. It is once again the artistic imagination mediated through technological devices that is leading the way for this social transformation.

In Chapter 26, Renee Conroy's reflections about kinesthetic imagination and dance appreciation illustrate that art-world games of make-believe have always been a lens through which we can (re-) envision aspects of our inner selves that are often overlooked in addition to probing new possibilities well before the birth of the digital age. It is important to note that cultural artefacts like avatars are an extension of human corporality as opposed to being a replacement for it. Without the entire body and the information that our brain interprets through our senses, there would be no imagination of which to speak at all. For this reason, researchers in the fields of Theater and Performance Studies and Sensory Studies posit that "the knowing body" is a conduit for knowledge acquisition that is connected to our stable sense of Self. As Ana Deligiannis theorizes, "the body and imagination operate as pathways of knowledge through the use of movement as active imagination." Instead of being mistrustful of our sensorial faculties, the concept of the "somatic imagination" implores us to hone our senses to their full potential.

Numerous Serres scholars including Ian Tucker, William Paulson, and Nicholas Chare have observed that the *somatic imagination* takes the shape of a "sensual journey" in the philosopher's diverse *œuvre* that urges us to "feel, touch, taste, and see the world." For Serres, "the somatic encounter with a turbulent, physical world" is a philosophical exercise linked to the process of knowledge formation. In his groundbreaking essay *The Five Senses*, which has become a seminal text in Sensory Studies, Serres provocatively poses the following question: "What if philosophy came to us from the senses?" In *Variations on the Body*, published seventeen years after *The Five Senses*, he further develops his theories connected to the *somatic imagination*. After thanking his physical education teachers and athletic coaches for helping him learn how to sharpen his sensorial faculties in his youth, Serres declares, "The origin of knowledge resides in the body ... We don't know anyone or anything until the body takes on its form, its appearance, its movement, its *habitus*, until the body joins in a dance with its demeanor." Although Serres is evidently being lyrical, this section of the book is one of the many passages in which he pinpoints dancers, mimes, clowns, and artisans as artists who know how to train their body and mind. Rejecting mind-body dualism, Serres promotes dancing as an art form that is laden with philosophical value due to our "embodied condition." Similarly, Conroy's essay encourages us to take dance seriously as a type of *somatic imagination* that warrants more attention in academic circles.

As briefly mentioned earlier, the final theoretical section of the volume reflects the kind of ecologized thinking for which Morin advocates by expanding the conversation to include non-Western perspectives regarding various kinds of imagination. Similar to how scholars have only scratched the surface of the notion of the *somatic imagination*, Arindham Chakrabarti, Yangping Gao, Amy Lee, and Ali Hussain explore fundamental differences related to how the social imaginary is (re-) created, shared, preserved, and continually reconstructed in Arabic, Indian, Chinese, and Japanese culture through art. In spite of his aforementioned efforts to nuance the dominant metanarratives linked to the *gendered imagination*, which he convincingly claims are too *phallogentric*, Derrida ignited a polemical controversy during a visit to China in 2001. Much to the bewilderment of a stunned audience, Derrida declared, "China does not have any philosophy ... only thought." As a maverick philosopher who spearheaded the fight against ethnocentrism and logocentrism for decades, it is debatable exactly what Derrida meant by this surprising statement. Nonetheless, as Sean Meighoo highlights, it is possible that even Derrida could not rid himself of Western bias completely.

In *Taking Back Philosophy: A Multicultural Manifesto*, Bryan van Norden argues that "philosophical ideas from outside this [Western] tradition are largely undervalued or overlooked, if not outright ignored." Although several influential academic studies have generated a renewed interest in imagination in the twenty-first century, this eurocentrism is evident in many of these recent projects



as well. Consequently, the final portion of this book is merely a starting point for highlighting the contributions of other philosophical and artistic traditions to the study of imagination. In Chapter 30, Yangping Gao explains how the deep respect that many Chinese people have for stones and rocks finds its origins in Daoist philosophy. As opposed to being indicative of a type of meaningless reverie, Gao contends that “ecological imaginings” in traditional Chinese culture, including the imagination of rocks, reflect a coherent biocentric worldview. Defending the richness of Chinese spiritual and philosophical paradigms, Gao demonstrates that the reverence for rocks in Chinese society is a metonymical reflection of what Gaston Bachelard referred to as the “imagination of matter” that deserves more critical attention.

In her investigation of contemporary Japanese literary narratives written by three authors representing vastly different genres and writing styles, Amy Lee also underscores the singularity of the Japanese imagination. Lee explains that Japanese products of the imagination are epitomized by a fusion of ancient and modern customs that is unique to this island nation. Compared to other civilizations in which only a few faint traces of ancient traditions remain, Lee maintains that the artistic imagination is one of the main counter-hegemonic tools for resisting what the Indian theorist Vandana Shiva terms “monocultures of the mind.” Counterpointing “the distant gaze of the globalising dominant system” and the alleged universality of Western values with a hybrid mix of the ancient and modern, Japanese artists struggle to fend off the nefarious effects of cultural imperialism.

In his essay examining the concept of “fun” itself in Indian aesthetics, Arindam Chakrabarti also notes the pervasive influence of American-style globalization that has been exported to all corners of the planet. As a testament to how this monolithic model has encroached upon all facets of traditional cultures, Chakrabarti laments how American forms of entertainment dominate the contemporary global landscape. Building upon the theories that Neil Postman develops in *Amusing Ourselves to Death*, Chakrabarti discusses the impact of what Morin refers to as “a monoculture subjected to the hazards of the global market” characterized by the omnipresent entertainment industry. This vision of what constitutes “fun” “is blind to the cultural riches of archaic societies” whose social imaginary is being withered away by hegemonic, monocultural forces.

Chapter 32 represents a different kind of intellectual myopia that has traditionally prevented any sort of meaningful dialogue concerning the similarities and differences between the Christian and Muslim imagination. Given that “language and religion have been the central instrument in the emergence and identity of a culture,” several researchers such as Alamghir Hashmi, James Morris, and Faisal Devji have started to fill this research gap that is a byproduct of eurocentrism. Just as certain core beliefs have shaped and sustained the collective imagination of the Christian community around the world, Hussain elucidates how the main tenets of Islam are closely tied to the (re-) construction of the social imaginary in Muslim societies. Additionally, Hussain’s explanation of the essential role that imagination plays in Sufism reveals noteworthy distinctions between this mystical branch of Islam and other schools of Muslim thought.

In summary, the diversity of the forms of imagination outlined throughout this transdisciplinary collection suggests that the study of imagination has a very promising future within academia as a whole. Regardless of the theoretical approaches for investigating the imagination that a given scholar prefers, **IMAGINATION AND ART: EXPLORATIONS IN CONTEMPORARY THEORY** has demonstrated that this inexhaustible field of inquiry is a serious academic venture that should take center stage instead of hiding in the shadows. Moreover, the concept of the social imaginary reminds us that when the world in which we live becomes increasingly problematic to the point of falling prey to “deadly identities” that denigrate the Other or destroy the planet that we call home, it is time to *imagine* new possibilities. As Richard Rorty and Maxine Greene assert, the values that undergird



human civilizations are not written in stone for all of eternity. In the face of far-right nationalism, xenophobia, obscurantism, and overt racism that have once again infiltrated the political imaginary in the United States and abroad, it is worth remembering that our collective sense of Self can be reconstituted in a more positive way. Furthermore, it is often through art that the *stories-we-live-by* are modified leading to an expanded identity. In the words of the iconic British singer-songwriter John Lennon, our ability to evolve as a society is largely determined by our capacity to *imagine* the world of tomorrow and to attempt to realize it. Given that we are imaginative beings, Rorty asserts that “the only source of redemption is the human imagination.” He concludes “that this fact should occasion pride rather than despair.” By virtue of our imagination, we truly hold the key to our own future. The only question is: which door will we choose to unlock in the coming years? <>

## Essay: The Metaphysics of Creativity: Imagination in Sufism, from the Qur’ān into Ibn al-‘Arabī by Ali Hussain

And not an ordinary Arab, someone who is a poet ... is needed to understand that writing [of Ibn al-‘Arabī]. SHAYKH HISHĀM QABBĀNī

### Introduction

In his survey of Islamic theology, *Theologie Und Gesellschaft*, Joseph Van Ess offers the following remarks on the condition of the Muslim community after the passing of the prophet Muhammad: “One had to realize that the prophetic event had ended; of the Word, only the writing remains.” Indeed, the ensuing chapters in that work – and countless others – that highlight the myriad of theological schools and sects with dissenting differences that emerged within the Muslim community, after this “prophetic event,” appear to support the proposition that only the “writing remains” of the Word that had been revealed to the Prophet.

And yet, for all the tremendous dissonance in dogma and pragma that had overwhelmed this nascent community of faith, the various groups who considered themselves “Muslims” still managed to find within the contours of the Word that had been revealed to the Prophet traces of that divine spark beyond the writing. Sometimes, this resurrection of the original prophetic state appeared as a common bond that united members of a sect, while other times it was used to marginalize entire peoples outside the fold of Islam.

Either way, the assessment offered in *Theologie Und Gesellschaft* seems to reflect only a partial reality of a religion that continues to survive fourteen centuries after its birth. A more recent survey on Islamic thought and practice, Shahab Ahmed’s *What is Islam? The Importance of Being Islamic* – which might be considered a much-needed reformulation of the antiquated opinions voiced by Van Ess and others – focuses on this perplexing force that seems to tie the lives of countless Muslims together despite their differences in language, culture and contentious understandings of their faith.

Ahmed’s solution is to focus less on the difference in beliefs and practices and more on the shared principles that sustain them in the collective imagination of the community. The author presents the Pre-Text, Text and Con-Text as key operators that account for the diversity of Muslims living in the “Balkans to Bengal complex.” Ahmed describes the first of these concepts, the Pre-Text, as that which is “ontologically and alethically prior to the Text and is that upon which the Truth of the Text is contingent.” Simply put, the Pre-Text is the “Unseen” spiritual realm, while the Text, at least in

this excerpt, seems to refer solely to the Qur'ān as the scripture recited and experienced by Muslims.

However, such a limited designation of the Text quickly dissipates as one reads Ahmed's entire magnum opus. Muslim philosophers, for instance, do not perceive the Qur'ān as a necessary medium with which intelligent seekers need to engage in order to interact with the Pre-Text. Rather, the latter should simply refer to the writings of philosophers for this knowledge. On the other hand, for Sufis, the Qur'ān is but one of many texts that can channel the PreText into the sphere of belief and social practice. Perhaps the most poignant example of this is the celebrated compendium of poetry, the Mathnawī, by Jalāl al-Dīn Rūmī (d. 1273), which was – and still is – regarded by many Sufi devotees as the “Qur'ān in Persian.” In this regard, it is the Con-Text, or “the body of meaning that is the product and outcome of previous hermeneutical engagement with Revelation,” which decides which texts predominate as channels to access the Pre-Text in a given society or culture.

These three constructs together allow Ahmed to present Islam not as a static object of analysis, but as the very idiom or language through which “people express themselves so as to communicate meaningfully.” More than that, the author posits that Islam is “the reality of the experience itself,” not only the “means by which an experience is given meaning.” This creative rendering of Islam as a movement to produce meaning, and meaning itself, pays homage to the name of the religion, which means – among many things – “to submit” and, thus, affirms an inward journey towards God, who is the ultimate meaning for believers.

In “Imaging Islam: Intellect and Imagination in Islamic Philosophy, Poetry and Painting,” James Morris highlights how Muslim philosophers and mystics have performed Ahmed's rendition of Islam precisely through novel engagements with scripture (Text), in order to channel the Pre-Text into their ConText, using unique cultural and historical constructs. One of these figures, the celebrated Shaykh al-Akbar (Greatest Master) Muhyī al-Dīn Ibn al-ʿArabī (d. 1240), Morris tells us, left us with a heritage that is “so profoundly rooted in both the letter and the deepest spirit of the Qur'ān.” Beyond this, it is also Ibn al-ʿArabī's ability to communicate this “deepest spirit of the Qur'ān” not only to religious scholars, but also “secular interpreters, poets, teachers, and translators,” some eight centuries after his passing that makes him truly unique. This is corroborated by the quote in the epigraph, attributed to the contemporary Sufi guide, Shaykh Hisham Kabbani, who emphasizes the poetic spirit needed to understand the Greatest Master's writings.

A preliminary reading of Ibn al-ʿArabī's works does not help explain this unique dissemination among a diverse audience. On the contrary, his magnum opus, *al-Futūḥāt al-Makkiyya* (Meccan Openings) and second most-important work, *Fuḥūḥ al-hikam* (Bezels of Wisdom), both contain as many – if not more – convoluted discourses on dialectical theology and metaphysics as can be found in many classical tomes of Islamic thought. If readers are not deterred by this specialized terminology, then they might very well be dissuaded by the countless controversial excerpts wherein he contravenes normative Islamic orthodoxy and scholarly consensus.

In order to partially explain this attraction to Ibn al-ʿArabī and his writings by scholars and artists alike, I suggest we return to Ahmed's definition of Islam, as the “means through which an experience is given meaning.” It is the very language and rhetorical style which the Greatest Master uses to express his own journey that, I posit, continues to attract readers today, in addition to the novel ideas in his works. In this regard, Ibn al-ʿArabī brilliantly conveys a subtle trait prevalent in many Sufi writings: the mystical experience is inseparable from the very language used to describe it.

In the ensuing paragraphs, we will attempt to decipher this creative rhetorical style by analyzing selections from the Meccan Openings and Bezels of Wisdom. Our focus will be on those discussions pertaining to khayāl (imagination) and how the author travels, semantically and spiritually, back and forth from language to meaning, and from body to spirit. Our journey will begin with the prophet Muhammad and then delve into the significance of ʿĪsā b. Maryam (Jesus son of Mary), as an archetype of divine creativity and imagination. Thenceforth, we will conclude by synthesizing Ibn al-ʿArabī's portrayals of Muhammad, Jesus and khayāl (imagination), with some final remarks on the significance of this discourse on our understanding of human creativity and art.

As will become evident, for Ibn al-ʿArabī, hālam al-khayāl (the realm of imagination) is one where dense bodies are spiritualized and subtle spirits are embodied. Alternatively, it is a realm that resides at the barzakh (interstice), between the physical residence of bodies and spiritual abode of spirits. In this sense, imagination for Ibn al-ʿArabī is what connects Ahmed's Pre-Text to both the Text and Con-Text. It is the very process of rendering what is ineffable and beyond language in the various mediums of human expression.

It is from this perspective also that art emerges in Ibn al-ʿArabī's thought as any attempt by humans – and perhaps any other created being – to reside in the imaginal realm and travel back and forth between the Pre-Text of creative divine inspiration and the Con-Text of art in all its forms. More importantly, from this perspective, scripture emerges not entirely separate from human art, but rather the ideal archetype for eloquence and sacred creativity. Simply, the Word in Ibn al-ʿArabī's thought is a blueprint for all human artistry.

### Akbarian Muhammadology

If there is such a body of knowledge in Christianity known as Christology, or “the part of theology, concerned with the body and work of Jesus,” then a similar designation of “Muhammadology” should also be used to describe the overarching narrative of Ibn al-ʿArabī's metaphysics, and many other Sufi mystics for that matter.

One cannot overemphasize the centrality of the prophet Muhammad to the entire structure of Ibn al-ʿArabī's thought. Consider what he says in the Meccan Openings regarding the Prophet's cosmological primacy: “What honor is greater than that of Muhammad, for he was the beginning of this circle [of existence], he is connected to its end and its completion is through him. In this way, through him things began and through him they are perfected.”

A similar sentiment can also be found in the Bezels of Wisdom, wherein the author references the title of the chapter devoted to Muhammad, “The Bezel of a Singular Wisdom in a Muhammadan Word”: “His wisdom is singular because he is the most perfect being in this human species. This is why the affair began with him and, as such, it is also sealed.”

The cornerstone of this superiority, which Ibn al-ʿArabī alludes to in these excerpts, is that the Prophet is both the first creation and spring for the rest of creation. Here, the Andalusian mystic is relying upon a well-known hadīth (prophetic narration) where the Prophet is asked by one of his companions about God's first creative act, to which the former responds: “The first thing that God created is the light of your Prophet.” From this perspective, it is the spirit or essence of Muhammad that is perceived as the first creation, not his physical body.

And it is this essence-beyond-form of the Prophet that became known as al-haqīqa al-muhammadiyya (Muhammadan Reality) among Muslim mystics, most notably Ibn al-ʿArabī. Returning to the reference to Christology, one might say that the Muhammadan Reality plays a similar – central – role in Muhammadology as the Logos does in Christian theology. As Ibn al-ʿArabī proposes in the

excerpts above, the cosmogenic importance of the Prophet is not simply a matter of sequence, but that his essence and spirit are also the very fabric of creation. In this grand cosmic theater of sacred history, Muhammad is simultaneously the stage, actors, props and audience. He fulfills and unfolds the direction and production of the creative divine will.

And truly, it would not be a farfetched analogy to portray the mystic's perception of creation in its entirety as theater; a fortunate happenstance considering the focus of this volume on "art and imagination." For alongside the hadith of the original creation, there is another narration, also central to Sufi thought, known as the "hadith of the hidden treasure." In this instance, the prophet Muhammad is not the speaker, but God himself who explains the original spark of life in the universe: "I was a hidden treasure, and I loved to be known. Therefore, I created creation so that I may be known by them."

These two narrations harmonize with one another in the Sufi cosmology to which Ibn al-'Arabi adheres. In combination with Ahmed's definition of Islam as the "means to experience meaning," we can deduce that if the initial divine motivation for creating is love, then the light of the Prophet, al-haqiqa al-muhammadiyya, is not only that original object of love, but divine amour itself. Likewise, if the consequence of God acting upon his love is that his creation will come to know him, then the Muhammadan Reality is not only knowledge of God, but the very process of knowing him as well.

As stated previously, this primary role granted to the spiritual reality of the Prophet Muhammad in Ibn al-'Arabi's Sufi metaphysics presents al-haqiqa almuhammadiyya in a similar light as the Logos in Christology. As the "divine reason implicit in the cosmos, ordering it and giving it form and meaning," the Sufi Logos is perceived as being identical with the Prophet's essence, at least in Ibn al-'Arabi's thought. The latter explicitly states in the Meccan Openings that al-haqiqa al-muhammadiyya is the "[divine] creative object ... and the First Intellect for others. It is also the Higher Pen which God created from nothing."

This allows us to transition to another aspect of Sufi Muhammadology, pertaining to the intimate relationship between the Prophet and the Qurhān. This is a necessary step in order to venture into Christ's metaphysical significance in Ibn al-'Arabi's thought, as a symbol of divine creativity and imagination. If identifying the Prophet's essence with the Logos presents his spiritual reality as the creative force that animates the entire cosmos, then establishing a connection between him and the Qur'ān will situate him as the particular archetypal spring for all prophetic figures, including Jesus.

For Ibn al-'Arabi, the quintessential narration that establishes this connection is one attributed to the Prophet's wife 'Ā'isha, who was asked about his character after his passing. According to varying narrations, she is reported to have either said that "his character was the Qur'ān" or "he was a walking Qur'ān." This allows the Andalusian mystic to deduce that:

She said this because he is most singular among all creation. Such a unique creation must encompass the best of manners. Moreover, God has described this character with "greatness." He also described the Qur'ān as "great." This is why the Qur'ān is his character. Thus, whoever wanted to see the Messenger from among his community who did not live during his time, then let them look at the Qur'ān. There is no difference between looking at it and gazing at the Messenger of God. It is as if the Qur'ān has been molded into a human form named Muhammad. Moreover, the Qur'ān is divine speech and God's attribute. In turn, Muhammad is the attribute of the Real (God), in his entirety.

The Andalusian mystic extends the identification found in this narration, of the recited Qur'ān with the physical – or historical – persona of the Prophet, to the transcendent and timeless divine speech (Logos), in turn presenting the provocative image of the Prophet as a divine attribute.

The key to deciphering the connection between the Prophet and the Qur'ān, on the one hand, and between him and other prophetic figures, on the other hand, resides in Ibn al-'Arabī's second most important work, the *Bezels of Wisdom*. Specifically, it is the organization of this monograph that provides a glimpse into the author's vision of *nubuwwa* (prophethood). In contrast to the *Meccan Openings*, an encyclopedic work with a rather enigmatic structure, the *Bezels* is neatly categorized according to names of divine prophets and messengers.

The 27 chapters in this book follow, rather loosely, the order of prophets found in Islamic sacred history, with the first focusing on Adam and last on Muhammad. With that in mind, Ibn al-'Arabī creatively departs from this historical sequence in order to augment the nuances of his mystical vision. For instance, although Jesus immediately precedes Muhammad in Islamic prophetology, that is not the case in the *Bezels*. On the contrary, the author has chosen an enigmatic figure named Khālid as the placeholder for this penultimate phase, prior to the coming of the prophet of Islam.

Despite these differences, we can still surmise the contours of the vision that motivates the entire work. We begin with imagery that undergirds the title of the book itself, *Bezels of Wisdom*. Ibn al-'Arabī's mastery of the Arabic language and his ability to decipher connections between homophones (similar sounding words), using his own creative etymology, appears clearly in this instance. For it is the relationship between *al-khātām* (ring) and *khātim* (seal) that animates the entire spirit of the *Bezels*: just as the Prophet Muhammad is *khātim al-anbiyāh* (seal of prophets), he is also the *khātām* (ring) on the hand of God, who encompasses the prophetic bezels of all different shapes and sizes, from Adam to Jesus.

This should not be surprising, considering that the Andalusian mystic also regards the spiritual reality of the Prophet, *al-haqīqa al-muhammadiyya*, to be the Logos, the original created being and means through which the cosmos continues to unfold, which includes other prophets and messengers. However, what Ibn al-'Arabī is implicitly presenting in the *Bezels* is a much deeper and more significant idea, that just as the recited Qur'ān was revealed in stages (23 years), so was the walking Qur'ān, Prophet Muhammad, also “revealed” in phases, according to the gradual historical appearance of those prophets and messengers mentioned in the *Bezels*.

What supports this hypothesis are the individual chapter titles in this work that focus on a single theme (e.g. prophethood, spirituality, light), whereas the culminating section, focusing on Muhammad, designates “singularity” as the unique attribute fit solely for the prophet of Islam. This presents us with a truly remarkable reworking of Islamic prophetology. From this perspective, the appearance of prophets are not discrete events, but rather the gradual emergence of a single being, the Prophet Muhammad, also known in Sufism as *al-insān al-kāmil* (perfect human), in stages.

And so, the appearance of the first prophet, Adam, whom Ibn al-'Arabī associates with the perfection of the human form, can also be described as the manifestation of the prophet Muhammad's own bodily perfection. Inversely, one can say that the human form of the Prophet is simply called “Adam.” Likewise, the appearance of Jesus, whose unique physiology and birth is the author's main concern, can be viewed as the manifestation of the Prophet as Logos, as the *haqīqa muhammadiyya* in its entirety.

Indeed, it is for this very reason that 'Īsā b. Maryam (Jesus son of Mary) may be considered the most quintessential – penultimate – stage in the revelation of the walking Qur'ān, Muhammad. This is

because the former contains all those aspects that appeared before him, through previous prophets, with the addition of this last and most necessary dimension: the embodiment of the Word.

### Akbarian Christology, Creativity and Imagination

There are several concepts pertaining to Christ's image in Ibn al-ʿArabī's writings which we must first consider prior to venturing into the presence of creativity and imagination in his thought, eventually returning to the Muhammadan Reality as the metaphysical thread that ties this entire apparatus together.

As expected, the Andalusian mystic's foundation in exploring the figure of Jesus is thoroughly Qur'ānic. He focuses on the three scriptural descriptions of Christ as: "Messenger of God, His Word that He cast to Mary and a spirit from Him." Our concern in the ensuing paragraphs will be the son of Mary's status as *kalimatu Allāh* (Word of God) and a *rūhun minh* (spirit from Him).

We begin with an excerpt from the Meccan Openings where the author discusses Jesus as the *kalima* (Word of God). His focus here is to situate this single Word within God's other – countless – Words, *kalimātu Allāh* (plural form):

And He said regarding Jesus peace be upon him that he is: "His Word which He sent to Mary" and He also said about her: "she believed in the *kalimāt* (Words) of her lord" and they [these Words] are nothing other than Jesus. He made him as Words [plural] for her because he is abundant from the perspective of his outward and inward composition. Thus, every part of him is a Word ... It is like a human being when he utters the various letters that form one word that is intended by the speaker who seeks to create these words; so that he might express through them what is in his soul.

The Andalusian mystic creatively extends what begins as a conversation on grammar to a profound reimagining of both Jesus and God as divine language and divine speaker, respectively. What emerges from all of this is the son of Mary not only as a single Word, but actually multiple divine expressions.

In turn, the entire universe appears as God's stream of consciousness and a constantly unfolding story. Per our discussion above, we can say that this tale began with the *hadīth* of the "hidden treasure." Since God loved to be known in the mirror of his creation, he has been incessantly "speaking" this creation into existence. In this case, the reality of the prophet Muhammad is not only this uttered cosmos, but the very act of divine speech as well.

However, Ibn al-ʿArabī is not satisfied to stop at this meta-cosmic perspective but returns to the human being's ability to speak as an imitation of divine speech. For just as God utters the universe into existence, we also speak microuniverses into being through our words and conversations. We ponder here two open-ended questions that arise from this creative portrayal and to which we will return later on. First, since human beings are capable of speaking in different registers (i.e. prose or poetry), and since Jesus and the rest of creation are God's uttered Words, is the son of Mary an instance of divine prose or poetry? Second, what kind of microcosms are we bringing into existence through our words and conversations?

In two *miʿrāj* (ascension) narratives found in the Meccan Openings, where Ibn al-ʿArabī recounts his mythic celestial travels to the divine presence, retracing the Prophet Muhammad's own journey, the former continues to explore the connection between Jesus and divine language. In the first of these accounts, Ibn al-ʿArabī describes the journey in the third person, covering the tracts of a *tābiʾ muhammadi* (Muhammadan follower), or Sufi mystic, and his companion the *hāhib al-fikr* (rational philosopher). While the "Muhammadan follower" receives a ceremonious welcome from the angels



and prophets guarding each of the seven heavens, the philosopher-companion is forced to speak with the planets orbiting these spheres, reflecting the lower rank of the latter's knowledge.

Upon reaching the second heaven, Ibn al-`Arabī tells the reader that the “Muhammadan follower” is greeted by the cousins, Jesus and John the Baptist. He also provides important details on the specific knowledge imparted by these two prophets to their visitor:

They reveal to him the authenticity of the message of the teacher, God's messenger [Muhammad] prayers and blessings be upon him, through the miraculous nature of the Qur'ān. This is because this presence is that of al-khihāba [oration], al-awzān [poetic meters], husn mawāqī' al-kalām [the beauty of appropriate speech], imtizāj al-umūr [the mixture of affairs] and huhūr al-ma'nā al-wāhid fi-l-huwar al-kathīra [the appearance of one meaning in a multiplicity of forms]. He also receives the furqān [clear criterion for understanding] and the understanding of kharq al-`awā'id [breaking of habits]. He also comes to know from this presence the `ilm al-`sīmiyā', which pertains to working with letters and names as opposed to vapors, blood and other things [i.e. as in `ilm al-`kīmiyā' (Alchemy)]. He also come to know the honor of words, jawāmi' al-kalim [the most encompassing of speech] and reality of kun [Be!] and its designation as kalimat al-amr [the word of command], not the past, future or hāl [state that is bound time]. [From this heaven also, one comes to know] the appearance of the two letters from this word, even though it is composed of three. [He also understands] why that third barzakhiyya [liminal] “word,” between the letter kāf and nūn, which is the spiritual wāw, was removed. This is the letter which gives [the realm] of mulk [dominion] the power to exercise influence upon the formation of created things. One also comes to know, from this presence, the secret of takwīn [formation].

This single excerpt brings together all the various concepts discussed so far in this essay and furnishes all the necessary components needed for us to march towards the conclusion. First, Ibn al-`Arabī establishes the connection between Christ's description as kalimatu Allāh (Word of God) and the recited Qur'ān, as God's eternal kalām (speech).

Second, the Andalusian mystic tethers Jesus, and John the Baptist, to the Prophet Muhammad, who is the walking Qur'ān and whose spiritual reality – we had described – is the Sufi Logos. This connection with the Messenger of Islam is reiterated in the second paragraph, albeit indirectly. The jawāmi' al-kalim (all-encompassing words) which the Muhammadan follower is given to appreciate in this heaven is a reference to a well-known hadīth where the Prophet Muhammad says according to the narrator: “I have been given jawāmi' al-kalim.” In another section in the Meccan Openings, Ibn al-`Arabī provides a fascinating – and rather provocative – explanation of this unique rank given to the Prophet:

God said: “And His Word which He cast to Mary,” and He said: “She [Mary] believed in the Words of her Lord and in His Book.” It is also said that the “prince cut the hand of the thief” or “the prince beat the thief.” In this way, whoever fulfills the command of the one who orders them, it is they [the deputy] who performed it.

Know, then, that the one who cast [the Word] is Muhammad. He cast, on behalf of God, the Words of the entire universe without exception. Some of these he cast by his own self, such as the spirits of angels and much of the higher realm, while other things he cast through causes. An example of the latter is the harvested grain that reaches your body as a spirit that glorifies and praises God. This only happens after many cycles and fluctuations. All of this comes from the one who has been given jawāmi' al-kalim.

And so, the intimate relationship between Jesus and Muhammad unfolds in the most profound and creative fashion possible. Ibn al-ʿArabī is not satisfied to simply describe Christ, the Word of God, as a manifestation of the Muhammadan Reality. Instead, the author explains in detail how the Prophet Muhammad is the Logos: as the sole proprietor in charge of jawāmiʿ al-kalim, he alone has the power and authority to cast divine words into their designated forms, including Jesus. In other words, if Muhammad is the Logos, then jawāmiʿ al-kalim explains how he fulfills this role.

There are still more insights to be deciphered from the miʿrāj excerpt mentioned above. Alongside the connections between Jesus, the Qurhān and the Prophet Muhammad, Ibn al-ʿArabī establishes a third association, between Jesus and the notion of barzakhiyya (liminality). This key term will allow us to directly venture into Ibn al-ʿArabī's understanding of khayāl (imagination). Only once we have taken this excursion, can we return one last time to this excerpt to appreciate the other descriptions of the second heaven that Ibn al-ʿArabī provides here.

In this instance, Ibn al-ʿArabī is relying upon an oft-quoted verse found in Chapter 55 of the Qurʾān, al-Rahmān (The Most-Merciful): "He merged the two seas, they meet. Between them is a barzakh [isthmus], they do not transgress." As expected, he undertakes the following creative discourse on ontology using this verse:

Know that known things are three kinds without a fourth. These are al-wujūd al-muhlaq (absolute being) which is never limited, and that is the being of God, who is the necessary existent. The second is the al-cadam al-muhlaq (absolute non-existence), which is non-existent in itself, cannot be limited and is what we call the impossible.

Thenceforth, there cannot be two opposites facing one another save that there be a barrier between them ... This barrier between the absolute existent and non-existent is al-barzakh al-aqlā [loftiest isthmus] or barzakh al-barāzikh [the isthmus of isthmuses]. It has a direction towards being and another towards non-existence.

Within it [the barzakh] also are all the possible things, which never end. Each of these things has an immutable essence in this isthmus whereupon the absolute being [God] gazes. It is from this aspect that the things are named, and if He chooses to bring them into being, He says to it: "Kun!" [Be!] and it will be.

Moreover, every human who has a khayāl [imagination] and imagines something, then their contemplation is extending into this isthmus, even though they do not know they are imagining their object from this presence.

Ibn al-ʿArabī delivers us, finally, to the shore of imagination through the door of the barzakh and the entire backdrop of the foundation which we have discussed thus far in this chapter. In reference to the Qurʾānic verse, Ibn al-ʿArabī most probably perceives the meeting between the fresh and salty waters to correspond to the absolute existence and non-existence, respectively. However, that is by far the most trivial conclusion from the above excerpt. Much more important is the fact that the Andalusian mystic is – essentially – equating this barzakh al-barāzikh (greatest isthmus) with the Muhammadan Reality, as the container wherein all possibly existent things reside. Just as the Prophet's dominion over jawāmiʿ al-kalim explains his status as Logos, here also it highlights – possibly – the emergence of the contingent beings from nothingness into existence via his agency.

In turn, Ibn al-ʿArabī is informing us that the Prophet Muhammad's reality is also cosmic imagination. This is not an abstract metaphysical concept. Rather, it is the tangible realm where human beings access and create their own contemplations and reflections. However, the underlying premise in both this last excerpt and the previous, pertaining to the miʿrāj, is that the property of barzakhiyya (liminality) is also attributed to the second heaven where Jesus and John the Baptist reside.

Earlier in our discussion, we described Ibn al-ʿArabī's vision of the prophets and messengers who appeared – historically – prior to Muhammad as various dimensions or aspects of the Prophet of Islam. Now, we can also describe the Christic aspect of the Prophet's reality as this *barzakhiyya* and imagination. More than that, this dimension pertains to bringing things into being and casting the Words of God into their respective forms, whence they transition from nothingness into contingent existence.

The last piece of information that Ibn al-ʿArabī gives us in the *miʿrāj* narrative is the quintessential connection between this metaphysical discourse and art as a tangible human experience. By situating *khihāba* (oration), *awzān* (poetic meters) and *husn mawāqīʿ al-kalām* (beautiful arrangement of speech) in this same heaven of Jesus and John the Baptist, the author is rooting human creativity within the cosmic divine epitomized by ingenuity, imagination and the Muhammadan Reality.

There is an intricate network of analogies operating in this conversation that renders Ibn al-ʿArabī's sophisticated metaphysics a tangible panorama of physical performances. First, by comparing *kalimātu Allāh* (God's Words) to human speech and situating oration and poetry in the second heaven of Jesus, where *takwīn* (formation and bringing into being) is also located, the Andalusian mystic is definitively rooting these forms of human creativity in divine speech. They are not only the result of divine inspiration but are actual imitations of God's process of creating through breathing Words into forms.

In turn, Ibn al-ʿArabī is answering our first open-ended question, whether Jesus might be considered an instance of divine prose or poetry. Given that "poetic meters" flow forth from the same heaven where Jesus resides, it is possible that the Andalusian mystic perceives the former as an instance of God's poetry. Beyond this, however, Ibn al-ʿArabī is also endowing human poetry, and speech generally, with the ability of *takwīn*, to bring created things into being. What those created beings exactly are is not clear from this passage. However, given that the author situates *barzakhiyya* (liminality), and by extension *khayāl* (imagination), in the same heaven of Christ, it is safe to assume that human speech also brings a micro-universe into being, each with its own *barzakh* and imagination.

This last inference leads us to the second phase in this network of analogies, pertaining to the presence of Christ in these excerpts. Jesus embodies, more vividly than other created beings, the way God creates through breathing. This unique embodiment manifests in Christ's ability to reenact his own creation and that of the universe through his own miraculous breath. In turn, whatever the son of Mary brings to life or resurrects through his breath is itself a Christic being.

Merging the analogies of human and divine speech with that of Christ's miraculous breaths and the divine *nafas al-rahmān* (breath of the most-merciful), we arrive at the conclusion that human speech itself is a Christic process, in two ways. First, the very act of breathing, in order to speak, imitates both God's bringing Christ into being through the divine breath and the latter's performance of miracles through breathing. Second, those things humans bring into being through breathing and speaking are Christic instances that imitate God's Words and those things which Christ himself brought to life or resurrected.

Lest this seems like a convoluted set of comparisons, Ibn al-ʿArabī provides a fascinating description in the Meccan Openings of the life that he believes human language has. The following makes clear that the Andalusian mystic perceives the power of poetry, and human speech at large, to be intimately related to the inherent life found in the sacred spirit of language and *hurūf* (letters):

Know, may God grant you and us facilitation, that letters are a nation from those who are spoken to by God and commanded to follow His commands. They also have messengers from among them and names through which they are known. Only the people of spiritual unveiling from our path know this. The world of letters is also the most eloquent of realms in tongue and clearest in proclamation.

“When I mold him and breathe in him from my spirit.” This is in reference to the appearance of accents upon the letters after their creation. Then, they emerge as another creation, known as a word, just as each of us is known as a human being. In this way, the world of words and expressions is created from the realm of letters. This is because letters are the materials for words, just as water, dust, fire and air are the matter from which our bodies are molded. Then, the commanded spirit flows forth and we are called human.

Ibn al-ʿArabī confirms our earlier conjecture by giving a fascinating portrayal of letters and words as a self-subsisting universe. In this vision, every time a person speaks, regardless of the content of their speech, they are imitating and reenacting the genesis of the universe. Essentially, they are unfolding their own “hidden treasure.”

We conclude this section of the essay with one final conceptual sojourn, at the above-mentioned notion of *nafas al-rahmān* (breath of the most-merciful). Ibn al-ʿArabī mentions this term numerous times in the Meccan Openings. In one example, he associates it with the origination of the cosmos: “The world appeared through *nafas al-rahmān*. This is because God has *naffasa* (alleviated) through it the pressure felt by the [divine] names, due to the absence of their effects [in the universe].” The author’s creative etymology emerges again as he relies upon the connection between *nafas* (breath) and *tanfis* (alleviation) to explain the role of *nafas al-rahmān* in bringing the world into being.

In other places, the Andalusian mystic extends this etymological network to embrace yet another key term and also include the son of Mary as a corroborating example:

Every *nafs* [soul] is afraid of non-existence ... Meanwhile, the divine spirit is *nafas al-rahmān*. This is why he associated it with breathing, due to the harmony between the spirit and breaths when He said: “I breathed in him from my spirit.” In this manner, also, He commanded Jesus to breathe in a mold of clay bird. Thus, spirits only appear through breaths.

And so, words appear from letters, and letters from air, and air from *nafas al-rahmān*. Through the divine names also appear the traces in the universes, and at this halts *al-hilm al-hisawī* [the Christic knowledge].

By rendering the *nafas* (breath) as Christic and tethering it to *tanfis* (alleviation) and *nafs* (soul), Ibn al-ʿArabī is also positing the latter two notions as artifacts that follow the archetype of Jesus. It is clear now that, for the Andalusian mystic, the words and letters we speak are universes that we give life to through our breaths, very much in the same way that God continuously brings into being. Not only that, but the source of the *nafas* (breath), which is the *nafs* (soul), and the remedy of breathing, which is *tanfis* (alleviation), and the things it creates, which are the letters and words, are all Christic.

In this way, Jesus son of Mary emerges in Ibn al-ʿArabī’s *Weltanschauung* as the meeting point between divine and human speech, imagination and creativity. The Andalusian mystic says much more in his writings about all the concepts we have discussed so far, including imagination. However, due to the limited scope of this chapter, we restrict ourselves to the excerpts and analyses in the preceding paragraphs. In the following final section, we try to synthesize the various analytical threads presented here and also offer some final remarks on the significance of Ibn al-ʿArabī’s metaphysics to our understanding of human creativity and imagination.

## Conclusion

In “Representation in Painting and Drama: Arguments from Indian Aesthetics,” Ananta Sukla states that “the theater is superior to painting not because it creates the illusion of reality better, but because, for the peculiarity of its medium, it is capable of representing the indeterminate in its determinate form.” It is from this perspective, of “representing the indeterminate in its determinate form,” that our previous exploration of the unfolding of the “hidden treasure,” through the writings of Ibn al-`Arabī, has been nothing but a sojourn amidst the divine drama of creation.

In the case of the Andalusian mystic and his theosophy, the “indeterminate” is the transcendent divine essence, the “hidden treasure” par excellence, while the “determinate forms” are the endless and incessantly unfolding theophanies that manifest this ineffable divine essence. As we mentioned previously, paying homage to Sukla’s mention of theater, in this divine drama of the “hidden treasure” the stage, play, characters and audience are all but mirrors of *alḥaqīqa al-muḥammadiyya* (Muhammadan Reality), which is at once God’s original creation and the very process of creation. The Prophet is at once the original object of divine love and the act of loving itself.

However, if theater, painting and the arts are central components of human culture, then what Sukla informs us in “Oriya Culture: Legitimacy and Identity” is also relevant to the discussion in this chapter, in so far as “language and religion have been the central instrument in the emergence and identity of a culture.” The central objective in the preceding paragraphs has been to show that, for Ibn al-`Arabī, the social and worldly dimensions of imagination, art and creativity are very much rooted in metaphysics and divinity.

However, the Andalusian mystic is not interested in the least to subject human imagination and artistic expressions to the dogmatic prescriptions of legal strictures, but rather to decipher the infinitude of potentialities inherent in divine creativity through the variety of worldly forms and manifestations. His *Weltanschauung* is one where the physical is enchanted and sacralized towards the metaphysical, not vice versa. Equally important also is Ibn al-`Arabī’s positioning of art forms like poetry and imagination squarely within Sufi theology. In other words, the creative dimensions of Akbarian Christology and Muhammadology are not auxiliary to the “art” of knowing God but are central and indispensable components to that end.

Our objective in this concluding section is twofold. First, we will summarize and synthesize Ibn al-`Arabī’s vision of Christ and his creative dimensions in Sufi metaphysics. Here, we will focus specifically on bringing together the discussions of the Muhammadan Reality and Sufi Jesus in order to better appreciate the larger narrative of Logos and imagination in the Andalusian mystic’s thought. Second, we will attempt to extend Ibn al-`Arabī’s vision of poetry and language to other forms of art. Our central concern will be to gauge whether the Sufi mystic would give painting and music specifically and other forms of creative expression generally the same station which he granted poetry.

We can summarize the two analytical threads in this chapter as Sufi Muhammadology and Christology, both through the Akbarian prism. In the first, we saw that Ibn al-`Arabī presents the spiritual reality of the Prophet Muhammad as simultaneously the first entity created by God and the matter from which the entire universe, and all that it contains, is created. The Andalusian mystic also makes sure that the Prophet does not appear as a passive agent in this narrative, but as the one with authority and power to cast the divine words into their respective forms, stemming from his sole proprietorship over *jawāmiḥ al-kalim* (the all-encompassing divine Words). This ontological and historical primacy of the Prophet enabled us to describe him as the Islamic equivalent of the Logos in Sufi metaphysics.

Transitioning to Ibn al-ʿArabī's Christology, we saw that the son of Mary facilitates an intricate network of analogies between God and human beings in the former's thought. On the one hand, the Andalusian mystic perceives Jesus' existence, as a divine Word(s), to be similar to human speech that contains letters, sentences and expressions. In order to fully appreciate this comparison, we also saw that Ibn al-ʿArabī regards those letters and words that we speak and write as living nations that are "spoken to by God." In turn, all human speech, once uttered, exists in a microcosm of imagination. In this way, we reenact the original drama of creation by unfolding the "hidden treasure" within us outwardly.

Bringing these two threads together yields a few key points. First, as mentioned previously, Christ represents an aspect or dimension of the Muhammadan Reality, specifically the *barzakhiyya* (liminality), imaginability and the narrative of the Logos. Alternatively, we can equate this Christic facet with *jawāmiḥ al-kalim* (all-encompassing words) of the Prophet's essence. In other words, Jesus represents the Prophet's sole proprietorship over casting divine words into their respective forms.

What the Andalusian mystic does in his writings is to extend the sphere of these divine words and their receptacles to also include art and creativity. The second heaven of Jesus (i.e. the second heaven of the Muhammadan Reality), where imagination and liminality reside, is also where oration and poetic meters can be found. As we have seen, the letters and words that give life to poetry are a nation that are spoken to by God. In turn, they are also a cosmos of forms waiting to receive the divine breath and spirit to bring them to life. It is at this crucial juncture that the Muhammadan Reality emerges in Ibn al-ʿArabī's thought as *barzakh al-barāzikh* (greatest isthmus) and imagination itself.

What this means is that the Prophet Muhammad's essence is not only the original divine artwork, but also divine creativity in movement and the spiritual space from which human creativity springs and wherein it takes place. Of course, that is yet another way of describing the Christic aspect of the Muhammadan Reality, since Jesus embodies and reenacts the divine creative power through breathing. In a similar fashion, artists also receive a "breath" of creative inspiration from the realm of *khayāl/barzakh* (imagination/isthmus) and reciprocate that process by breathing their "indeterminate" inspiration outwardly into a "determinate form" of art (i.e. poetry, painting, film etc.)

And somadology, Christology and imagination for discussing the metaphysics of art forms other than poetry, such as painting or music. In the case of painting, and all forms of imagery, Ibn al-ʿArabī provides a fascinating interpretation of the Islamic prohibition against statues and portraits, in the specific context of the Christian idolization of Jesus. The excerpt begins with a mention of a special rank of Muslim saints known as *al-hisawīyyūn al-thawānī* (the dualist Christic saints):

They are those whose way is that of *tawḥīd al-tajrīd min ḥarīq al-mithāl* (abstract monotheism through the path of form). This is because the existence of Jesus did not come through a male human, but rather through a spirit that appeared in a human form. For this reason, the majority of the community of Jesus son of Mary, more so than other nations, have advocated for the use of images, as exists in their churches. They worship God by directing themselves to these images.

As for us, [the Prophet] has sanctioned for us to worship God as though we see Him, whence he admitted Him into *khayāl* [imagination]. This is the meaning of *al-tahwīr* [forming or putting into form]. But he forbade us from visualizing Him in the world of the senses.

As expected, Ibn al-ʿArabī creatively roots the Christian – read Catholic – practice of idolizing Jesus, Mary and saints through imagery within the very notion of *tawḥīd*, or monotheism and



acknowledging the oneness of God, an association that would certainly seem heretical to many Muslim scholars who hold that imagery is a transgression against tawhīd and who insist on iconoclasm.

The Andalusian mystic also expands the relevance of this discussion by simultaneously rooting the Islamic and Muhammadan command to “see God” within khayāl (imagination) and tahwīr (molding into form), or as Ananta Sukla would describe, “to put the indeterminate into determinate forms.” However, by emphasizing the departure of God in Islam from statues to imagination, Ibn al-ʿArabī is not actually restricting the permissible forms of visualizing God in the physical world.

On the contrary, the Sufi mystic is at once liberating the human perception of God from restricted sensual forms (e.g. statues) and transferring it instead to a higher spiritual realm (i.e. imagination), whereby it can become the “indeterminate” essence for the myriad of human creative expressions. In other words, for Ibn al-ʿArabī, it is not only statues or images of Jesus, saints and prophets that represent God, but the entire gamut of human expressions that necessarily communicate an aspect of the divine, through the means of the Muhammadan Reality.

As for the Akbarian perspective on music, this is the subject of future research that will soon be completed. For now, it suffices to say that Ibn al-ʿArabī discusses music and melodies approximately twenty-seven times in the Meccan Openings. Throughout these discourses, he emphasizes the need for listeners to transcend a “natural” or purely emotional enjoyment of sound, and instead to attempt and derive mahrifa (gnosis) from the power of the notes and cadences. Here again, Ibn al-ʿArabī is formulating a type of auditory tahwīr in khayāl (imagination), whereby the basic units of music are no longer the end of the experience but a means and spring for more sophisticated listening acts.

Between poetry and music, language and sound, Ibn al-ʿArabī presents us with a truly remarkable understanding of human creativity and imagination. As is the case in all other areas of his thought, the Andalusian mystic is thoroughly fixed on divinity as the source of human creative expressions. From that singular transcendent essence, through the Muhammadan Reality and its myriad of prophetic mirrors, the infinitude of aesthetic artifacts in our world emerge as mere refractions of that one source. This is a hierarchy that he beautifully portrays in an image of a hūr (horn), which he – unsurprisingly – etymologically tethers to huwar (forms).

The findings of this essay should encourage us to undertake a deeper exploration of the relationship between Sufi metaphysics and the importance of art and creativity in pre-modern and contemporary times. In “Ibn al-ʿArabī and Joseph Campbell: Akbarian Mythology and the Metaphysics of Contemporary Art,” I do this by comparing and contrasting the Andalusian mystic’s thought with Campbell’s groundbreaking exposition on the enchantment of modern art, *The Power of Myth*. I show that Ibn al-ʿArabī would find metaphysical relevance in many of the creative expressions of our time, including – but not limited to – video games and even films that glorify the zombie apocalypse.

It is indeed a fortunate happenstance that this essay on Ibn al-ʿArabī’s metaphysics of imagination and creativity should find a place in a groundbreaking volume such as this one, on art and imagination in the humanities. As Shaykh Hisham Kabbani states in the epigraph at the beginning of this paper, the sophisticated mystical writings of a Sufi mystic like Ibn al-ʿArabī require the finesse of a poet in order to be understood. What Shaykh Kabbani is also telling us, indirectly, is that art and creativity have always been married to the world’s great religious traditions throughout history. From Andalusia to the Vatican, beautiful arrangements of colors, shapes and sounds immortalize the ineffable and fleeting moments of the mystical experience. <>

## ISLAMIC CIVILIZATION IN THIRTY LIVES: THE FIRST 1,000 YEARS by Chase F. Robinson [Illustrations: 80 color images, University of California Press, 9780520292987]

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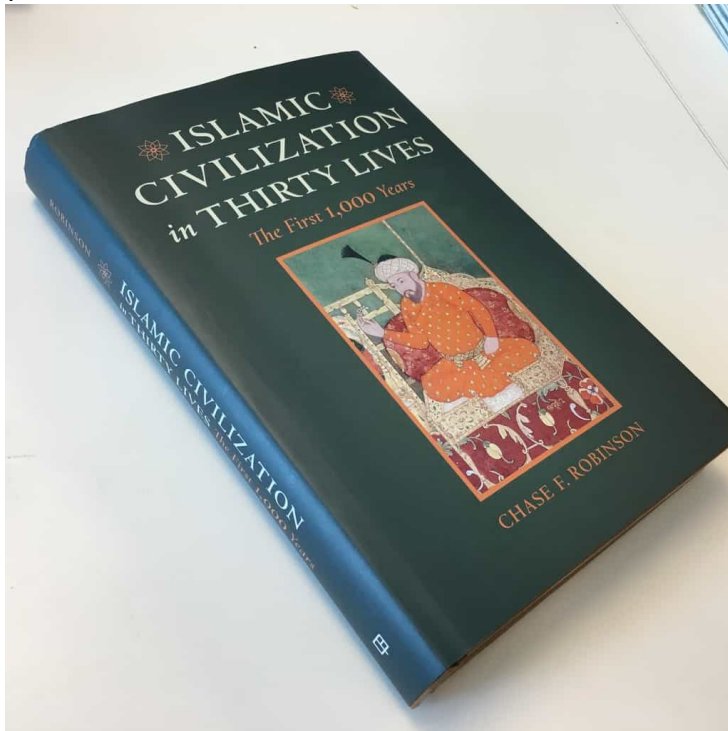
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A few snapshots from the book follow:



### 'A'isha, wife of the Prophet

'A'isha was a native Meccan, and a daughter of Abu Bakr, one of the earliest converts to Islam. She was also one of the Prophet Muhammad's wives, the third and his favorite, called the "Mother of the Believers." Robinson notes that relatively few accounts exist about her, but each say something interesting about gender. One such account involves her leading a force of 1,000 men to oppose 'Ali, who had come to power as a result

THE "SIYER-I NEBI," A TURKISH EPIC ABOUT THE LIFE OF MUHAMMAD, 16TH CENTURY.



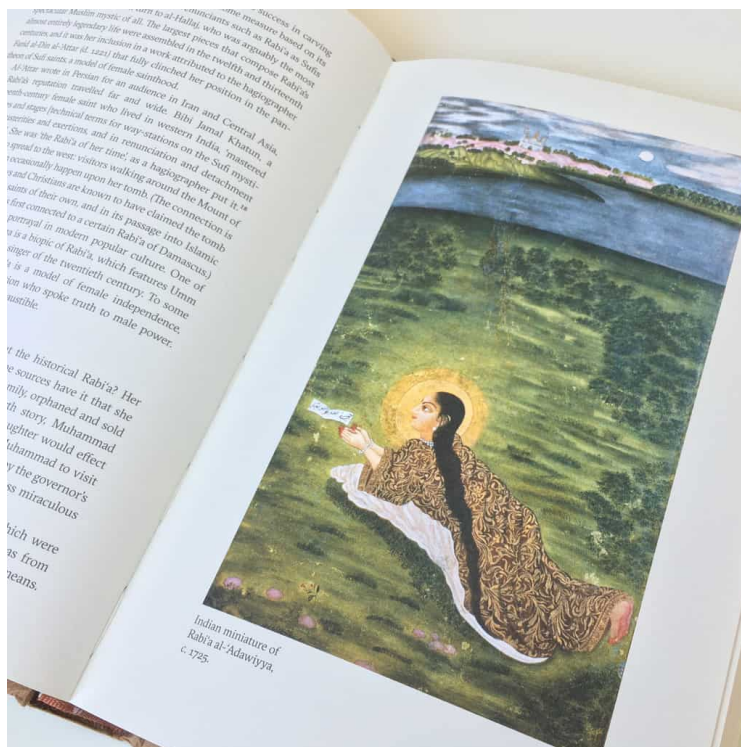
of the caliph 'Uthman's assassination. She can be seen as an unforgettable heroine who spoke her mind.



## Al-Biruni, cataloguer of nature and culture

As Robinson notes, Al-Biruni's "supranational celebrity-scientist" status is well earned. Not only did he write prolifically, tackling topics in astronomy, applied physics, geography, astrology, and medicine, he was also interested in the humanities, in history, culture, and comparative religion. No other Muslim scholar wrote so widely and authoritatively. His polymathy was staggering, linguistic range extraordinary.

1307, SHOWING BIHAFARID, A RELIGIOUS LEADER FROM IRAN, TRYING TO CONVINCE A PEASANT TO JOIN HIS SECT.



## Rabi'a al-'Adawiyya was a Muslim saint.

Her ethnic and social background is contested, but according to the earliest surviving biographical details, which were circulated a generation or two after her death, Rabi'a was from a high-status lineage of the Quraysh tribe and never married. "The marriage knot," she once said, "can only tie one who exists. Where is existence here? I am not my own — I am His and under His command." Known for her piety, she was only one of several female renunciants who made names for themselves in eighth century Basra.

## ISLAMIC CIVILIZATION IN THIRTY LIVES: THE FIRST

**I,000 YEARS** is an illuminating read for anyone interested in learning more about this often-misunderstood civilization.

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*Are the Saracens the Ottomans?*

*No, the Saracens are the Moors.*

*The Ottomans are the Turks.*

So reads, in its entirety, Lydia Davis's micro-story 'Learning Medieval History'. In conventional (and now obsolete) usage, the 'Saracens' are 'Moors', and the Ottomans, Turks. But learning history is more than assigning labels, as Davis's satire tells us. At least to my mind, history is an exercise in critical imagination, and in the case of the Middle East, this exercise has become all the more important.

This is because the Islamic past has never mattered more than now, what with civil war fracturing societies along Sunni and Shi'ite lines, militants reviving traditions of jihad and donning the mantle of caliphs, and those in and out of power making various - and often wild - claims about what constitutes 'true Islam'. Anyone attentive to events in the contemporary Middle East is likely to intuit that history - both real and imaginary - has an enduring and (perhaps) undue influence upon the politics and culture of the region; misunderstandings of that history also condition Western perceptions of Islam and Muslims. The present is not merely shaped by the past: it is constituted of conflicting claims about the past. As Salman Rushdie put it, we are all 'irradiated' by it.

How is one to judge the claims made about the Islamic past? More specifically, how is one to distinguish between fantasy and myth on the one hand, and genuine history (at least as reconstructed according to modern standards of critical scholarship) on the other? My hope in writing this book is to make available scholarship that is typically specialized and inaccessible, and thereby to offer some answers. According to an oft-transmitted Prophetic tradition, 'When God wishes good for someone, He gives him understanding in religion'. In what follows I hope to address some of the misunderstandings and myths that attach to Davis's schoolboy categories.

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As will become clear, much remains unknown about many of the figures featuring here. For example, childhoods are usually lost to history, and as much as it is the rule that death dates are fairly accurate, birth dates are very rarely so. For most famous people were not born famous; and unless their families or at least their fathers were notable in one way or another, birth dates were usually forgotten. Rumi (d. 1273), whose father was a well-known scholar and mystic, is the exception that proves the rule. Sometimes silence was even filled with legend. We can be fairly certain that Timur died on 17 or 18 February in 1405, but we shall see that his birth date was concocted. I shall therefore dispense with birth dates.

The problems do not end with dates, however. The evidence for these biographies — mainly historical, biographical and literary accounts — is often as misleading as it is exiguous. Because memory and record were often compounded over centuries by legend, myth and misunderstanding, we generally know much more about the afterlives of early Muslims than we do their actual lives. We shall see that Rabi'a al-Adawiyya was an eighth-century ascetic, but the compound portrait constituting her afterlife belongs mainly to the twelfth and thirteenth centuries. The later the figure, the fuller and more accurate the historical record tends to be, but even then, fame and infamy meant distortion, as it does now.



And a final qualification: what follows is a work of synthesis and interpretation — with all of the perils that this implies. As Eduard Sachau wrote in his translation of the staggeringly erudite *Chronology of Ancient Nations* of al-Biruni (see below), '...even in the simplest historical narrative the editor and translator may go lamentably astray in his interpretation, if there is something wrong with the method of his research'. In a work of this range and scope, it would be sheer hubris for me to imagine that I have not gone astray.

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One of the most striking features of Islamic 'civilization' (we shall turn to a definition in a moment) is the scale and variety of learning. 'Of making many books there is no end', is how Ecclesiastes 12:12 described the problem that learned Muslims would face throughout their history: there was too much to learn in too little time, and for all that books might be summarized, epitomized and condensed, knowledge never stopped growing. Each generation produced ambitious authors with new ideas or original ways of recycling old ones.

Books were of many, many kinds - on topics from agriculture, algebra and alchemy to zodiacs, zoology and Zoroastrian heresy. One of the most distinctive literary genres was the chronologically or alphabetically ordered compendium of capsule biographies, which could number in the hundreds and thousands. Some of these were restricted to specific professions or schools of thought, such as Qur'an reciters, jurists who belonged to a given school of legal thinking, philosophers or Sufis, to mention only a handful of examples. An early example belongs to an Iraqi scholar named Ibn Sa'd (d. 845). His *Book of Generations* starts with a long biography of Muhammad, and then, in seven volumes, assembles information about Muhammad's contemporaries and followers, most of whom we would call amateur or professional scholars, especially those who transmitted Prophetic traditions - stories, maxims and opinions expressed by or about Muhammad, which were building blocks of Islamic law, ethics and history. Other books were generic, offering to their readers hundreds or thousands of notices of men (and the occasional woman) from the widest variety of professions, occupations and careers - not just scholars, but also poets, rulers, physicians and much more besides. The most celebrated example belongs to a native of Damascus named Ibn Khallikan (d. 1282); his *Obituaries of the Notables* brings together approximately 5,500 capsule biographies, 'notable' here simply meaning 'famous'. It is not unlike a 'Who's Who'. Coming from nearly all corners of the Islamic world and every century of Islam, these figures shared little besides celebrity.

Beyond showing off their inexhaustible energies, what were the compiler-authors of these compendia trying to achieve? It is not always clear, but at least one goal is frequently made explicit: the lives of highly accomplished Muslims were to be preserved and narrated because they told stories, some inspiring, others humbling and chastening, but all edifying. In other words, exemplary lives offered lessons for Muslims.

My goal is not altogether different. I have composed thirty brief biographies, which can hint at the scale, diversity and creativity of Islamic civilization over about a millennium. I should like to emphasize from the start that diversity and creativity, which were generated in large measure by that scale - not merely the size of polities, cities, wealth, networks of learning, even libraries, but also intellectual and political ambition. We shall see that for some Muslim thinkers, the sky - not God - was the limit. In using the terms diversity and creativity, I aim to capture a wide and inadequately acknowledged spectrum of ideas, social practices and personal styles and commitments. There was legalism and dogmatism, of course; but so too was there hyper-rationalism, scepticism, inventiveness, iconoclasm and eccentric individuality. For the Islamic civilization that I shall be describing here, dynamism, experimentation and risk-taking were the rule. And I stop in the early sixteenth century

not because that diversity and creativity dried up or that civilization stultified, but because the underlying economic and political framework of the pre-industrial Middle East began to undergo major changes. As a result, the 'early modern' or 'modern' societies that emerged generated fundamentally different cultural forms.

'Civilisation is a loaded term, of course. It is sometimes used stuffily or polemically by those censorious of non-Western societies and cultures, who sometimes imagine that civilizations are monoliths, adjoining and colliding like tectonic plates, and that 'the West' is distinctive or even unique in its traditions of freedom, rationalism and individuality. This is not how I use the term. What I mean here is the distinctive yield, in lived experience and especially high culture, of the religious and political project undertaken by Muslims over the near millennium that spans from the seventh to the sixteenth centuries. The framing conditions of that project were military, political and economic - and so much will be said in what follows about those who conquered and ruled, especially in introductions to each of the book's four sections.

Moreover, those framing conditions explain why the Muslims described here came overwhelmingly from a tiny numerical minority. This uneven coverage is inevitable. We live in an age of great and growing inequality, but in pre-industrial societies, divided as they were between oceans of poor producers (especially peasants, pastoralists, labourers, serfs, slaves) and small islands of wealthy consumers, it was even more extreme. And so it follows that it was the elite who had the capacity to produce the exemplars, the notables, the stars, the powerful and the influential. Of course there is the occasional figure with the singular genius, intelligence or ambition that empowered him or her to escape a modest background.

But there is no getting around the general rule that families and households of means reinvested and so reinforced their social capital, generation after generation, typically by outfitting their children with education, social connections and wealth. Elite Muslims made contributions to Islamic civilization that were disproportionate to their number because they could draw on such resources.

Readers should also be reminded that the cultural categories once used by Muslims naturally differed from those commonplace nowadays: it made little sense a millennium ago to speak of 'fiction, for example, or 'the humanities' (as opposed to 'science'). For the same reason - the divide between the post-Enlightenment world we know and religion-infused Eurasia of the pre-industrial age - unfamiliar readers may be surprised by the extraordinary pull that religious problems and ideas exercised upon men (and a small handful of women) with great intellectual ability and ambition. Nowadays, such men would be drawn into any number of fields in academia, business or creative arts; in those days, they were attracted just as much to theology and law as they were to disciplines, such as mathematics, astronomy or optics, that we would now categorize as science.

Finally, readers should know that the thirty biographies presented here do not capture a scholarly consensus, a 'Who's Who' in Islam or Islamic history. There is no such consensus and nothing special about the number thirty. Although most of the names will be familiar to specialists, at least some will be new. In a few cases, I have spurned the obvious in favour of the less celebrated. I have also omitted some worthies in order to accentuate some themes, such as the permeability of civilization and the breadth of culture: this book is not a pantheon of Muslim intellectuals. Be this as it may, collectively these thirty figures can offer what I hope to be an accessible introduction to Islamic civilization, which, for all its extraordinary diversity, remains poorly understood in the English-speaking world. <>

## SOLOMON AND THE ANT: THE QUR'AN IN CONVERSATION WITH THE BIBLE by David Penchansky [Cascade Books, 9781725288690]

**SOLOMON AND THE ANT**, using the Bible as a dialogue partner, examines stories from the Qur'an, their drama, characters, and meaning. Although some qur'anic stories have close biblical parallels, here Penchansky examines stories without biblical precursors. Qur'anic narratives in dialogue with biblical texts enhance understanding. Penchansky chooses biblical stories that address similar questions about the nature of God and God's interaction with people.

Solomon matches wits with an ant, a bird, and the queen of Sheba. Magical creatures, the jinn, are driven out of heaven by fiery meteors. Moses, on a quest, meets a mysterious stranger. The Bible offers parallels and connections. Genesis, Exodus, Isaiah, Matthew, and other biblical books, contrast with the qur'anic text, comment on the qur'anic story, and supplement it.

- Separated by space and time, the Bible and the Qur'an faced similar issues.
- Both the Bible and the Qur'an adapted material from their surrounding culture while at the same time distinguishing themselves from that culture.
- Rather than addressing this cultural confrontation with rigid certainty, the Bible and the Qur'an are ambiguous and multivocal.
- The Bible and the Qur'an are layered, containing stories within stories, fragments, and structural abnormalities. These features contribute to meaning.

Penchansky's analysis of these stories makes the Qur'an accessible and compelling to nonspecialists and students.

### Reviews:

"This is a conversation between the Qur'an and the Bible as serious as it is simple. Applying a wealth of scholarly experience, Penchansky engages the holy texts both thematically and thoughtfully. Using his mastery of post-biblical and Islamic traditions, the author ensures a robust discussion about how readers wrestle with God through the stories of scripture."

—EMRAN EL-BADAWI, UNIVERSITY OF HOUSTON

"Some of the most obscure Qur'anic passages that seem to discuss fantastical realms, such as the *jinn* or demons, speaking animals, magical worlds of angels or deities, and mystical journeys have no recognizable biblical counterparts. Yet Penchansky is so well-versed in biblical literature that he brings a genuine voice artfully and skillfully mirroring Qur'anic narratives with similitudes in biblical literature. Away from any polemics, this is brilliantly an honest and sympathetic reflection that would undoubtedly enlighten and enrich any reader of the Qur'an." —ABDULLA GALADARI, KHALIFA UNIVERSITY OF SCIENCE AND TECHNOLOGY

"This book makes a unique and important contribution to the study of the relationship between the Bible and the Qur'an. Adopting a thematic approach, Penchansky offers a set of insightful and creative studies that explore how the two texts address the topics of polytheism, theodicy, and revelation. Readers will come away with a deeper appreciation of the fascinating interconnections that exist between the scriptures of the monotheistic traditions." —JOHN KALTNER, RHODES COLLEGE

"The Qur'an's narrative extension of the biblical tradition has been the subject of much scholarly discussion. While most scholars who engage in this field are trained in Qur'anic studies,

Penchansky's training in the Hebrew Bible makes *Solomon and the Ant* an important and unique contribution. Through a careful analysis of parallel stories in the Bible and the Qur'an, this book demonstrates how the two scriptures share the same cultural milieu, without losing sight of the Qur'an's theological peculiarity, and it does so with commendable clarity." —MUN'IM SIRRY, AUTHOR OF *CONTROVERSIES OVER ISLAMIC ORIGINS*

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Excerpt: What's so special about the Qur'an? Muslims believe their sacred book consists of the actual words of God in Arabic, dictated to the Prophet Muhammad by the angel Gabriel. How does one examine such a claim, which goes beyond what most Jews and Christians believe about their holy texts? The Qur'an claims that its divine nature will be obvious to anyone who reads it with an open heart. These are some Qur'anic texts that make this claim:

If you are in doubt about what We have sent down to Our servant, then bring a sura [chapter] like it, and call your witnesses. (Q 2:23)

Or do they say, "He has forged it?" Say: "Then bring ten suras forged like it, and call on whomever you can, other than God, if you are truthful." (Q 11:13)

Say: "If indeed humankind and the jinn joined together to produce something like this Qur'a'n, they would not produce anything like it, even if they were supporters of each other." (Q 17:88)

I, a sympathetic reader, hope to gain access to the excellence and profundity of the Qur'an, I seek evidence of the divine presence Muslims claim emanates from the reading of the book. Notice I said reading of the book. There is one aspect of the Qur'an unavailable in this study. Qur'an means "recitation," and a Muslim's primary relationship to the book is through chanting its contents or listening to its words chanted in Arabic. All I can do here is access that aspect of the Qur'an that one can reach through reading. The Qur'an, like the Bible, consists of many different types of literature, such as laws, prayers, ritual instruction, and apocalyptic visions. However, because I encounter the Qur'an as a relatively new visitor, I begin with narrative. It is an easy place to start because everyone relates to a story.

In what follows, I analyze nine stories from the Qur'an. Although some of these Qur'anic tales involve biblical characters (Moses, Solomon, and the Queen of Sheba), those I have chosen scarcely overlap with the Jewish or Christian Scriptures. However, in many ways these stories bring to mind biblical texts, ones that address similar themes and concerns to those found in the Qur'an. Bringing the Qur'an and Bible together in this way enriches understanding of both. John Kaltner observes, "Revisiting a familiar Bible story with the theme and message of its Qur'an parallel in mind can allow us to notice elements of it that have previously gone unrecognized." This remains true even though my work does not examine Qur'anic parallels to biblical texts, as Kaltner does.

My training is in the Hebrew Bible. I here examine what for me is an alien text, a strange text, and a whole interpretive tradition that had been unfamiliar to me. Why have I strayed so far from my chosen field? At least in part, it was because of the Muslim claim that the sublimity and uniqueness of the Qur'an will be obvious in any serious examination. This drew me. I am curious about the attraction to this book and about its veneration by over a billion people.

I chose the nine Qur'anic passages because they were compelling narratives. I looked for stories with vivid characterization and drama. Also, I looked for passages skirting the edge of orthodoxy. I search out Qur'anic texts that appear to represent the earliest stages of Islamic formation. When the community began fashioning its identity, it was at a time when many pre-Islamic practices and beliefs were being examined and reconsidered by the new community. These passages, then, inhabit the borderland between the Islamic community and the surrounding culture. As I approached each of these stories in turn, certain common themes emerged, and this became the structure of my study.

Now a word about my choice of biblical texts. I did not have any Bible passages in mind when I began to analyze these Qur'anic narratives. None of the Qur'anic texts I have chosen has a biblical parallel, except for mention of the queen of Sheba (Chapter 6). Rather, as my knowledge of these suras grew, they brought to mind particular parts of the Bible that were similar, or which might illumine certain obscurities in the Qur'anic story. I found many surprising similarities as well as revealing differences between the Bible and my chosen passages. Overall, I found that both scriptures asked similar questions and faced comparable issues. Most notably, both the Qur'an and the Bible advocate for exclusive worship of a singular God. The Qur'anic passages I have chosen, and the corresponding biblical texts both make their case as to which parts of the surrounding culture to embrace and which parts to reject in the light of that exclusive worship.

This introduction is not the place to survey the field of Qur'anic scholarship. I will, however, briefly situate myself within that vast and creative field. I divide Qur'anic interpretation into these categories, although I realize my divisions grossly oversimplify:

- I. Pious interpretations—Islamic commentaries on the Qur'an, called tafsir, make certain assumptions about the text. They take every single word of the Qur'an as God's speech, unmediated by human influence. Therefore, the Qur'an must be true in all it affirms. As a result, these interpreters harmonize disparate elements within the Qur'an so that they say the same thing and so they support Islamic orthodox belief. Early Islamic interpretation made reference to the Prophet's actions and teachings, things not included in the Qur'an. For most subsequent Muslim exegetes, some part of this early post-Qur'anic tradition becomes determinative to later interpretation. Early Muslim interpreters comment on the necessity of these traditions:

It is not possible to know the interpretation of a given verse without knowing its history and the causes of its revelation.

- Exploring the cause of revelation is a firm way to understand the meaning of the Qur'an.
2. Orientalist interpretations—Orientalist is a term made famous by Palestinian literary critic Edward Said (1935–2003). Said took the word orientalist from art criticism and used it to describe Western scholars who wrote about the Middle East or North Africa and who regard their subject as quaint and primitive. Western Qur'anic scholars making Orientalist interpretations conclude that the Qur'an is derivative, either from Christianity or Judaism or both. They claim that the Qur'an was unoriginal and uncreative.
  3. Contemporary, late twentieth-century and twenty-first-century interpretations—In 2015 I presented an earlier version of Chapter 6 in Yogyakarta, Indonesia, at the State Islamic University, as part of the annual meeting of the International Qur'anic Studies Association (IQSA). It has been my privilege to be present at the birth of this new society, founded in 2012, a community of scholars, Muslim and non-Muslim, global in scope. Having attended and participated in their annual meetings, I have noted the following trends. Most of their research is in the these areas:
    - A concern for history, in which the Qur'an is mined as source material to reconstruct seventh-century Arabia and the conditions that contributed to the birth and early years of Islam.
    - History of transmission—analyzing how various Islamic communities, ancient and modern, read and understood Qur'anic texts.
    - Philological studies—examining the meaning or semantic field of a particular Arabic word or phrase used in the Qur'an and surrounding texts. I include here also discussions of Qur'an translations into English and other languages.
    - Thematic studies—what the Qur'an says about a particular topic, such as God, the afterlife, eschatology, and so forth.
    - Close reading of Qur'anic texts—I would include myself in this group.

In my work I do not say anything global about the Qur'an or about Islam. I limit the scope of my study to a small sampling of narrative texts. If you picture the Qur'an as a vast mountain (it is!), I am only taking a few teaspoons of matter from the mountain, or perhaps a teacup of water from one of its swift-running streams.

Some of my fellow literary critics, those who engage in close reading of individual suras, often succumb to a harmonizing impulse. When they see a “rough spot” in their passage, a tension or lack of coherence, they find reasons to maintain that if the passage were properly understood, the contradiction or ambiguity would melt away. I contend that the most dynamic parts of these ancient scriptures are located in the spaces between pieces of a text that do not easily fit together. Therefore, my analyses often work against harmony. The disruptions and dissonances in the text are the places where meaning is produced. The passages in the Qur'an that I have chosen are those where these lines of tension, these ruptures, are closest to the surface. Rather than being flaws, these fault lines are the sources of the Qur'an's power. Thus, each section of this book introduces an unresolved problem the Qur'an must address.

The first section of the book explores the challenge of polytheism. Both religions, the Islamic and the Israelite, emerged out of a polytheistic environment<sup>8</sup> and to varying degrees defined themselves distinct from and against that context. From the Qur'an I chose three narratives that examine how Muslims regard those who believed in and worshiped multiple gods. Chapter 1 covers two connected suras (chapters), incantations that protect against malevolent spiritual forces. These forces much resemble the gods and goddesses of surrounding culture. Chapter 2 considers three goddesses who are called “the daughters of God.” Their continued presence in seventh-century



Arabia constitutes a challenge to Islamic monotheism. Chapter 3 concerns the jinn, a supernatural race with a long history of interacting with humans on the Arabian Peninsula. Although the Qur'an rejects the very existence of goddesses (Chapter 2), the Jinn Sura does not question the reality of these supernatural beings.

The second section of the book examines an issue that every monotheistic faith must deal with: the problem of evil, or theodicy. If one believes in a single deity, does that deity then bear the responsibility for all the suffering in the world? Chapter 4 considers divine punishment and its proportionality to the offense. Chapters 5 and 6 through different narratives, consider whether to blame God for human suffering, and if not, why not? These two suras each present a unique figure that serves as proxy for the interrogation of deity. The suras, by exploring the behavior of these unique figures, indirectly reflect upon God's actions. In the Cave Sura (Chapter 5), a figure named in later tradition the Green Man ('al-Khidr) stands for God. He appears to Moses in a sacred place and schools him regarding divine behavior. In Chapter 6, King Solomon himself is God-like when he threatens a community of ants. This narrative device (proxy figures standing for God) provides a less dangerous way for Muslims to consider God's liabilities and other transgressive possibilities when addressing the problem of evil. These stories question divine justice only indirectly.

The final section of the book isolates three texts under the heading of revelation. Chapter 7 considers how the Qur'an, though a fresh revelation, uses older stories to convey its message. Chapter 8 examines a sura in which two revelatory moments jump-start the career of the Prophet. Finally, Chapter 9 examines what effect the behavior and judgments of the Prophet have on the message.

In this book, I primarily focus on the Qur'anic narratives I have assembled. Certain connections or similarities exist between these Qur'anic narratives and portions of the Hebrew Bible. In some cases, I only briefly mention a biblical text. In other chapters, consideration about the Bible constitutes up to half of the chapter. In Chapter 2 for instance, I spend equal time with the Star Sura and Proverbs 8. In each chapter, after the chapter title, I list the relevant biblical passages under a subheading, labeled Texts in Comparison.

These chapters trace how biblical communities dealt with similar issues to those in the Qur'anic stories. The Qur'an and the Hebrew Bible share many strategies as they address these three issues, monotheism, theodicy, and revelation. This is not surprising because they raise questions that are intrinsic to revelatory monotheism, that is, a monotheism whose followers regard their sacred text as heaven-sent. Both the Bible and the Qur'an come from the same rough geographic and cultural milieu, although many centuries apart. Additionally, there is ample evidence that the Arabian people in the seventh century had knowledge of many biblical stories in some form. There are of course significant differences in the way the Bible and the Qur'an approach these issues I have listed, and I explore those differences as well. Differences and tensions between the two provide another rich source of meaning.

Although this book focuses on the actual narratives in the Qur'an itself, I will often refer to post-Qur'anic literature, including the early biographies of the Prophet, Qur'anic commentaries (called *tafsir*), and "occasions of revelation" (*ʿasbāb al-Nazūl*), stories that emerge in the early Islamic community that tell what happened to inspire each revelation. These sources tend to be determinative for pious interpretations. Although sometimes these occasions of revelation and other ancient sources might represent actual historical circumstances when the Prophet received the messages, more commonly they reveal how the first few generations of Muslims understood the

Qur'an in the centuries after the time of Muhammad. Qur'anic scholar Patricia Crone (1945–2015) said this:

There cannot, of course, be any doubt that in the long run the tradition will prove indispensable for an understanding of the Quran, both because it preserves early information and because it embodies a millennium and a half of scholarship by men of great learning and high intelligence on whose shoulders it is good to stand.

These post-Qur'anic writings reveal how early readers understood the Qur'an and the strategies they used to understand difficult and confusing texts. I frequently resort to a "master narrative" of early Islamic history to explicate a sura. The Qur'an is made up of disparate genres with many themes and stories repeated multiple times in different suras. Very soon after the time of the Prophet, the community of interpreters began to piece together a master narrative, a single coherent story. They were able to fit together the disparate suras and parts of suras like pieces of a puzzle. This master narrative features the following elements that may or may not correspond to the actual history of the formation of the Qur'an.

The story begins in the city of Mecca, where the beleaguered community of Muslims was persecuted by the ruling tribe, the Quraysh. Muhammad was himself a member of this tribe. Leading members of the Quraysh opposed Muhammad and the fledgling Islamic religion for two reasons. First, they objected to Muhammad's teaching of monotheism (tawhid) on principle. Second, they opposed Muhammad's criticism of their idol worship because pilgrimages to the shrine of the Ka'ba were a major source of income for the Qurayshi leaders. By opposing the gods housed in the Ka'ba, Muhammad was damaging their bottom line. At some point, the persecution against the small group of Muslims became so intense that Muhammad had to move the entire community from Mecca to Medina.

I locate many of the Qur'anic narratives I examine within this master narrative. Specifically, subsequent Islamic interpretation sees many of these suras as products of the time of persecution, reflecting the dire situation of the suffering community in Mecca. This becomes a helpful way to understand the suras, seeing them as response to this persecution.

Frequently in these chapters I examine breaks in the text—places where key information is missing or is contradictory or in tension with other parts of the passage. It is a principle of Islamic interpretation (and biblical interpretation, and interpretation in general) that the larger context (in this case other parts of the Qur'an) determines the interpretation of a specific text. That is certainly true to an extent. However, all too often this search for a larger context turns into a desire to harmonize an elusive text, making it fit better with the whole. Early Islamic interpreters force any passage that is an outlier to agree with dominant beliefs and conform to their sense of coherence in the Qur'an. This harmonizing impulse does violence to the Qur'an because it marginalizes troublesome texts and fails to listen to their manifold voices. It is far better to examine these ruptures, explore their contours and textures, because these are the places in the text that produce meaning. As Leonard Cohen sang:

There's a crack in everything. That's how the light gets in.

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The Qur'an is neither derivative nor uncreative. It stands with the other major world scriptures in its stature, insight, and beauty. In my ignorance, I had expected the Qur'an to be rigid and authoritarian. I found myself surprised by its humane understanding and challenging ethic. The scope

of my study is limited in that I examined only the narrative genre, and a scant nine suras. From this admittedly limited sample of the Qur'an's writing, I offer the following reflections. These stories are characterized by ambiguity and nuance. Such qualities as these are essential for the continued relevance of the Qur'an over time. I noticed a tension between tawhid (monotheism) and the Qur'an's depiction of the crowded realm of the spirit world. The Qur'an never denies God's goodness, but questions about God's goodness are legitimately raised in its pages. Perhaps most significantly, in these stories, God's message to humans is subject to the limitations of human language and human frailty. In its fabric the human and the divine are linked inextricably.

The Qur'an is a human document. This is not to question its divine origin or its divine qualities, but these ancient words are clearly rooted in their time and in the concerns of their human authors. As just one example, Surat-al-Masad was directed toward a single named individual, apparently a contemporary of the Prophet (Abu Lahab, see Chapter 4). The Qur'an is thoroughly human in all its aspects. Just as they do in the Jewish and Christian scriptures, so in the Qur'an the divine qualities of the text shine through this humanity rather than through humanity's absence. In this I respectfully diverge from orthodox Islam, where many claim that the entire Qur'an existed with God before any created thing, similar to how Proverbs 8 describes Chokmah.

I learned that in the Qur'an's portrayal of the Prophet Muhammad, he has much in common with prophets in the Bible. The Qur'an's Muhammad has less congruence with subsequent Islamic understandings of the Prophet's life and teaching, which portray him as flawless.

While the Jewish, Christian, and Islamic religions change and adapt, their scriptures do not change. As a result, there emerges a disparity between the two, the scripture and those in a different time and place who follow the religion. This disparity creates problems for those later believers. When later beliefs conflict with things that their scripture says, that causes conflict. In some cases, what is fragmented and inchoate in the scripture becomes defined and systematized in later eras. For instance, in the Hebrew Bible the path to monotheism was slow and episodic. There are many passages that imply or assume the existence of other gods. Even the first commandment, often regarded as the monotheistic manifesto, says:

You shall have no other gods before me. (Exod 20:3)

This implies that other gods exist. However, they must not be worshiped alongside Yahweh, the God of Israel. That is a problem for monotheism. In the New Testament, one does not find full-blown expositions of the Holy Trinity or the dual nature of Christ. That creates a problem for Christianity. In a similar way the Qur'an openly questions itself regarding what later Islam says about monotheism (there is only one God), theodicy (all that God does is good; all that God says is true), and prophecy or revelation (the Prophet's message is a "clear book" [Q 27:1], an unmediated message from God).

Pious interpreters embed problematic stories such as the ones I covered here, in larger master narratives of their own creation. They depend on biographies and teachings of the Prophet written later than the Qur'an itself. These master narratives reflect subsequent concerns. By means of these overarching narratives, the interpreters redirect the meaning of the stories in less transgressive directions; alternatively, traditional interpretations marginalize or abrogate offending passages by interpreting them through the lens of less threatening verses. For instance, the innocent jinn listening to the heavenly council in seats reserved for them become "rebellious satans" eavesdropping where they never belonged. (See Chapter 3.) The pious interpreter regards these more conforming passages, those that disparage the jinn, as more authoritative. In another strategy, the interpreters

avoid the troublesome texts altogether or only comment on a few pious statements within them while ignoring the import of the wholes.

The Qur'an is best approached by highlighting its ambiguity and the tension it creates. Using a metaphor of sound, we may say that the narratives I chose create dissonance in the mind of the reader. Dissonance is when two sounds clash, irritating to the ear. Elements of the narrative that do not quite cohere together create dissonance in the experience of reading. For example, the three layers in the story of "the Companions of the Cave" do not fit together smoothly. Some of the stories lack beginnings or endings. Sometimes, elements of a narrative conflict with similar accounts in other parts of the Qur'an or conflict with later interpretive traditions. At times a narrative conflicts with a reader's expectation or moral stance. One can harmonize dissonance of sound by supplying a resolving note or chord. When reading the Qur'an, however, I allow the irritant to remain. This shows respect for the actual words of the sura. Understanding the dissonance in these narratives brings the interpreter to the place where meaning is formed. The dissonance itself provides a key to how such meaning is produced and how it affects the reader. Additionally, observing the dissonance allows the interpreter to see traces of an unfiltered (or a less filtered) picture of Islam's first generation.

This journey of discovery has always been a personal one for me. A long time before I began this project, I was introduced to the story of Joseph in the Qur'an (Q 12). This was my first real encounter with Islam's book. Like the Bible's Joseph story, the Joseph Sura is a long, continuous narrative, and it roughly parallels the biblical account. There is, however, one incident in the Qur'an's account not found in Genesis, and this incident gave me a first inkling that the Qur'an had qualities I wanted to investigate. It concerns the wife of the high Egyptian official. Her husband is named Potiphar in the Bible, but she remains unnamed in the Qur'an. The woman has become an subject of gossip among the other noblewomen because of her obsession with Joseph. To regain her reputation, she invites them all to a party at her house and provides them food and utensils. At the banquet, she parades Joseph before them. He is so gorgeous that all the women, overwhelmed with passion for the young man, cut themselves accidentally. They tell their hostess that now they can understand and sympathize with her infatuation with her slave.

It is a funny story. Also, it offers multilayered characterization and deep irony, with a narrative voice that winks at the reader, in on the joke. I wondered if perhaps I was wrong. The Qur'an was not the dour writing I had expected.

In the Introduction I wrote of what drew me to the Qur'an. Muslims claim that any open-minded examination of the Qur'an will render its uniqueness apparent and give incontrovertible proof of its divine origin. However, if one reads the Qur'an in translation, beginning with the first sura, the result will be disappointing. One can easily get lost in the details and the strangeness of first encounter. After reading the first sura, a brief prayer, the second sura, Al-Bakara, overwhelms. It is the longest sura of the Qur'an, and it jumps to many different subjects. The eyes of the average reader will likely glaze over and miss the essentials.

Reading the Qur'an in English translation does not seem adequate as a means to access the Qur'an's sublimity. The difference between the Qur'an in translation and the Qur'an in its original Arabic is so profound that Muslims usually do not call an English version a translation but rather an interpretation. The importance of the Qur'an in Arabic to Muslims is much greater than the comparative importance for Jews and Christians of the original languages of their scriptures. So, I learned Arabic. I do not know it well enough to speak, unfortunately, but I can read the Qur'an with a good dictionary. Muslims are indeed correct—The Qur'an in Arabic is nuanced and beautiful. One

notices details, features that do not easily translate. As just one example, the last line in a given sura almost always ends in a rhyme. This and much else is lost in English renderings.

However, reading the Qur'an in Arabic was not sufficient. I had to somehow approach the experience of the Qur'an like a Muslim. Reaching for that experience, I memorized Surat-al-Najm and Surat-Abasa when I began my research on those suras. Having memorized them, I then learned to chant the suras using a program I found on the internet. At first my chanting was halting and difficult, but after a while it became effortless, almost unconscious. I experienced these sacred words flowing freely out of my mouth in the ancient rhythm and cantillation. Then I got it. Or at least I got the beginning of it because I experienced the special power of the Qur'an. The impact of people over the centuries chanting the same verses in communities throughout the world adds weight to the words. When I chanted those verses, I found that I was not alone. I joined a mighty river made up of all the people who chanted the same sura before me and were chanting it even as I did. I was only able to go ankle-deep in that river, but I felt the tug of its current. Chanting the Qur'an greatly enriched my understanding of these suras. I began to notice every turn of phrase, every ambiguity and misdirection. It was meditative. It was prayer.

The Qur'an and the Bible are quite dissimilar. Even though I compare them and find many points of commonality, I am still struck by how different they are from each other in tone, style, and intention. Notwithstanding, they both draw from the same mythic pool, or we might say they drink from the same well. It makes little difference to the Muslim community that I am impressed with their Qur'an. But it means a great deal to me.

And now that I have come to the end of my book, I realize that I have scarcely begun. <>

## ARTHUR DANTO'S PHILOSOPHY OF ART: ESSAYS by Noël Carroll [Series: Philosophy of History and Culture, Brill, 9789004468351]

For over thirty years, Arthur Danto was the most important art critic and philosopher of art and aesthetics in the English-speaking world. **ARTHUR DANTO'S PHILOSOPHY OF ART: ESSAYS** provides a comprehensive and systematic view of his philosophy and criticism by Noël Carroll, Distinguished Professor of the Philosophy of Art, CUNY and himself a former journalist specializing in arts criticism. Danto's writings attracted and still attracts diverse audiences, including aestheticians, artists, art critics, historians, and art lovers. In this book they will find his major themes not only analyzed in depth but also discussions of his political significance, views on history, cinema and more.

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Excerpt: In nineteen hundred and eighty-one I returned to graduate school in philosophy with the desire to specialize in the philosophy of art. That was also the year of the publication of *The Transfiguration of the Commonplace* by Arthur Danto.<sup>1</sup> It was *the* book to study – the gold standard of the philosophy of art among my fellow graduate students and me. Although Danto had written seminal essays in the field of the philosophy of art prior to the publication of *The Transfiguration of the Commonplace*, until nineteen eighty one, Danto was only a part time aesthete; he was also a metaphysician, an epistemologist, a philosopher of history and a historian of philosophy, among other things. But the *Transfiguration of the Commonplace* marked his transition into becoming a full-time philosopher of art, producing, by now, the larger half of his books in the field of aesthetics. That productivity, moreover, coincided with my own professional career as a philosopher, a career that has been stimulated throughout by Arthur Danto.

A number of my core ideas are variations on Danto's – some of whose deviations from his versions I suspect he does not approve. Nevertheless, studying Danto closely was essential to my evolution as a philosopher over nearly forty years, as it has been for others, including my own students.

As a result of this close engagement with Danto's work, I have often had occasion to write about it. Sometimes, these articles have been the result of panel discussions which I had the good luck to share with Danto at various professional meetings. Frequently, the publication of a new book by Danto led me to reconsider his oeuvre from a novel perspective. In time, I accumulated quite a collection of articles on Danto, enough in fact to make a book. And that is what you are now reading – a collection of my articles on Arthur Danto's philosophy of art, including a brief appendix addressing two essays in his last book *What Art Is*.

This collection is intended to provide an overview of Danto's contributions to the philosophy of art, while also attempting to take into consideration the relations of his art criticism to his philosophy and vice-versa. As major new developments in Danto's philosophy of art emerged, I attempted to take note of them. In this respect, this book could be seen as the journal of an avid Danto-watcher. However, the book is not a desultory chronicle, since I am constantly concerned with charting the relationships between the major developments in Danto's philosophy of art.

I have also included essays on Danto's approach to criticism, on the consequences of his approach for politics, his views on cinema, on history, on the ramifications of his philosophy of art history for dance, and a view of his style of writing.



Danto's work in the philosophy of art heralded a decisive break with reigning philosophical fashions. Before Danto's earliest endeavors in the philosophy of art, a moratorium on the attempt to define art had been declared by a number of philosophers influenced by Ludwig Wittgenstein. Even Monroe Beardsley, the dean of American philosophers of art of the period, in his landmark treatise *Aesthetics*, refrained from proffering a definition of art, despite the fact that he clearly had one within his reach.

However, in nineteen hundred and sixty four at a presentation during the Eastern Division meetings of the American Philosophical Association Danto gave a paper entitled "The Artworld" (also published in 1964 in *The Journal of Philosophy*), which began to turn the tide against Neo-Wittgensteinian aesthetics.<sup>2</sup> Although not proposing a complete analysis of the criteria for art status, "The Artworld" did argue powerfully for an atmosphere of art theory and history as a necessary condition for art status.

Not only was "The Artworld" important for rejuvenating the project of defining art. Danto's strategy for carrying it off was also influential. In what was to become for Danto a life-long meditation on Andy Warhol's *Brillo Box*, it came to Danto that whatever decided whether or not a candidate was art, it would not be something that could be detected by the naked eye. That is, since Warhol's *Brillo Box* is an art work whereas everyday, identically looking Brillo cartons are not, that which won *Brill Box* art status was not something that could be eyeballed. That is, it could not be a manifest property of the art work.

This insight was important in a number of respects. Previous attempts to define art, such as the representational theory, the expression theory, formalism, and the aesthetic theory of art all relied upon searching for the essence of art in terms of something that could be manifested perceptually in experience – like significant form. Danto's argument that what made art *art* was indiscernible, thus pinpointing the mistake upon which millennia of art theorizing had been predicated, while also turning philosophers onto a more promising direction of inquiry.

At the very least, this encouraged many thinkers to wonder about what in the context of the practices of art enfranchised some objects as art works. George Dickie developed this in terms of what he initially called the institution of the art world. Richard Wollheim talked about the art world as a form of life. However, even where philosophers of art characterized the decisive art world context for the enfranchisement of art in ways differently than Danto did, they owed the expansion of art theory to a wider field of considerations to Danto. And, as well, the method of deploying thought experiments involving an array of perceptually indiscernible counterparts that nevertheless strike us as belonging to contrasting categories – such as art works and real things – while a signature technique of Danto's, also became important element in the workaday tool-kit of every practicing aesthetician.

Danto has not only been a pioneer in the philosophy of art through his re-invigoration of the question of the essence of art. He has also re-inspired interest in the philosophy of art history. In a daring conjecture, reminiscent of Hegel, Danto has argued that art history has come to an end, a thesis that requires careful parsing, as you will see in the pages to come. This claim, it will be argued, has a crucial role to play in the defense of Danto's philosophy of art while also providing a foundation for the kind of art critic Danto became.

That is, on the one hand, the end of art thesis is an attempt to indemnify Danto's essentialist theory of art from the greatest nemesis of such theories – the future from whence counterexamples never dreamt of by essentialist philosophers hurtle from with devastating effect. But, if Danto is right, and

art history has come to an end, then his essentialist theorizing has nothing to fear from what will be. There will be nothing new under the sun; theoretically, it is dusk, and Minerva may take wing.

On the other hand, the end of art thesis played further roles in Danto's approach to art. It served as an argument that vindicated his particular practice of art criticism. According to the end of art thesis, with respect to art, we live in post-historical times. There is no overarching agenda that is first and foremost in the minds of ambitious artists as the program of the self-definition of art was said to be during the period of Modernism, as understood by people like Clement Greenberg and Michael Fried. Instead, each artist is free to pursue her own projects. Ours is an era of pluralism. Moreover, pluralism in art making calls for pluralism in art criticism – that is, for art critics who are open to many different kinds of artistic aspirations and who are committed to identifying what each art work is about on its own terms on the way to assisting audiences in appreciating the ways in which the artist in question embodies that which the art work is about. And, of course, that is exactly the kind of criticism Arthur Danto practices. In short, he is precisely the type of critic the art world needs, if the end of art thesis is true.

Because Danto is a pluralist, he has a certain flexibility in responding to political art not shared by many of the most ambitious art critics who were and are his peers – the Modernist art critics and the Politicized Post Modernists art critics. Since Danto accepts that art works can be about something other than the reflexive critique or the self-definition of art, he can countenance explicitly political art – and even implicitly political art – as perfectly legitimate. Alternatively, unlike Politicized Post Modernists, he does not have to measure the worth of each artwork in terms of the contribution it makes or fails to make to the struggle against capitalism and the consciousness debauching semiotics of consumerism. Danto's pluralism allows that art can be political or not, and that there are political projects beyond only the putatively titanic conflict between progressives and capitalism.

My first chapter – “Danto, Art, and History” – derives from my comments on the occasion of Danto's delivery of the Trilling Lecture at Columbia University. This essay sets out a hypothesis about the relationship between Danto's philosophy of art and his philosophy of art history. The idea is not only that Danto's philosophy of art indemnifies his philosophy of art in the way suggested earlier. The philosophy of art history also sets the stage for Danto's arrival on the scene as the successor to Andy Warhol. Warhol shows that the essence of art needs to be stated in terms of something indiscernible to the naked eye. Danto is ready and able to say what that something is.

This chapter also addresses a tension within Danto's philosophy. It points out that the kind of philosophy of art history involved in announcing the end of art is, strictly speaking, at odds with the analytical philosophy of history that Danto developed in a book with that title. For, in his *Analytical Philosophy of History*, Danto argued that the historian cannot know that some historical process is over, unless she is at a sufficient temporal remove from it.<sup>3</sup> Yet, Danto is in the thick of the course of events he deigns to declare done.

The next essay – “Danto, Style, and Intention” – discusses the essay that is, perhaps, Danto's single best known, “The Artworld.” In this piece, I examine the notion of the style-matrix that Danto introduced in “The Artworld” and question whether it is consistent with what Danto contends about artistic intentions in other works such as *The Transfiguration of the Commonplace*.

“Essence, Expression, and History: Danto's Philosophy of Art” overlaps with the first chapter to some extent; however, it has a decidedly different emphasis, since it spends much more time

critically laying out and questioning the theory of art presented in *The Transfiguration of the Commonplace*.

With Danto's publication of his book, *After the End of Art*, he modifies his theory of art. In "Danto's New Definition of Art and the Problem of Art Theories," I explore the changes in his philosophy of art and argue that his new theory is not up to doing the work he assigns it – namely, to cut the difference between art works and real things.

In "The End of Art?" my aim is to work out Danto's end of art thesis as exactly as possible and to locate the points at which I think the argument falters. The end of art thesis is also examined in my next essay – "Danto, the End of Art, and the Orientational Narrative." In this essay, I return to the criticism that Danto's philosophy of art history contradicts his philosophy of history. But then I go on to suggest that Danto's own philosophy of history may be too narrow in its construal of the function of historical narratives. For, there are not only what might be called scientific narratives; there are also ones I call orientational or practical narratives. Moreover, Danto's end of history thesis, while unacceptable as an example of a scientific narrative, may be charitably reconstrued as an orientational narrative that possesses the sort of legitimacy that belongs to the genre of practical narratives.

"Danto and the Problem of Beauty" takes up the issue of Danto's last through-written treatise in aesthetics, *The Abuse of Beauty*. In this article I attempt to show why Danto needs to confront the issue of beauty, given his theory of art, and then I go on to assess the degree to which his account of artistic beauty succeeds in what it needs to accomplish.

"Danto, the End of Art and the Orientational Narrative" concludes with the idea that Danto's story about the end of art can be read as propaedeutic to his pluralistic brand of art criticism. The end of art thesis, in other words, paves the way for his pluralism. In "Danto, his Philosophy of Art and Critical Practice" I attempt to show the relations of Danto's criticism not only to his philosophy of art history but also to his definition of art. In a manner of speaking, his art criticism, I claim, "falls out" of his definition of art. Nevertheless, I also argue that certain of the assertions that Danto makes about his criticism, including his evasion of evaluation, are unsustainable.

The discussion of Danto's critical practice naturally leads to a discussion of the political dimension of his approach to art, given the large amount of political art and criticism that emerges in the period that Danto becomes one of the leading art critics. In "Danto and the Political Re-Enfranchisement of Art" I point out that Danto's theory of art, in contrast to Modernism and the aesthetic theory of art, neatly accommodates the possibility of taking political art seriously rather than supposing that politics and art combine as incongruously as oil and water. And then in "Danto, Pluralism, and Politics" I specify Danto's stance toward the political in art. I maintain that in opposition to Modernists, Danto can appreciate the political dimension of art works, while, at the same time, not forcing every artwork into the one-size-fits-all ideological rack that the Politicized Post Modernists endorse.

Danto's philosophy and criticism has excited interest far beyond the seminar rooms of philosophy departments and even the groves of academe. Artists, art writers, and art lovers find Danto's work on art compelling, since Danto's insights at one level of generality or about one art form can often shed light elsewhere. In "Judson Dance Theater, and the Philosophy of Dance History after Danto" I suggest a way in which Danto's philosophy of art history – which is stated primarily in terms of painting – can be extrapolated in ways that partially reinforce Danto's theory while simultaneously enriching our understanding of dance history.

In “Arthur Danto Goes to the Movies” and “Warhol’s *Empire*” I look at Danto’s philosophy of art in relation to cinema. In “Danto’s Philosophy of History,” I examine Danto’s conception of narrative, a view that is so essential to both his aesthetics and his criticism.

The penultimate chapter – “Danto’s Comic Vision: Philosophical Method, Literary Style” – attempts to take the measure of Danto as a thinker and a man by examining his style of writing. This essay focuses on Danto as an author with a distinctive philosophical and literary style. That style, I maintain, is essentially comic. As is well known, Danto’s preferred literary device is the proliferation of indiscernibles. Danto adores inventing indiscernible counterparts and then exploring their ramifications at length. But this recalls the recurring comic strategy of creating structurally ambiguous situations – as when two sets of identical twins are strolling around Ephesus unbeknownst to themselves and others. The comic possibility of a comedy of errors, in other words, is of a piece at the level of literary style with Danto’s commitment to the philosophical method of indiscernibles.

Thus, Danto’s writing style at once expresses the clarity and joyfulness that make Danto Danto. I conclude with “The Age of Danto,” a brief attempt at characterizing the coherence of his overall aesthetical project, emphasizing the unity of his philosophy of art and his criticism while also remarking upon its suitability as theory and practice for our times.

This is *not* a through-written book. The essays collected here are stand-alone articles. The book is organized with an eye to the reader who may be interested in this or that aspect and/or stage in the development of Danto’s project. One can dip into this collection anywhere; each article will contain the background information necessary to make this possible. Thus, there is unavoidably some repetition from article to article as is required to make Danto’s recurring premises clear as new topics are broached. This, of course, is a function of the fact that most of these articles were published as responses as Danto’s thinking about art headed toward new vistas. The advantage of this feature of the book is that it allows the reader to sample topics without having to read everything that precedes the subject that concerns her.

Interest in Danto ranges across disciplines and practices. Readers with many different interests can use this book. One can, for example, gain a comprehensive account of Danto’s view of beauty or of criticism by reading the relevant articles rather than the whole book, because they are stand-alone articles. This makes the book especially useful to libraries where students, professors, art practitioners, and art lovers from diverse fields can focus on their own concerns by simply turning to an article that addresses their interests.

At the same time, this collection presents a systematic overview of Danto’s philosophy of art, showing how the parts fit together, while also tracking recurring problems.

Danto himself attracted admirers from diverse communities including not only philosophers of art and philosophers of history, but artists, art critics, and art historians as well as art enthusiasts in general and fans of Danto’s criticism in particular. I hope that this volume meets those various interests by addressing the variety of interests in stand-alone articles that speak to readers from a gamut of varied backgrounds. <>

## **SCIENTISTS AND POETS #RESIST** edited by Sandra L. Faulkner and Andrea England [Series: Personal/Public Scholarship, Brill Sense, 9789004418806]

**SCIENTISTS AND POETS #RESIST** is a collection of creative nonfiction, personal narrative, and poetry. This volume is a conversation between poets and scientists and a dialogue between art and science. The authors are poets, scientists, and poet-scientists who use the seven words—"vulnerable," "entitlement," "diversity," "transgender," "fetus," "evidence-based" and "science-based"—banned by the Trump administration in official Health and Human Service documents in December 2017 in their contributions. The contributors use the seven words to discuss their work, reactions to their work, and the creative environment in which they work. The resulting collection is an act of resistance, a political commentary, a conversation between scientists and poets, and a dialogue of collective voices using banned words as a rallying cry— **SCIENTISTS AND POETS #RESIST**—a warning that censorship is an issue connecting us all, an issue requiring a collective aesthetic response. This book can be read for pleasure, is a great choice for book clubs, and can be used as a springboard for reflection and discussion in a range of courses in the social sciences, education, and creative writing.

### Reviews Advance Praise for **SCIENTISTS AND POETS #RESIST**

"This collection of high quality creative nonfiction, poetry, and personal narrative is not only an act of resistance, but an act of hope. Reading the dialogue between scientists and poets centered on seven words banned by the Trump administration in official Health and Human Service documents gave me a deeper understanding of the effect of censorship and tyranny on the work, personal lives, and identities of scientists, poets, and scientist-poets and how they are engaged in resistance. The book made me feel more empowered in my own resistance through engagement in social scientific – Pamela J. Lannutti, PhD, author of *Experiencing Same-Sex Marriage: Individuals, Couples, Social Networks*

"**SCIENTISTS AND POETS #RESIST** is an act of emboldened literary and intellectual rebellion against the overt censorship and banning of seven words by the dystopian dictator in chief in the reality TV show of our current America— vulnerable, entitlement, diversity, transgender, fetus, evidence-based, and science-based. This anthology is an impassioned cry against this censorship, a defensive strike for the protection of language, rallying together is an amalgamation of written resistance with the seven words scattered in boldface defiance throughout, like embers of separate flames joining together into one fire. With sparks that provoke self-and societal-reflection resistance poets and thinkers thought when someone attempted to ban our **SCIENTISTS AND POETS #RESIST**, editors Sandra L. Faulkner and Andrea England, have created a text that is by turns lament, manifesto and blueprint for how to live a life of compassion and integrity. say them, not only write them, but use them—to theorize, hypothesize, narrate and imagine expertise and understanding. The richly textured work in these pages, written by poets and scientists, sometimes collaboratively, evokes a painful moment in our national story, but creates within that moment a space of possibility. They remind us that we need to start somewhere in order to get anywhere will you start, and what will you – Sheila Squillante, Director, MFA Program in Creative Writing and assistant professor of English at Chatham University

"When the Trump administration banned the use of seven words in documents—words pointedly related to gender, abortion access, and science—they went beyond merely trying to frame a public discussion according to their own agenda: it is one thing to identify preferred language, this

anthology demonstrate, openly and often painfully, the day-to-day necessity of the words this administration seeks to suppress. This is a crucial text. – Philip Memmer, author of Pantheon

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### Expressive Writing Paradigm: An Experiment in Righting by Jessica Moore

Thank you for participating in this writing study. Please follow the instructions written below over the next four days. Your writing is confidential and will not be re(a)d by anyone but you.

"Over the next four days, take 15 minutes each day to write about your deepest thoughts and emotions. Find a place where you will not be disturbed. Write continuously without interruption. Write only for yourself and don't worry about spelling or grammar. Really let go and explore. You might link your writing to the past, present, or future, or who you have been, who you are now, or who you would like to be. The only rule is that once you begin writing, continue to do so until time is up."

#### Day 1: Denial [#fakenews]

Take 15 minutes today to avoid all of your thoughts and emotions. If you have informed thoughts or heightened emotions, keep them to yourself because no one cares. Overburden yourself so that you will not be disturbed; stay busy. Clean and organize your disgusting home, improve the deficiencies of your body, purchase new and improved feelings. Right continuously without interruption with no consideration for your own desires. Never let go and explore. Doing so might prompt you to become aware and disrupt your psychosocial internment. Once you shut out all thoughts and emotions, continue to do so even when time is up.

#### Day 2: Anger [8 U.S. Code § 1531 § 18.5.19.9.19.20]

Take 15 minutes to right your deepest thoughts and emotions. Find a place where you will not be disturbed by diversity, solidarity, or the nationless. Right continuously without interruption. Right and don't worry about science or evidence. Let go of your desire for healthcare; you are not worthy. You might link your righting to the past, present, or future, or the fetus you once were, the living soul you are now, or who you would like to become as long as you are not transgender. Once you begin righting, continue to do so until you arrive at a wall.

#### Day 3: Bargaining [Writes]

Take back 15 vulnerable minutes to right your deepest thoughts and emotions. Find places you will disturb the status quo. Write continuously without interruption from those attempting to shut you up. Right for diversity and the vulnerable, and leverage the power of language to speak your truth. Let art and science be companions of comfort. You might link your writing to the past, present, or future, or who people wanted you to be, who you are now, or who you aspire to become. Once you begin resisting, the writing will become increasingly effortless as you let the rules fade away.

#### Day 4: Depression [ICD-10 F32.5 Full Remission]

Take as little or as much time as you want to write about your deepest thoughts and emotions. Discover places to write where you can just allow yourself to be. Write in spite of the inevitable interruption(s). Write first and foremost for yourself, but recognize the power of your words when you set them free. Let your words fly from the page into shared spaces. You might link your writing to the past, present, or future, or who we have been, who we are now, or who we are becoming. Once you begin writing, continue to do so. Time is never up. Thank you for accepting this self-study. Take a few days off and then come back to reflect on your acts of resistance.

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### To Beat the Banned by Scott Wiggerman

A gob of gel, a glob of goo,  
too young to yet be a fetus.  
I may always stay an embryo,  
content with being a nucleus.  
Too speculative, too vulnerable,  
a bit of squiggle, a snick of squirm,  
like many lives, I'm accidental,  
the hook-up of an egg and sperm.  
Not male, not female, a touch  
of both, which shouldn't be a crime.  
I might be transgender in a clutch  
and create my own paradigm.  
A clot, a curd of diversity,  
I add to myself each day.  
I will be what I want to be,  
not what conservatives say.  
A spit of this, a spot of that,  
afloat in this environment.  
This hydroponic habitat  
exists as my entitlement.  
Facts are always evidence-based  
or else they wouldn't be facts,  
as science is always science-based—  
or are these just means to distract?

<>

## LEO STRAUSS ON DEMOCRACY, TECHNOLOGY, AND LIBERAL EDUCATION by Timothy W. Burns [SUNY series in the Thought and Legacy of Leo Strauss, SUNY 9781438486130]

The first book-length study of Leo Strauss' understanding of the relation between modern democracy, technology, and liberal education.

Liberal democracy is today under unprecedented attack from both the left and the right. Offering a fresh and penetrating examination of how Leo Strauss understood the emergence of liberal democracy and what is necessary to sustain and elevate it, **LEO STRAUSS ON DEMOCRACY,**

**TECHNOLOGY, AND LIBERAL EDUCATION** explores Strauss' view of the intimate (and troubling) relation between the philosophic promotion of liberal democracy and the turn to the modern scientific-technological project of the "conquest of nature." Timothy W. Burns explicates the political reasoning behind Strauss' recommendation of reminders of genuine political greatness *within* democracy over and against the failure of nihilistic youth to recognize it. Elucidating what Strauss envisaged by a liberally-educated subpolitical or cultural-level aristocracy—one that could elevate and sustain liberal democracy—and the roles that both philosophy and divine-law traditions should have in that education, Burns also lays out Strauss' frequent (though often tacit) engagement with the thought of Heidegger on these issues.

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Excerpt: Leo Strauss is famous for his recovery of classical political philosophy. This does not initially bespeak a friend of democracy. As he himself succinctly puts it, "To speak first of the classics' attitude toward democracy, the premises: 'the classics are good' and 'democracy is good' do not validate the conclusion 'hence the classics were good democrats.' It would be silly to deny that the classics rejected democracy as an inferior kind of regime. They were not blind to its advantages. . . . [But] the classics rejected democracy because they thought that the aim of human life, and hence of social life, is not freedom but virtue." There are to be sure, as he frequently noted, differences between classical democracy, which was, owing to economic scarcity, inevitably the rule of the poor and hence the uneducated, and modern democracy, which has far more abundance and which is structured toward greater abundance. Yet modern democracy, which Strauss considered the most decent of the available modern regimes, suffers from a new malady: it is "mass democracy," and as such stands in need of an education that "broadens and deepens" the soul—the very type of education that its dynamic economy of plenty threatens to destroy.

Strauss disagreed, moreover, with a number of his prominent contemporaries, some of them friends—Kruger, Löwith, Voegelin—on the secularization thesis, according to which modern democracy embodied the historically disclosed "truth" of Christianity, the secular manifestation of an advanced moral consciousness, first expressed within Christianity, of the equal dignity of each individual. He argued that modern democracy emerged, rather, through the modern philosophic-scientific project, and has therefore within it the very serious threat to humanity that is posed by technology. In fact, he goes on to argue, after the passage I have quoted, that "the difference between the classics and us with regard to democracy consists exclusively in a different estimate of the virtues of technology." The classics foresaw that "the emancipation of technology, of the arts, from moral and political control . . . would lead to disaster or to the dehumanization of man." It is this concern that predominates in Strauss's analysis of modern democracy.

## Modern Political Thought as Technological Thought

Yet students of Strauss may well be surprised by his claim that the fundamental difference between the ancients and the moderns on democracy rests on the difference in their respective assessments of technology. Given Strauss's attention to political philosophy, one may even be (fairly) inclined to consider that statement (or even to dismiss it) as an exaggeration. In fact, however, Strauss not only

made similar and corroborative statements throughout his work—from his earliest to his latest—but understood technological thinking to be at the very core of modern political philosophy: in its stand toward nature as something to be "conquered" by the increase of human "power," and its shift in human attention away from the political-moral question of the right end or ends of human life to the means to any desired end; in its enlisting of modern science and its attention to efficient causality in the project of conquering nature, including human nature; in its consequent and important obfuscation of the radical difference between the theoretical and practical/political/moral life; and in its promulgation of democratic and liberal political teachings.

That Strauss understood modern science as technological science is clear. In the Hobbes chapter of his first book, *Spinoza's Critique of Religion*, he identifies the spirit of modern "physics" with "technology": the very title of the book's first subsection is "The Spirit of Physics (Technology) and Religion." And, as this section of the work makes clear, he identifies technology with the goal of the conquest of nature. It is a distinctively modern goal, not found in the classics. (Since recent scholarship has presented the recovery of Lucretian Epicurianism as playing a decisive role in the birth of modernity,<sup>1</sup> it is worth noting that, as Strauss later made clear, he included Lucretius among the classics and hence as quite distinct from the modern, technological thinkers: "For Lucretius, happiness can be achieved only through contentment with the satisfaction of the natural pleasures, no rushing out, no conquest of nature, glory, domination, power; or even charitable technology—technology inspired by the desire to improve the human lot. There is a very radical difference.")

That Strauss saw the moderns' disposition toward technology as decisive for at least one modern political regime is also clear. Readers of Strauss are bound to be familiar with his statements concerning technology's effect on the prospects, not indeed of democracy, but of modern tyranny. In his "Restatement on Xenophon's Hiero," for example, he states:

Present-day tyranny, in contradistinction to classical tyranny, is based on the unlimited progress in the "conquest of nature" which is made possible by modern science, as well as on the popularization or diffusion of philosophic or scientific knowledge. Both possibilities—the possibility of a science that issues in the conquest of nature and the possibility of the popularization of philosophy or science—were known to the classics. (Compare Xenophon, *Memorabilia* I.1.15 with Empedocles, fr. 111; Plato, *Theaetetus* 180c7—d5.) But the classics rejected them as "unnatural," i.e., as destructive of humanity.

Seven years later, in *Natural Right and History*, one finds the same focus, in the difference between the ancients and the moderns, on technology's effect on the prospects of universal tyranny:

The world state presupposes such a development of technology as Aristotle could never have dreamed of. That technological development, in its turn, required that science be regarded as essentially in the service of the "conquest of nature" and that technology be emancipated from any moral and political supervision. Aristotle did not conceive of a world state because he was absolutely certain that science is essentially theoretical and that the liberation of technology from moral and political control would lead to disastrous consequences: the fusion of science and the arts together with the unlimited or uncontrolled progress of technology has made universal and perpetual tyranny a serious possibility!

Both statements speak to the dark prospect of universal and perpetual tyranny, made possible by technology—a prospect that is, to say the least, as real as ever. What is less often observed are both Strauss's highlighting, in these statements, of the ancients' awareness of the possibility of technology, and their rejection of it on the ground that the use and dissemination of "essentially theoretical" science would be destructive of humanity. And the fundament, according to Strauss, of the ancients' humane stand against both technological science and its dissemination ("enlightenment") is the

certainty that "science is essentially theoretical," and hence the gulf between the theoretical life and the life of praxis.

But this gulf obtains, necessarily, in considerations of the desirability of modern democracy no less than of modern tyranny. That this is so—and that the "destruction of humanity" is a term that encompasses not only our physical destruction—is perhaps no more clearly stated than in the original Walgreen lectures that became *Thoughts on Machiavelli*.<sup>1</sup> Here Strauss again makes explicit that a different disposition toward technology is the decisive difference between the ancients and us on the choice for or against democracy. He presents it as emerging from an "estrangement" or alienation from the fundamental "human situation" of "acting man," that is, of attempted discernment of our end or ends in the world of human action. And he distinguishes his attention to this estranging shift from the alternative tendency to attribute the rise of modernity to a newfound and better understanding of justice. In its stead, he proposes a different assessment of, or disposition toward, technology:

The shift from the perspective of the founder to the intellectual situation of the founder, i.e. the shift from the direct apprehension of the end to the reflection on the efficient cause implies an estrangement from the primary issue, and therewith an estrangement from the human situation, from the situation of acting man. This estrangement is connected with the assumption that chance can be conquered and therefore that the founder of society has not merely to accept the materials of his art, just like the smith and the carpenter, but that his material is almost infinitely malleable. . . . We cannot leave it then at applauding Machiavelli as a fore-runner of modern democracy, but must consider the reason why the tradition which Machiavelli attacked was not democratic. Plato and Aristotle did not lack social justice or a sense of it. They knew as well as we can know them the true principles of justice, the beautiful principles of justice. They saw therefore, as well as we do, that a society ruled by a privileged group is of questionable justice, since social superiority and natural superiority do not necessarily coincide. But it is not hard to see that only men who are truly educated, who are experienced in things noble and beautiful, ought to rule, that average men cannot fulfill this condition, if they are not well-bred from the moment they are born, that such good breeding requires leisure on the part of both the parents and the children, that such leisure requires a reasonable degree of wealth, and that having or lacking wealth is not necessarily proportionate to deserts. The classics accepted this element of arbitrariness, and therefore of injustice, because there was only one alternative to the social scheme they espoused, that alternative being perpetual revolution, which means perpetual chaos. They did not consider another alternative, namely, that all members of society should receive the same good breeding. They did not consider this alternative because they took for granted an economy of scarcity. Not a different understanding of justice, but a different notion of whether an economy of scarcity could or should be replaced by an economy of plenty, separated modern man from the classical thinkers. The problem of scarcity or plenty is however connected with the problem of [whether] the mechanical and other arts should be emancipated from moral and political control, and whether or not theoretical science should lend its supports to the increase of productivity. But increase of productivity means necessarily also increase of destructivity. What separates modern man from the classics is not a different notion of justice, but a different attitude toward technology. We are no longer so certain as we were a short while ago that we have made a decisive progress beyond the classics by taking here a different stand, or that we have chosen wisely.

What here comes again into clear relief is Strauss's understanding of technology as entailing the introduction of theoretical science, and its attention to efficient causation, into the arts. The radical disjunct between theoretical and practical life—which, as we will see, is finally denied by Martin

Heidegger—is a crucial part of Strauss's understanding of technology and hence of the difference between the ancients and the moderns, including their different assessments of democracy.

As Strauss next makes clear in the same talk, he did not consider the move to technology to have been necessary or impelled by a correction of an alleged weakness in philosophic thinking begun by the ancients that found its fuller elaboration or fate in the moderns: "But can we speak here of a choice? Must we not speak rather of a fateful dispensation?" (The implicit confrontation with Heidegger, who viewed technological thinking as the mysterious or fateful dispensation of Being in the West, continues here.) Strauss first, to be sure, makes the case that there was indeed a weakness to classical political philosophy that moved Machiavelli to correct the ancients by introducing an embrace of technology, or conquest of nature:

As I see it, there was only one fundamental difficulty in the political philosophy which Machiavelli attacked. The classics were what is now called conservative, which means fearful of change, distrustful of change. But they knew that one cannot oppose social change without also opposing what is now called technological change as well. Therefore, they did not favor the encouraging of invention, except half-ironically in tyranny. Still, they were forced to make one crucial exception: they had to admit the necessity of encouraging technological invention as regards the art of war. They bowed to the inescapable requirements of defense. By accepting this principle, they might seem to be driven eventually to the acceptance of the hydrogen bomb. This is the only difficulty which could be thought to be an entering wedge for the modern criticism of classical political philosophy, and therefore indirectly also for Machiavelli's criticism. This difficulty might be thought to imply the admission of the primacy of foreign policy.

But as he goes on to argue, it was the strictly speaking unnecessary, unfated enlistment of theoretical science in the artful conquest of nature that was decisive:

It seems to me, however, that the real difficulty arises, not from the admission of the necessity of military invention, but from the use of science for this purpose. Therefore the fundamental issue concerns the character and the function of science. If we were to consider this fundamental issue, I believe we would realize that the classical position is not only thoroughly consistent, but as irrefutable as it has always been.

As this statement suggests, Strauss—again, contra Heidegger—understands technology not as originating with Plato but with Machiavelli; he sees it as born not of a "fateful disposition" of Da-Sein in the West but (as he goes on to argue) of anti-theological ire; as something to be distinguished sharply from the *techne* of the smith or carpenter and his tools (to which Heidegger frequently appeals early in *Being and Time* to elucidate heedful being together with the "world," or our association in and with the surrounding world); as "an estrangement from the situation of acting man," and as consisting not of thinking essentially directed to a "standing reserve of energy," as does Heidegger, but most essentially as the deployment of theoretical science in the conquest of nature.

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## Technology and Democracy

If the classics foresaw that "the emancipation of technology, of the arts, from moral and political control . . . would lead to disaster or to the dehumanization of man," and if it is this concern that predominates in Strauss's analysis of modern democracy, how, specifically, according to Strauss did the modern, essentially technological thought of modernity come to be democratic?



Strauss's account of how it did so begins to become clear in a sketch of the evolution of modern liberal democracy, in its resemblance to and its difference from the classical mixed regime, that Strauss draws in "Liberal Education and Responsibility." The sketch begins as follows:

The modern doctrine starts from the natural equality of all men, and it leads therefore to the assertion that sovereignty belongs to the people; yet it understands that sovereignty in such a way as to guarantee the natural rights of each; it achieves this result by distinguishing between the sovereign and the government and by demanding that the fundamental governmental powers be separated from one another. The spring of this regime was held to be the desire of each to improve his material conditions. Accordingly the commercial and industrial elite, rather than the landed gentry, predominated.

The fully developed doctrine required that one man have one vote, that the voting be secret, and that the right to vote be not abridged on account of poverty, religion, or race.

Few would find fault with this brief description of the modern doctrine of (liberal or constitutional) democracy. But even as Strauss found "unhesitating loyalty to a decent constitution and even to the cause of constitutionalism," as he says later in the same essay, to be a requirement of political "wisdom," he found liberal democracy to be highly problematic. As he continues:

Governmental actions, on the other hand, are to be open to public inspection to the highest degree possible, for government is only the representative of the people and responsible to the people. The responsibility of the people, of the electors, does not permit of legal definition and is therefore the most obvious crux of modern republicanism.

Especially in light of the fact that he begins the same essay by explaining that "responsibility" is the contemporary (and degraded) substitute for "virtue," the "crux" to which he refers here initially comes to sight as the problem of the maintenance, in modern liberal regimes, of public-spiritedness or sense of duty in the people, who exercise sovereignty in liberal democracy—under the dominant activities of its new "commercial and industrial elite." But Strauss does not simply or for long identify the maintenance of public spiritedness among the people as the crux of the problem. Rather, he initially presents that as the crux of the problem as it was perceived at a certain period (the late eighteenth and early nineteenth century) by friends of the modern democracy that had come into being. The deeper (and earlier) problem, as he subsequently suggests, is tied up with the original, anti-biblical intention of the founders of the modern technological-scientific enterprise and its goal of "enlightenment" of the people. Owing to developments within the "stupendous enterprise" of modern philosophy-science, which, Strauss will argue, was from the start behind modern democratization, a "race" to "enlighten" the people before it came into its sovereignty replaced what had appeared, subsequently, to some to be the problem of educating the people in public-spirited virtue. The late, open admission of modern science that it is (and ever was) incapable of providing any moral guidance to anyone, but (however increasingly efficient and specialized) is in fact "value-free," has finally had the result that what most characterizes our present situation is "hardly more than the interplay of mass taste with high grade but strictly speaking unprincipled efficiency." Technology, in its anti-theological end, causes democracy to emerge out of modern philosophy, and has resulted in the highly problematic, deeply degraded contemporary situation in which we find ourselves.

We have alluded to Strauss's implicit disagreement with Heidegger on the source of technology and the best disposition towards it. The more we examine Strauss's presentation of liberal democracy and technology, the more Strauss's debt to Heidegger and break with Heidegger will come into focus. We note for now that, in a talk titled "Existentialism," Strauss indicates that his concern about

the degradation of humanity posed by technology is one that he had in common with Heidegger. And in a letter to Heidegger student Hans-Georg Gadamer, Strauss goes so far as to express his agreement with Heidegger's characterization of our present situation as that of "the world night":

It is strange that there should be a difference between us where you take a stand against Heidegger and I stand for him. I shall state this difference in a way which probably does not do full justice to you. I believe that you will have to admit that there is a fundamental difference between your post-historicist hermeneutics and pre-historicist (traditional) hermeneutics; it suffices to refer to your teaching regarding the work of art and language which at least as you present it is not in any way a traditional teaching; this being so, it is necessary to reflect on the situation which demands the new hermeneutics, i.e. on our situation; this reflection will necessarily bring to light a radical crisis, an unprecedented crisis and this is what Heidegger means by the approach of the world night. Or do you deny the necessity and the possibility of such a reflection?

That Strauss's work is everywhere a "stand toward" Heidegger, and therefore deeply informed by the work of Heidegger, is clear from the introductory remark that he makes prior to one of his rare published confrontations with that work (and even a possible invitation to dialogue with it): "As far as I can see," says Strauss, "[Heidegger] is of the opinion that none of his critics and none of his followers has understood him adequately. I believe that he is right, for is the same not also true, more or less, of all outstanding thinkers? This does not dispense us, however, from taking a stand toward him, for we do this at any rate implicitly; in doing it explicitly, we run no greater risk than exposing ourselves to ridicule and perhaps receiving some needed instruction."

But unlike Heidegger, who likewise identifies the problem of technology and utilitarian thinking as a great threat to humanity, Strauss does not call for a "new thinking," characterized above all by an authentic and resolute, angst-induced attunement to one's true, "thrown" situation as disclosed in full awareness of death, to replace or directionally supplement the technological thinking that, Heidegger alleges, became more dominant in modern philosophy but has its roots in Plato's alleged failure to grasp the "ontological difference" and the need, in the light of it, to become attuned to an angst that makes possible an authentic life of being-toward-death. Strauss instead finds Plato and the other ancient political philosophers unflinchingly aware of their mortality and the passing away of all human things and of its significance, and for that very reason as drawing a sharp distinction between philosophy and political-moral thinking, with religion and ancestral tradition having an important and admirable role in the latter and serving as both a bulwark for human excellence and a crucial interlocutor with philosophy. And unlike the nihilists, both of Germany in the 1930s and of today, whose repulsion at what they saw as the immoral and amoral character of modern society led them to will the destruction of liberal democracy, he saw political-moral thinking and action, and even greatness, as manifestly still possible in modern democratic regimes—with the example of Winston Churchill being most important. The modest political recommendation that Strauss offers for our time, a time dominated by the technology of modern science, is faithful adherence to a liberal democratic constitutionalism whose tone and direction may be provided by a subpolitical "aristocracy within democracy," one whose thinking is informed by both serious religious education in one's ancestral traditions and study of the Great Books.

The four writings in which Strauss most directly addressed these matters are "What Is Liberal Education?," "German Nihilism," "Liberal Education and Responsibility," and "The Liberalism of Classical Political Philosophy." Looking first at the two works on liberal education and then at "German Nihilism" will enable us to understand the meaning of an "aristocracy within democracy" that Strauss intended as the best means to sustaining and improving the regime of which he considered himself not a flatterer but a friend and ally, and the recovery of the non-historicist

political reasoning that would make this possible. Having examined these works, we will turn to the fourth, Strauss's extended review of Eric Havelock's *The Liberal Temper in Greek Politics*. Havelock attempted in his work to find in the classics—in Plato's work and in the pre-Socratics—a buried ground for contemporary liberalism and technology, over and against the "moral absolutism," begun by Plato, that he saw as a threat to these. By examining the classical works on which Havelock's study relies, Strauss brings to light the reason for the ancients' stand against the autonomy of technology, for their support for healthy ancestral traditions, and for the art of writing that was required by their insight into the true character of moral-political life, in its opposition to the philosophic life. In the course of doing so, he extends his critique of Heidegger and his project, which he had begun in its explicit form in *Natural Right and History*, even as he indicates some limited agreement with him on the matter of "rootedness."

Before approaching these writings, I offer the following caveat. Among the thinkers whose words Strauss examines in these essays is John Stuart Mill, who likewise devoted attention to the problem of education within modern democracy, and who likewise suggested the reading of the classics as part of liberal education. Mill did so in part because the works of the classics, unlike most works written in modern democracy, were, in his words, "not written in haste," but rather with each word carefully chosen. The seventeen-page essay of Strauss in which this quotation from Mill is given was written in response to a request for an elaboration on two sentences from "What Is Liberal Education?" It thus permits us to see, among other things, how weighted is Strauss's own writing, and so to see the careful reading that is needed to understand such careful writing. While what follows can claim to be no more than a preliminary study of these four works, I invite readers—friends and foes alike of Strauss—to join me in this preliminary effort with this need in mind. <>

## **DEMOCRATIC AND AUTHORITARIAN POLITICAL SYSTEMS IN TWENTY-FIRST-CENTURY WORLD SOCIETY, VOL. I: DIFFERENTIATION, INCLUSION, RESPONSIVENESS** edited by Anna L. Ahlers, Damien Krichewsky, Evelyn Moser, Rudolf Stichweh [Global Studies & Theory of Society, Transcript Publishing, 9783837651263]

What seemed unthinkable after the end of the Cold War and the triumph of liberalism has become reality today: the democratic world society of the 21st century is threatened by illiberal and autocratic political models. The state is no longer an instrument of a dominating stratum trying to control society. It must include individuals, produce valued outputs, know the complexity of society, and accept or deny the autonomy of other specialized function-systems. The authors analyze these political systems of a functionally differentiated world society and argue that they are completely novel because they incessantly adapt to the process of functional differentiation. To this end, they define structural core characteristics of modern policy, such as the political inclusion of everyone as a reaction to individualism; the complexity of polities arising from internal differentiation; and the increasing political decision-making handed to experts and autonomous organizations.

This book is about the radical novelty of modern polities in a functionally differentiated world society. Premodern states were at the apex of a stratified, hierarchical society. They dominated society and all its groups and strata. Modern polities have to be understood through the ecology of relations among different function systems. They have to find and incessantly redefine their place in

society. They produce decisions that are collectively binding, but in preparing these decisions experience constraints and knowledge deficiencies that are related to the complexity of a functionally differentiated society. The book concentrates on six analytical perspectives that reflect how modern polities are embedded into 21st century society.

These perspectives are: the concept of inclusion and the inclusion revolution constitutive of modern polities; the internal differentiation of polities that endows them with an unprecedented complexity; the fact that polities do not know anything about society and the ways in which they compensate for this; representation and responsiveness as strategies to reconnect with society; the self-restriction of some polities that brings about ever new autonomous expert organizations; the symmetrical rise of autocracies and democracies as the two modern variants of political regimes.

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5. Expansion through Self-Restriction: Functional Autonomy in Modern Democracies by Evelyn Moser

6. The Bipolarity of Democracy and Authoritarianism and Its Societal Origins by Rudolf Stichweh and Anna L. Ahlers

### Biography of Authors

This book reports on the work of a research group that was established at the University of Bonn in 2013. This group 'Comparative Research on Democracies' is a part of the 'Forum Internationale Wissenschaft' in Bonn, an interdisciplinary research institute that focuses on the functional differentiation of contemporary world society. In the Forum we created three departments for the study of contemporary religion, for research on the global system of science and for research on the world polity.

In our days, there are many thousands of academic research institutes in the world. But the 'Forum Internationale Wissenschaft' appears to be the only one among them that truly concentrates on the 'functional differentiation of world society' as its major research problem. This special and rare position is for us a challenge and an obligation. In this book - the first of two volumes - we do not run the whole gamut of functional differentiation of society. Instead, we focus on one function system, the world polity, a function system consisting of hundreds of democratic and authoritarian political systems. However, we always write from a perspective that seeks to compare function systems. In studying features of modern political systems - patterns of internal differentiation, the duality of representation and responsiveness, the dynamics of problem expansion and problem retreat in polities - a comparison to similar dynamics in other function systems is inescapable. Furthermore, many of these characteristics derive from ecological relations among function systems. Thus, though we are primarily interested in polities, we have to understand them on the basis of the relations of the polity to other function systems.

We do not arrive at an adequate understanding of modern polities if we primarily study them as modern transformations of premodern states. Premodern states were at the apex of a stratified, i.e. hierarchical, society. They dominated society and all its groups and strata. In doing this, they constituted the whole of society and included every societal relevance into their domain. Religion

may have made similar and competing demands on society. It was the only other function that could claim the whole of society (including the state) as being part of its domain and subordinate to it. As long as these interpretations were dominant and decisive for societal structure formation, society consisted of the competing claims of two totalizing functions, both of which were monistic, not pluralistic visions of society. This monism embedded into stratification constitutes the radical difference between premodern society and modernity.

Modern polities have to be understood through the ecology of relations among function systems. They have to find and incessantly redefine their place in society. They produce decisions that are collectively binding, but in preparing decisions they experience constraints and knowledge deficiencies that are always related to the complexity of a functionally differentiated society. This book concentrates on six key analytical perspectives that mirror the way modern polities are embedded into the ecology of functionally differentiated world society. In the following, we summarize these six analytical perspectives.

There is, first, inclusion (Ch. 1), which is a universal imperative in all the function systems of world society. They are all based on inclusion revolutions which begin in the eighteenth century and continue into the present. Inclusion is related to the institutionalization of the individual as one of the core inventions of modernity that connects locality and globality, structures and beliefs. Polities always have to balance individual and collective inclusion. How they do this shapes the democratic or autocratic or populist regimes they build.

Modern political systems can no longer adequately be described by looking at the apex of a hierarchy. To do so was instructive in the premodern world, but it is instructive no more. Function systems of the modern world achieve their autonomy and identity by building complex patterns of internal differentiation (Ch. 2). The best way to understand a function system is to understand its milieu intérieur (Claude Bernard), that is its internal environment, the practices and imperatives built into it, and the way the system is different from all the systems in its external environments on the basis of the complex reality of its internal environments. To understand autocratic mainland China one needs to study its villages and regions and provinces and cities and the immense multilevel governmental apparatus, the way decision capabilities are distributed in it, and the way decision alternatives are generated and made use of. Another core question is the interrelation between the ongoing internal differentiation of a function system and the processes of differentiation progressing in its external environments.

What is characteristic for political systems and distinguishes the polity from other function systems is that politics is almost never a profession, which can be learned by studying a specific knowledge system (Ch. 3) that - as a scientific or intellectual knowledge system - defines the core of what politics is about. In contemporary society in most world regions exist a profession of law and a profession of medicine and often a professionalization of religious core roles, and even, in the last decades, a certain amount of professionalization of managerial roles in the economy. But there is no profession of politics. The inclusion into political public roles (voters and the public sphere) and political performance roles (political parties and political offices) is independent of professionalization. The inclusion of everyone with equal rights of participation seems to be so important that it conflicts with any professionalization imperative for politics. If one starts from this diagnosis there arises the core question of how political processes organize the access to the knowledge resources they need in order to work on the ever more numerous societal problems that are being redefined as part of the problem set in need of collectively binding decision-making by political institutions. For this they need advisors and experts and other forms of knowledge import.

The study of modern political systems will in one central respect be the study of these forms of knowledge import.

But how does the political system observe society? If modernity no longer has a problem set that defines which problems are the invariable core responsibilities of political systems, one has to find out how political systems select the problems they work on. For this selection process modern political systems make use of two strategies by which they try to affirm and expand their relevance for society. These two strategies are representation and responsiveness (Ch. 4). Representation is based on inclusion which, via votes, petitions, protests and public opinion allows the political system to apprehend the problem perspectives, preferences and interests present in the population. These are then selectively represented in the system. Representation already works in small-scale political systems. But political systems grow in complexity over time. They build an institutional set of their own and this set of political institutions develops diagnostic tendencies regarding relevant societal problems that operate independently of direct inclusion. We call these somehow autonomous diagnoses responsiveness. The path from representation to responsiveness seems to be a general feature of the differentiation histories of function systems: they start as relatively simple machines for the representation of environmental features, only over time do they build much more complex interpretive schemata which demonstrate cognitive autonomy. But the responsiveness of polities is obviously limited, as polities are organized around the fight for power, but not around the search for knowledge.

Besides the power structures, ever more organizations and institutions arise in complex political systems. These institutions and organizations are specialized on functionally defined policy fields and relatively specific problems in those policy fields. Policy fields are obviously near to the functional differentiation of society and they operate as channels for the interaction of the polity and the other function systems of society. The institutions and organizations (central banks, constitutional courts, cartel and patent offices and many others) are often endowed with autonomous competences for collectively binding decision-making. They are functional autonomies (Ch. 5) and as such insulated from power processes, although their decisions can claim the force of collective bindingness, which is only available in a political system. Such autonomous organizations are always expert organizations and the kind of expertise they represent is in most cases near to the problem perspectives of other function systems beyond the polity. The rise of these organizations documents the respect for knowledge which is unavailable or not sufficiently protected in the power processes of political systems, and it documents the respect a democratic polity may build regarding the autonomy of other function systems. Functional autonomies are the structural form through which polities accept the primacy of the functional differentiation of society and operate with self-limitations on the basis of this acceptance.

The inclusion revolution at the beginning of modernity is clearly a democratic revolution. But in most cases this was a slow process, in which mixed forms of government - monarchies, aristocracies, democracies - dominated for most of the 19th century and into the 20th century. At least until 1918 (dissolution of empires as a consequence of WWI) and in some respects until 1960 (final decolonization) the most important states were empires, what implies that different regime types were part of the same empire. Only after 1960 did the modern system of the universality of national and territorial states arise. In this modern system the bipolarity of democracy and authoritarianism (Ch. 6) becomes the dominant regime difference. Authoritarian regimes mostly do not mean the continuing dominance of traditional aristocratic elites. In some respects, autocracies participate in the democratic revolution as most of them call themselves democracies and they affirm the universal inclusion of everyone in the possibilities of participation they offer. The major



differences of democracies and autocracies have to do with the way they react to functional differentiation.

Democracy seems to be the political regime that maximizes the compatibility with functional differentiation. Democracies are receptive towards a plurality of societal values and they limit their Eigenvalues to core values that protect the autonomy of the individual. They create the autonomous institutions analyzed in Ch. 5, and thereby enlarge the social spaces for other function systems and processes of self-organization in other function systems. They identify and fix political problems in open search processes that aim for representation and responsiveness (Ch. 4). Compared to such structures authoritarianism nearly always means the resistance to and a partial negation of functional differentiation. Autocracies realize the renewed dominance of a stratum, an ethnic group or a family/dynasty in politics and society. In other cases, autocracies institutionalize a prevalence of one of the function systems of society over the other functions. This may be religion (theocracies or ideocracies of quasi-religious systems), the economy (technocracy), or the polity itself, if there is a political actor who successfully claims a non-negotiable domination (a political party, the military, a dominant person). These different claims for dominance are often based on non-contingent values.

The research group that produced this book will continue the work on the analytical perspectives presented here and add further perspectives. We prepare a second volume with case studies on Mainland China, Russia, India, the EU and the USA. We have to thank the University of Bonn and its rectors who established and continue to support the 'Forum Internationale Wissenschaft'. <>

## **PRAGMATISM AS ANTI-AUTHORITARIANISM** by Richard Rorty, edited by Eduardo Mendieta, Foreword by Robert B. Brandom [Belknap Press: An Imprint of Harvard University Press, 9780674248915]

The last book by the eminent American philosopher and public intellectual Richard Rorty, providing the definitive statement of his mature philosophical and political views.

Richard Rorty's **PRAGMATISM AS ANTI-AUTHORITARIANISM** is a last statement by one of America's foremost philosophers. Here Rorty offers his culminating thoughts on the influential version of pragmatism he began to articulate decades ago in his groundbreaking *Philosophy and the Mirror of Nature*.

Marking a new stage in the evolution of his thought, Rorty's final masterwork identifies anti-authoritarianism as the principal impulse and virtue of pragmatism. Anti-authoritarianism, on this view, means acknowledging that our cultural inheritance is always open to revision because no authority exists to ascertain the truth, once and for all. If we cannot rely on the unshakable certainties of God or nature, then all we have left to go on—and argue with—are the opinions and ideas of our fellow humans. The test of these ideas, Rorty suggests, is relatively simple: Do they work? Do they produce the peace, freedom, and happiness we desire? To achieve this enlightened pragmatism is not easy, though. Pragmatism demands trust. Pragmatism demands that we think and care about what others think and care about, which further requires that we account for others' doubts of and objections to our own beliefs. After all, our own beliefs are as contestable as anyone else's.

A supple mind who draws on theorists from John Stuart Mill to Annette Baier, Rorty nonetheless is always an apostle of the concrete. No book offers a more accessible account of Rorty's utopia of

pragmatism, just as no philosopher has more eloquently challenged the hidebound traditions arrayed against the goals of social justice.

## Reviews

“We have perhaps the clearest account of how he understood pragmatist thinking as a political undertaking... Provocative and engaging... The array of urgent questions and crises facing our democracy makes one miss Richard Rorty’s voice: insistent, relentlessly questioning, and dedicated to the proposition that we can’t afford to let our democracy fail.”—Chris Lehmann, *New Republic*

“Today, there are few philosophers left whose thoughts are inspired by a unifying vision; there are even fewer who can articulate such a view in terms of a ravishing flow of provocative, but sharp and differentiated, arguments. But rarely anyone can compete with Richard Rorty in summarizing the whole of it in a series of brilliant literary lectures like these.”—Jürgen Habermas

“Richard Rorty was the most iconoclastic and dramatic philosopher of the last half-century. In this final book, his unique literary style, singular intellectual zest, and demythologizing defiance of official philosophy are on full display.”—Cornel West

“A sharp and comprehensive statement of Richard Rorty’s distinctive version of pragmatism, presented with all the wit and vitality typical of his writings. Carefully edited by Eduardo Mendieta, with an illuminating foreword by Robert B. Brandom, this book is invaluable reading for anyone interested in Rorty’s philosophical vision.”—Richard J. Bernstein, *Vera List Professor of Philosophy, The New School for Social Research*

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## Excerpt: Achieving the Enlightenment by Robert B. Brandom

Pragmatism as Anti-Authoritarianism is Richard Rorty's long-lost, last book. Its first English-language publication is an epoch-making event. Written ten years before his death, this volume presents Rorty's final, mature version and vision of his path-breaking pragmatism. Further, it announces a substantially new phase in the development of that view. At its core is a commitment to human self-determination. The principal animating and orienting impulse of pragmatism is now identified as its anti-authoritarianism. Its ultimate goal is our emancipation, both in practice and in theory, from subjection to nonhuman authority. Pragmatism points us at the sort of freedom that consists in humans taking full rational responsibility for our own doings and claimings.

On this conception, pragmatism is an intellectual movement of world-historical significance. Rorty construes pragmatism as aiming at nothing less than a second Enlightenment—as offering what is needed properly to complete the task begun in early modern times by the first Enlightenment. The key to the conceptual division of labor he envisages between the two historical phases of the Enlightenment is the "anti-authoritarianism" of the title—a theoretical and a practical attitude. It is the rejection in both spheres of the traditional understanding of authority and responsibility in terms of subordination and obedience. It is to be replaced by a conception of judging and acting as exercising the authority to undertake commitments that come with a correlative responsibility to justify them, to offer reasons for them that can be assessed by our fellow discursive practitioners.

As Rorty is thinking of it, the great achievement of the original Enlightenment is on the side of ethics. In broadest terms, it is substituting the secular for the sacred in our understanding of the source and nature of our most fundamental obligations. The tradition that the Enlightenment reacted against and recoiled from took normative statuses of authority and responsibility to be independent of the attitudes of those whose statuses they were. Norms were understood as ontologically determined by the objective structure of things, epitomized by the *scala natura*, the Great Chain of Being. That is a hierarchical ontological structure of superiority and subordination, in which superiors have the authority to command and subordinates the responsibility to obey. (It is what determines "My station and its duties," as the title of F. H. Bradley's essay has it.) It is a natural structure with intrinsically normative significance. In its later Christianized form, it is taken to have been instituted by the supernatural fiat of the ultimate superior and authority, God. Thence derives the "divine right of kings," devolved through the various feudal ranks, bottoming out in the righteousness of man's dominion over the beasts. In both forms, those that take the norms to be read off of the natures of things and those that also take those normatively significant natures to be supernaturally ordained, the ultimate source of our responsibilities and obligations lies outside of us, in something non-human, in the way things anyway are, apart from and independently of our practical activities and attitudes. Our job is to conform our attitudes and practices to these normative statuses of superiority and subordination, authority and responsibility, about which we don't have a say.

From the pragmatist point of view that Rorty sees as prefigured by the Enlightenment, both the natural and the supernatural versions of this traditional picture are fetishistic, in Marx's technical sense. They reify what are in fact the products of human practices and project them into the non-human, merely natural or supernatural, world. By contrast, in its finest flowering in social contract theories of political obligation such as those of Hobbes, Locke, and Rousseau, Enlightenment thought grounds normative statuses of authority and responsibility instead in human attitudes and practices of consent, negotiation, and agreement. In seeing this humanizing of the norms governing our practical activity as the core Enlightenment insight, Rorty is at one with Kant's account in his popular essay "*Was Ist Aufklärung?*" For there Kant construes the Enlightenment as announcing the emancipation and coming to maturity of humanity, our casting off our juvenile need for and

dependence on normative tutelage from without, in favor of the adult dignity that consists in ourselves taking responsibility for our ultimate commitments.

In the background of this understanding of the message of the Enlightenment is Kant's account of positive freedom: the freedom to do something one could not otherwise do, as opposed to the negative freedom that consists in freedom from some constraint. Kant understands freedom as autonomy: the authority to bind ourselves (autos) by norms (nomos), to acknowledge and undertake commitments, making ourselves responsible by taking ourselves to be responsible. The resulting constraint of commitments is intelligible as distinctively normative constraint (as opposed to the matter-of-factual constraint of compulsion by greater power) just insofar as it is the result of self-binding. This conception radicalizes what Kant learned from Rousseau's dictum that "obedience to a law one has prescribed for oneself is freedom." For Kant turns Rousseau's definition of freedom into a criterion of demarcation of the genuinely normative. By analyzing normativity in terms of autonomy—a distinctive kind of positive freedom—Kant moves decisively beyond the traditional understanding of normativity in terms of subordination and obedience. Here the central inspiration of the Enlightenment achieves its most explicit self-conscious expression. This articulation of the intimate and ineluctable connection between freedom and genuinely normative bindingness underwrites a distinctive liberal, democratic approach to politics. It shows up as having as its implicit telos that everyone who is bound by a law should have a say in imposing that law: the ideal of universal suffrage, in the sense of according all those bound by (responsible to) laws the authority to make them.

The edifying lesson Rorty sees the Enlightenment as teaching is that fear of God and fealty to His authority are to be replaced by human freedom, self-reliance, and solidarity in the form of individual autonomy on the side of ethics, and social commitment to and participation in liberal political practices and institutions, on the side of politics. Our practices are the real source of our commitments and responsibilities, and those practices should be understood as involving no authority beyond what we institute and exercise by engaging in them. Instead of looking outside of human practice for our ultimate commitments, we are to look to what emerges in conducting the human conversation. Liberal political institutions are to structure that conversation procedurally—in effect, to provide the language in which that conversation takes place. This is anti-authoritarianism on the side of our practical activity. The theme of Pragmatism as Anti-Authoritarianism is that pragmatism should be understood as defined by its commitment to bringing about a second Enlightenment. Its task is to broaden the anti-authoritarian lesson of the first Enlightenment beyond the practical sphere, applying it to the theoretical sphere. It is to be applied not only to ethics and politics, but to epistemology.

Rorty admits that the extension he proposes is not one the philosophers of the original Enlightenment envisaged or endorsed. Early in Lecture 2 of this book he tells us

The anti-authoritarianism which was central to the Enlightenment . . . finds its ultimate expression in the substitution of the kind of fraternal cooperation characteristic of an ideal democratic society for the ideal of redemption from sin. The Enlightenment rationalists substituted the idea of redemption from ignorance by Science for this theological idea, but Dewey and James wanted to get rid of that notion too. They wanted to substitute the contrast between a less useful set of beliefs and a more useful set of beliefs for the contrast between ignorance and knowledge. For them, there was no goal called Truth to be aimed at; the only goal was the ever-receding goal of still greater human happiness.

The Enlightenment's critical rejection of religious obedience was complemented by its constructive endorsement of scientific knowledge. But Rorty sees a crucial analogy between the idea of the

authority of a non-human God over proprieties of practical conduct (what it is good to do) and the idea of the authority of a non-human Reality over proprieties of theoretical belief (what it is good to think and say). As he says in a different version of the lecture given here as Lecture I:

There is a useful analogy to be drawn between the pragmatists' criticism of the idea that truth is a matter of correspondence to the intrinsic nature of reality and the Enlightenment's criticism of the idea that morality is a matter of correspondence to the will of a Divine Being. The pragmatists' anti-representationalist account of belief is, among other things, a protest against the idea that human beings must humble themselves before something non-human, whether the Will of God or the Intrinsic Nature of Reality.

Rorty's idea is that the concept of Reality plays the same invidious role for the pragmatist Enlightenment on the cognitive side that God played for the original Enlightenment on the practical side.

He finds this thought already in the classical American pragmatists. On this conception, their thought is rooted in that of the British Utilitarians of the nineteenth century: Jeremy Bentham, James and John Stuart Mill, and Alexander Bain. The American pragmatists show up as extending their thought from the practical realm, to apply also to the cognitive realm. What is extended is the idea of the relativity of values to human interests—the thought that practical norms are ultimately to be derived from the needs and wants of the desiring beings understood to be subject to those norms. The pragmatists assimilate doxastic, cognitive, theoretical conduct oriented to reality and truth to practical, intentional, value-reflecting conduct oriented to the right and the good, viewing them as different species of a common genus. A bit later in Lecture I Rorty tells us that

what Dewey most disliked about both traditional "realist" epistemology and about traditional religious beliefs is that they discourage us by telling us that somebody or something has authority over us. Both tell us that there is Something Inscrutable, something which claims precedence over our cooperative attempts to avoid pain and obtain pleasure.

At the center of the version of pragmatism Rorty announces in this book is the thought that just as we should be anti-authoritarian in ethics in rejecting the authority of God over the correctness of what we do, we should be anti-authoritarian in epistemology by rejecting the authority of objective reality over the correctness of what we believe. Construed as the non-human locus of this sort of authority, Reality no more exists than God does.

This is a radical idea. It is one thing to emancipate ourselves from practical domination by the patriarchal dictates of what William Blake called "Old Nobodaddy." That is in a certain sense something we can do by coming to suitably redescribe and reconceive ourselves. For what we are freeing ourselves from is a snare powered by a delusion. (Here we can still think of the truth as setting us free.) We have a pretty good idea both of what it is to understand ourselves to live in a God-less world, and even what it is like actually to live in such a world. The same cannot evidently be said about emancipating ourselves from constraint by objective reality.

The ideal of autonomy that sees us as ultimately bound by no moral facts or moral laws we do not ourselves set, or at least acknowledge, is an intelligible and in many ways attractive one. But don't we have to think of ourselves as bound by objective facts and laws of nature whose constraint does not depend at all on our acknowledgment of them? (For Kant, that is the fundamental distinction between constraint by laws, "natural necessity," and constraint by conceptions of laws "practical necessity.") The idea that we could emancipate ourselves from that sort of constraint by any kind of redescription or reconceptualization seems to depend on a kind of magical thinking located somewhere between extremely implausible and just plain crazy.

Of course, that is not the sort of position Rorty is urging on us. Traditionally, the concept of objective reality is called on to play a dual role. As Rorty often says, it is understood to be at once both the cause of sense and the goal of intellect. The first concerns causal relations, the second, normative ones. This fundamental Kantian distinction between norms and causes shapes Rorty's thought throughout his life. He wholeheartedly endorses the idea of reality as causally constraining us. In this regard, his pragmatism is wholly naturalistic. Like classical American pragmatism, it is essentially a Darwinian naturalism rather than a Newtonian naturalism. It construes us as at base animals coping with our environment. Objective reality forces itself upon us by its recalcitrant resistance to our wants and the sometimes surprising and disappointing consequences of our actions, forcing us both to adapt it to our ends and to adapt to it ourselves. It is the physical arena we act in and deal with, setting Deweyan "problems" and framing Deweyan "inquiries" with which creatures like us respond... <>

## **“HARD POWER” AND THE EUROPEAN CONVENTION ON HUMAN RIGHTS** by Peter Kempees [Series: International Studies in Human Rights, Brill | Nijhoff, 9789004425637]

The European Convention on Human Rights is now crucial to decisions to be taken by the military and their political leaders in ‘hard power’ situations – that is, classical international and non-international armed conflict, belligerent occupation, peacekeeping and peace-enforcing and anti-terrorism and anti-piracy operations, but also hybrid warfare, cyber-attack and targeted assassination. Guidance is needed, therefore, on how Convention law relates to these decisions.

That guidance is precisely what this book aims to offer. It focuses primarily on States’ accountability under the Convention, but also shows that human rights law, used creatively, can actually help States achieve their objectives.

“I suggest that the time has come for human rights law to be made part of the military curriculum. The plain fact is that human rights law is relevant to the decision-making of soldiers, sailors and airmen. What is required is guidance on precisely how human rights law relates to the difficult decisions that have to be taken by service personnel in the field, or at sea, or in the air, and by their democratic political leaders. Focusing on the Convention, that guidance is precisely what I hope this book can offer.

“The basic assumption on which this book is based is that the European Convention on Human Rights is well adapted to the needs of the armed forces of European States that respect human rights and the rule of law – indeed, better than other international human rights instruments. In fact, on closer examination it will be seen that, uniquely, the Convention was drafted with armed conflict in mind.

“Although the main focus of this book is on national and non-international armed conflict, its subject-matter is broader. It includes such matters as the suppression of terrorism and piracy, which are normally considered in terms of law enforcement; peacekeeping, peace enforcing, and even post-conflict peace-building; and economic sanctions. I have chosen to borrow from the language of diplomacy the expression ‘hard power’ to include the additional areas covered.



“As a serving member of the Registry of the European Court of Human Rights I feel I must add the following. The views expressed in this work are mine alone, as held at the time when they were formulated. They do not necessarily correspond to views held by any other person or institution, including the European Court of Human Rights or any one of its judges, or that Court’s Registry or any one of its members other than myself.”

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Author: Peter Kempees

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## The European Convention on Human Rights and ‘Hard Power’

In Article 1 of the European Convention on Human Rights, the High Contracting Parties undertake to ‘secure to everyone within their jurisdiction the rights and freedoms’ defined in its Articles 2-11 and, by extension, in the Protocols to the Convention. This very phrasing makes it clear that the primary responsibility to protect human rights rests with the High Contracting Parties themselves. The role of the European Court of Human Rights, defined in Article 19 of the Convention, is essentially supervisory.

In ordinary circumstances the Parties to the Convention expect to entrust compliance with human rights standards to a competent administration faithfully applying domestic law. Contentious human-rights issues will nonetheless arise; these will be dealt with the domestic courts, which in so doing will also apply rules of domestic law subject as necessary to rules of international human rights law. At the same time citizens expect the State to protect them against the violence of others. It is for that reason that the State enjoys a monopoly on the use of force – or, to use an expression that we will introduce presently, ‘hard power’.

The armed forces of our countries also protect human rights. This they do at the most basic level possible. Individual freedom, political liberty and the rule of law would not survive for long unless defended by the credible threat – and if necessary, the actual use – of military force: put differently, the exercise of ‘hard power’ on behalf of the State.

In recent years the European Court of Human Rights has been called to pass judgment on the actions of servicemen doing their duty towards the countries they served. In several such cases the Court has had to find breaches of the Convention. Such findings have sometimes met with a frosty

reception from respondent governments. The defence minister of one of the Convention's Contracting States, for example, has gone on record stating that 'the cumulative effect of some of Strasbourg's decisions on the freedom to conduct military operations raises serious challenges which need to be addressed'. In the same country, a member of parliament (a former soldier) has published an article in the press arguing that the 'imposition' of 'complex human rights law' designed, as he sees it, solely for application in peacetime 'changes the conditions of service and hampers the ability of soldiers to fight, because human rights law does not accept that there is anything unique about a military operation'.

Closer to home, the Court has on occasion had to find fault with use of force lawful in terms of domestic law to eliminate a terrorist threat or put an end to a terrorist attack. The public, and especially some sectors of the press, have sometimes been dismissive of such findings.

It is easy to dismiss statements of politicians as mere politics, and the rants of journalists as facile; but even the most ardent human rights defender must at least make an effort to understand the frustration of governments, not to mention their military forces, at being taken to task for having violated the human rights of an often ruthless enemy. One cannot but sympathise with the bewildered soldier and his or her political superiors. Likewise, the view that it is justified to use lethal force to keep the public safe from terrorism is hardly incomprehensible. Even so, it is submitted that those who argue that the European Convention on Human Rights imposes unreasonable constraints on the meaningful use of 'hard power' are wrong.

The first basic supposition defended in this work is that the Convention itself makes sufficient provision for the legitimate use of 'hard power' in difficult situations. It should not be forgotten that the Convention itself was created only a few short years after the Second World War, the bloodiest conflict in human history so far, and after two colonial empires – British India and the Netherlands East Indies – had wrested themselves free from European overlordship: the first of many. Actual drafting took place even as new conflicts threatened to tear Europe apart. NATO, the North Atlantic Treaty Organization, was created on 24 August 1949 in response to the perception of a new threat to peace from the Soviet Union. European troops were in transit to Korea to fight with the blessing of the newly-created Security Council of the United Nations. The founding fathers of the Convention were no strangers to the reality of their day; they read the newspapers just as other responsible citizens did. We shall see that they strove to accommodate the need for 'hard power', even active war, more effectively than the United Nations did in their later Covenant on Civil and Political Rights.

Of course, even an observer who recognises that the use of 'hard power' may be inescapable even for the most well-intentioned of political leaders is bound to recognise that the protection of democracy, human rights and the rule of law in the name of their citizens, or even in a more abstract sense the protection of the international legal order, is hardly the only motive for States to resort to the threat or use of force in their domestic and international relations. Whatever the reasons for which the political decision is taken to resort to military force, for the serviceman ordered into action they are of importance only in so far as they may define his operational goals: otherwise, at his level, they matter little, and in so far as the legality of the use of force concerns him it will be at the level of *ius in bello* rather than *ius ad bellum*. These reasons are however relevant to domestic and international courts in that they may engage the State's responsibility for the actions of its servicemen and in some cases the individual criminal responsibility of political decision-makers.

This takes us to the second basic supposition of this work. Human rights law, including the law of the European Convention on Human Rights, is a subdivision of international law. Other such

subdivisions include the law of international organisations, most notably the United Nations Organization or UN, and international humanitarian law, also known as the international law of armed conflict or, more traditionally, the laws of war. It is our position that in terms of *ius ad bellum* the law of the United Nations, and in particular Chapter VII of the Charter of the United Nations, while it does not justify or condone violations of human rights, qualifies the way in which the European Convention on Human Rights applies in situations of armed conflict. International humanitarian law is relevant to the Convention applied as *ius in bello*.

## Understanding of 'Hard Power' for Purposes of this Study

Since the purpose of this study is to identify the parameters within which the Convention allows States to exercise 'hard power', we must first define our understanding of that concept.

### Armed Conflict

The classical use of 'hard power' involves the use of military force in an armed conflict.

A Vice-President of the Court, speaking in 2015, has used the expression 'conflict' in noting that the Court has had to address in one way or another all instances of the use of military force that have occurred on the continent, at least since 1990. The examples he mentions include the situations in Northern Cyprus and Transnistria, the dispute between Armenia and Azerbaijan over Nagorno-Karabakh, the events of 2008 in northern Georgia, the dissolution of the former Socialist Federative Republic of Yugoslavia and its aftermath, and the NATO intervention in Kosovo. He also refers to the involvement of European Contracting States, as members of the American-led force, in events in Iraq. He is right; and we shall come across all of these 'conflicts' below.

The Convention nowhere uses the expression 'conflict'. The word 'war' appears in only one Article of the Convention – namely, in Article 15 (derogation in time of emergency) – and in no other Protocols than Protocols Nos. 6 and 13, which concern the abolition of the death penalty. We will discuss the meaning of the expression 'war' as used in that particular context when we come to derogations from Convention rights.

The Convention was first drawn up in the immediate aftermath of the Second World War. A field of international law intended to rid warfare of the worst excesses of inhumanity existed already then, in the form of a body of treaty law that largely codified the customary 'laws of war' – the best known of the treaties being the Hague Conventions of 1899 and 1907, the Geneva Conventions of 1929 that had served the world as well as they could during the Second World War, and most recently the four Geneva Conventions of 1949. The understanding of 'conflict' that then prevailed was kinetic warfare of the classic kind – 'setpiece' or open-field battles, perhaps guerrilla – between the armed forces of opposing states.

This understanding of 'conflict' has not lost its relevance; neither have the classic laws of war. However, other forms of violence have arisen that cannot be understood in terms of direct confrontation between the armed forces of two or more States but that do not comfortably fit the paradigm of ordinary law enforcement either. For these, a new legal category has been created: the 'non-international armed conflict'. This new category, although foreshadowed by the common Article 3 of the four Geneva Conventions of 1949, has obtained recognition in the second of two Protocols added to those Conventions in 1977. The classical interstate conflict is now dignified by a category of its own: that of 'international armed conflict'.

Non-international armed conflicts are now much more common than classical international armed conflicts. *The War Report 2017*, a paper published by the Geneva Academy of International Humanitarian Law and Human Rights (Geneva Academy), lists six situations in 2017 that could be

considered 'international armed conflicts' in the classical sense (some of them short-lived); seventeen cases of 'belligerent occupation'; and no fewer than fifty-five 'noninternational armed conflicts' (some unfortunate countries hosted a plurality of such conflicts simultaneously).

States Parties to the Convention are concerned by conflicts in all these categories. For example, the situations identified by the Geneva Academy as arguably active 'international armed conflicts' include Ukraine v. Russia and the international coalition v. Syria – the 'international coalition' being comprised of (in addition to non-European states) European NATO members Belgium, Denmark, France, Germany, Italy, the Netherlands and Turkey. Of the ten 'belligerent occupations' identified by the Geneva Academy, five are to be found on the territory of Convention States: Armenia v. Azerbaijan, Turkey v. Cyprus, Russia v. Georgia, Russia v. Moldova, and Russia v. Ukraine. The Falkland Islands are alleged by Argentina to be under belligerent occupation by the United Kingdom.

Of the thirty-eight 'non-international armed conflicts' identified as such by the Geneva Academy in 2017, two are on the territory of Convention States: that between Ukraine on the one hand and the breakaway 'Donetsk People's Republic' and 'Luhansk People's Republic' on the other (it is not necessary for our purposes to take a position on whether this is one conflict or two), and that between Turkey and the *Partiya Karkerên Kurdistanê* (Workers' Party of Kurdistan, 'PKK'). The others are all to be found outside Europe, mainly in Africa and the Middle East; but Convention States take part in some of them as contributors to United Nations forces (at the time of writing, the United Nations Multidimensional Integrated Stabilization Mission in Mali (*Mission multidimensionnelle intégrée des Nations unies pour la stabilisation au Mali*, MINUSMA) and the United Nations Organization Stabilization Mission in the Democratic Republic of the Congo (*Mission de l'Organisation des Nations unies pour la stabilisation en République démocratique du Congo*, MONUSCO)).<sup>25</sup>

No mention is made in the Geneva Academy's report of the strife in the parts of the northern Caucasus that are under Russian sovereignty. This is not generally considered in terms of 'non-international armed conflict'; that expression is not used by the Russian Government to describe it.

Even so, the sheer scale of the separatist violence in that area – and elsewhere in Russia: the separatists have taken it to Moscow itself – has made its mark, including on the case-law of the Court, which draws a distinction between 'routine police operations' and 'situations of large-scale anti-terrorist operations'. It is accordingly of interest to us for purposes of this study.

No Convention State is understood currently to deploy military force in Iraq; but several have in the recent past, and the case-law of the European Court of Human Rights has had to develop accordingly. Similarly, the involvement of Convention States in Bosnia and Herzegovina during the 1992-95 war and its aftermath and in Kosovo during and after the events of 1999 is of interest from our standpoint. So, potentially, is the military operation briefly undertaken by Turkish forces in the Afrin district of Syria in January 2018, which we mention in passing since it has yet to give rise to Strasbourg case-law.

An 'armed attack' creating for the State under attack the right to defend itself was once thought to be possible only if occurring at the hand of another State. However, al-Qaeda's 9/11 attack on New York and Washington was sufficient for the NATO members for the first time in history to activate Article 5 of the Washington Treaty, according to which 'an armed attack against one or more of them in Europe or North America shall be considered an attack against them all', and invoke the right to collective self-defence, no less, under Article 51 of the Charter of the United Nations. As is well known, forces of the United States and their allies ran the al-Qaeda leadership to earth

in Afghanistan; even today no fewer than thirty-seven Convention States are contributing to the Resolute Support mission in that country.

### Other Exercise of 'Hard Power' Relevant to this Study

Armed conflict in the sense of kinetic military action against another political actor does not exhaust the scope of the expression 'hard power' as used for purposes of this study.

The threat of terrorist attack, and indeed actual terrorist attacks, by al-Qaeda and groups with a similar ideological motivation have induced several European NATO members to allow American intelligence services to undertake covert action on their territory. The measures taken against al-Qaeda and its ideological successors do not fit neatly into any category of armed conflict, whether international in character or not. Even so, politicians and journalists have sometimes been led to dignify them by the expression 'war'. Already by reason of their sheer scale, they are of interest to us – even though the expression 'war' by any conventional legal definition is inappropriate.

The same may be said, *a fortiori*, about the suppression of widespread organised crime. The kind of widespread violence committed by criminal armed groups, as seen in some parts of Latin America, is at the present time not to be found in Europe; but piracy, a similar phenomenon, does concern European States. Like terrorism of the al-Qaeda type, neither is conventionally viewed in terms of international or non-international armed conflict. Nevertheless, combating piracy requires the use of armed force; indeed, it is the traditional preserve of naval forces of the State. Piracy too is therefore worth examining in the present context.

Finally, it is conceivable that States – or rather, Governments – may resort to the covert use of lethal means to further their interests. This study touches briefly on such phenomena, which for present purposes must be treated as relevant though hypothetical.

### Background to the Concept 'Hard Power'

It is convenient for our purposes to use the expression 'hard power' as a hold-all term to cover all instances of the use of force referred to above. The concept is borrowed from the study of international relations.

The definition of 'hard power' used by diplomatists is usually in terms such as the coercive use of military or economic means to influence the behaviour or interests of political players distinguishing it from 'soft power', which is the use of diplomacy, foreign aid and cultural relations to the same end, and 'smart power', which is the judicious use of 'hard' and 'soft' power combined.

The use of economic means of coercion – boycotts, economic sanctions imposed by a state on another political actor – has rarely been the object of a judgment or decision of the Court or a decision or report of the Commission; there have been only a few such cases. The coercive use of military means is more frequently found in Strasbourg case-law. States Parties to the Convention have taken part in armed conflicts, in some cases on their own territory, in some cases abroad; they have used military force, either to exercise 'hard power' in the above sense themselves or to resist attempts of other political actors to do so.

However, the opponent against whom coercive force is directed is not necessarily a 'political player' in any conventional sense of the word: pirates, for example, are generally viewed as common criminals. Our understanding of 'hard power' is accordingly wider than that of the student of international diplomacy inasmuch as we must also touch on situations of this nature.

### ‘Hard Power’: a Definition

For our purposes, accordingly, ‘hard power’ means:

1. –Firstly, the deliberate projection by a Government of coercive force outside the territory of the State, whether the situation concerned constitutes an armed conflict within the meaning of international humanitarian law or not;
2. –Secondly, the deliberate use (or conscious acceptance) by a Government of coercive force within the State’s own borders on a scale necessitating the application either of military force or of non-military force in excess of the requirements of ordinary law enforcement to overcome opposition, whether the situation concerned is admitted by that Government to be an armed conflict within the meaning of international humanitarian law or not;
3. –Thirdly, the application by a Government of economic sanctions in the international relations of the State.

Such a definition encompasses situations which, from the standpoint of international humanitarian law, would in most cases be seen as law enforcement rather than armed conflict, including counter-insurgency operations, antiterrorist action going beyond ordinary policing, and the suppression of piracy whether in home or international waters.

The above definition is autonomous: it does not depend on any admission or declaration by the Government. Thus, the assumption by the Government of emergency powers is not a part of it.

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### Object of this Study

#### Research Question

Since as we have briefly mentioned above the Convention can, and does, continue to protect human rights in the direst of circumstances, even in wartime, the question arises whether the Convention leaves Contracting States the latitude needed to deal with situations in which a legitimate need to resort to the use of ‘hard power’ in the sense corresponding to our definition may arise.

Our assumption is that the latitude available to Contracting States will be sufficient if despite the obligations which they have assumed upon ratifying the Convention States retain access to means enabling them to pursue policy objectives that are legitimate in terms of international law.

### Method and Approach

To answer the above question, this study investigates precisely what latitude Contracting States have to tailor their Convention obligations to the situation in which the need to exercise ‘hard power’ presents itself to them. To that end, it identifies the limits both of the applicability of the Convention and of attribution of the use of ‘hard power’ to Contracting States.

It is important to reiterate in this connection that – quite contrary to the suppositions of the domestic politicians cited above and perhaps others – the Convention is not to be applied only in times of peace: it has relevance also to situations of conflict, even international armed conflict. As we will see, this was actually envisaged from the very outset by the drafters of the Convention; the Strasbourg institutions – the European Commission and Court of Human Rights – recognised it in their practice and case-law and strove from a very early date to accommodate the various competing interests. More recently the Council of Europe’s Steering Committee for Human Rights has recognised the Court’s role in this domain as ‘pivotal’.



This study is essentially a survey of the relevant case-law of the Court and the Commission with a view to identifying the resulting jurisprudential principles. Our intention is to state the law (as it stands in 2019) as comprehensively as possible. The Court and Commission case-law cited is all accessible through the Court's own searchable database HUDOC.

The case-law considered relevant is that in which the Court was called upon to determine whether the use of 'hard power' was in breach of the Convention. Additionally, cases are analysed where the Court developed general principles or interpretations with the potential to have a bearing on such cases in the future. It will be attempted to relate this case-law to other fields of international law, international humanitarian law and general international law in particular. This will require us to examine a variety of treaties other than the Convention; judgments and decisions of treaty bodies other than the Court and the Commission; documents from a variety of international bodies; domestic legislation and judicial decisions and other domestic legal documents; and finally, selected writings of learned authors.

The perspective of an individual applicant before the Court is necessarily that of an aggrieved victim who feels entitled to redress. As in all litigation, the terms of the dispute are dictated by the party with whom the initiative lies.

The perspective chosen for this study is the opposite: that of the respondent Contracting State. This is the most obvious choice, since only States (and then only Members of the Council of Europe) are Parties to the Convention and within the legal space of the Convention only they may lawfully resort to the use of force.

The extent to which non-State actors may be bound by human rights law is an interesting one, but from our perspective it is of little relevance since they cannot be respondents before the Court. Moreover, even though they may have the potential to violate human rights on a scale comparable to that of a Contracting State, as many armed groups now do, none have so far committed themselves to abide by Convention standards of human rights. A non-governmental structure (of the Geneva Call type) that would make it possible for them to register such a commitment, and perhaps enhance their legitimacy, does not exist at this time.

Nonetheless, the position of applicants cannot and will not be overlooked: it takes two, at least, to litigate, and for applicants (whether Contracting States themselves – in interstate cases –, individuals or groups of individuals, or strategic litigators) it is of interest to study possible defences precisely to overcome them. In the European Court of Human Rights as in any other court, the way in which a case is introduced can decide its fate at the outset.

The method chosen is to identify the basic types of legal argument that a respondent Government may make before the Court when it is faced with complaints under the Convention arising from the use of 'hard power'. Since the perspective chosen is the defensive position of the respondent Contracting State they may also be described as 'defences', if one will:

- I. –Once the facts have been established, the first line of defence is to argue that no violation can be found on the facts of the case; in other words, that there has been no violation of the Convention in the first place. This is the most obvious solution: it amounts to persuading the Court that the Contracting Party has remained in compliance with the obligations which it took upon itself in ratifying the Convention. Much of the relevant case-law has been developed over the years in situations of normality; the principles developed, however, are of general application. Its relevance to situations involving the use of 'hard power' will be the subject of Chapter 2.

2. –Reliance on a prior derogation under Article 15 of the Convention is a special sub-type of the first type of defence; it depends on a prior choice to recognise publicly that a problem exists that is insuperable as long as ordinary Convention standards are maintained. This will be discussed in Chapter 4. However, since, as is apparent from its very wording, Article 15 is of particular relevance to situations of ‘war’, an understanding of the interrelation between human rights law – for our purposes, Convention law in particular – and international humanitarian law is necessary before we can enter into the subject of derogation. This will be examined in Chapter 3.
3. –The second defence is that the matters complained of fall outside the ‘jurisdiction’ of the Contracting Party within the meaning of Article 1 of the Convention. This will be the object of Chapter 5, which explores the limits of what we will term Article 1 jurisdiction, and Chapter 6, which studies its actual exercise in situations of the use of ‘hard power’.
4. –The third defence is that the matters complained of fall outside the competence of the European Court of Human Rights itself. This will be considered in Chapter 7.
5. –The fourth defence is that the matters complained of are not attributable to the Contracting Party but to some other State or entity if to anyone at all. This will be the focus of in Chapter 8.

All have been considered by the Commission and the Court at various times. Sometimes they have been argued by a respondent. Sometimes the Commission and Court have applied them of their own motion and declared applications inadmissible *de plano*. In the latter situation it is, strictly speaking, more appropriate to use the expression ‘ground of inadmissibility’ than ‘defence’; but this distinction, which goes to the subtleties of Convention procedure, is not relevant to the purpose of this study.

Some ‘defences’ have been accepted by the Court in certain conditions; some have not. The interest of this study lies in the supposition that much has been said on these subjects but by no means all; that new problems will arise to which existing case-law may be applied; that the possibilities of presenting new positions have not yet been exhausted; and even, perhaps to the surprise of some, that the Convention itself actually has a role to play in furthering the very aims pursued by Contracting States in their use of ‘hard power’ – as a help, not a hindrance. <>

## **METAMORPHOSES** by Emanuele Coccia, translated by Robin Mackay (Polity Press, 9781509545667)

We are all fascinated by the mystery of metamorphosis – of the caterpillar that transforms itself into a butterfly. Their bodies have almost nothing in common. They don’t share the same world: one crawls on the ground and the other flutters its wings in the air. And yet they are one and the same life.

Emanuele Coccia argues in **METAMORPHOSES** that metamorphosis – the phenomenon that allows the same life to subsist in disparate bodies – is the relationship that binds all species together and unites the living with the non-living. Bacteria, viruses, fungi, plants, and animals: they are all one and the same life.

Coccia is Associate Professor at the École des hautes études en sciences sociales (EHESS), Paris.

Coccia explains that each species, including the human species, is the metamorphosis of all those that preceded it – the same life, cobbling together a new body and a new form in order to exist differently. And there is no opposition between the living and the non-living: life is always the reincarnation of the non-living, a carnival of the telluric substance of a planet – the Earth – that continually draws new faces and new ways of being out of even the smallest particle of its disparate body.

According to Coccia in the introduction to **METAMORPHOSES**, in the beginning we were all the same living creature, sharing the same body and the same experience. And things haven't changed so much since then. New forms and new modes of existence have proliferated. But even today, we are all still the same life. For millions of years this life has been transmitted from body to body, from individual to individual, from species to species, from kingdom to kingdom. Of course it shifts, it transforms. But the life of each living being does not begin with its own birth: it is far older than that.

Take our own existence. Our life, what we imagine to be the most intimate and incommunicable part of ourselves, does not come from us, and there is nothing exclusive or personal about it: it was transmitted to us by others; it has animated other bodies, chunks of matter different from the one in which we are currently harbored. For nine months, the fact that the life that animates and awakens us has no one name or owner was an obvious physical, material fact. We were the same body, the same humours, the same atoms as our mother. And we are that life, shared with the body of another, carried on and taken elsewhere.

According to **METAMORPHOSES**, it is the breath of another that is continued in ours, the blood of another that flows through our veins; it is the DNA we have received from another that sculpts and shapes our body, just as our life begins long before we are born, it does not end until well after our death. The breath of life will not expire in our corpse: it will go on to feed those for whom we will become a festive Last Supper.

Nor is our humanity something originary and autonomous. The human, also, is but a continuation and metamorphosis of a life that came before it. More precisely, it is an invention which primates, another life form, drew out of their own bodies – from their life force, their DNA, their way of life – so as to enable the life that inhabited and animated them to exist in a different form. They transmitted this form to us and, through the human life form, they continue to live within us. And even the primates themselves are just an experiment, a wager on the part of yet other species, yet other life forms. Evolution is a masquerade that takes place in time rather than in space. A masquerade that allows each species, from one era to the next, to don a new mask, different from the one that engendered it; that allows sons and daughters to pass unrecognized by and to no longer recognize their parents. And yet, despite this changing of masks, mother-species and daughter-species are metamorphoses of the self-same life. Each species is a patchwork of parts taken from other species. We, the living species, have continually exchanged parts, lineages, organs; what each of us is, what we call our 'species', is only a set of techniques that each living being has borrowed from others. It is because of this continuity-in-transformation that every species shares infinitely many traits with hundreds of other species. Every species is the metamorphosis of all those that preceded it.

Coccia in **METAMORPHOSES** says that this is the deepest meaning of the Darwinian theory of evolution, the one that biology and pop science don't want to think about: species are not substances or real entities. We have not yet grasped the full consequences of Darwin's intuition: to say that species are connected by a genetic relationship does not simply mean that living creatures make up one vast family or clan. Above all, it means realizing that the identity of each species is

entirely relative: primates may be the parents and humans their children, but we are human only through and in relation to those early primates, just as each of us is not a daughter or son in an absolute sense, but only in relation to our mother and father.

All of the above also applies to living creatures taken as a whole. There is no opposition between the living and the non-living. Not only is every living creature continuous with the non-living, it is its extension, metamorphosis, and most extreme expression.

Life is always the reincarnation of that which is not alive, a cobbling together of mineral elements, a carnival of the telluric substance of a planet – Gaia, the Earth – which continually presents new faces and creates new modes of being out of even the smallest particle of its disparate, heteroclite body. Every self is a vehicle for the Earth, a vessel that allows the planet to travel without moving.

Coccia in **METAMORPHOSES** says that metamorphosis is both the force that allows every living thing to be staged simultaneously and successively across several forms, and the breath of life that connects those forms with one another, allowing them to pass one into the other.

*Emanuele Coccia defines anew the relationship between humans and nature – a fascinating inquiry, and one which we urgently need in order to open our eyes to the world around us. – Peter Wohlleben, author of The Hidden Life of Trees*

By highlighting what joins humans together with other forms of life, Coccia's brilliant reflection on metamorphosis in **METAMORPHOSES** encourages readers to abandon their view of the human species as static and independent and to recognize instead that we are part of a much larger and interconnected form of life. <>

## IF GOD IS A VIRUS by Seema Yasmin [BreakBeat Poets, Haymarket Books, 9781642595017]

Merging documentary poetry from the epicenter of an epidemic with the story of viruses in the evolution of humanity, **IF GOD IS A VIRUS** gives voice to the infected and the virus.

Based on original reporting from West Africa and the United States, and the poet's experiences as a doctor and journalist, **IF GOD IS A VIRUS** charts the course of the largest and deadliest Ebola epidemic in history, telling the stories of Ebola survivors, outbreak responders, journalists and the virus itself. Documentary poems explore which human lives are valued, how editorial decisions are weighed, what role the aid industrial complex plays in crises, and how medical myths and rumor can travel faster than microbes.

These poems also give voice to the virus. Eight percent of the human genome is inherited from viruses and the human placenta would not exist without a gene descended from a virus. **IF GOD IS A VIRUS** reimagines viruses as givers of life and even authors of a viral-human self-help book.

### Reviews

"Yasmin, a medical doctor who investigated outbreaks for the Epidemic Intelligence Service from the CDC and was a finalist for the Pulitzer Prize, brings considerable experience and a poet's vision and sense to her depiction of Ebola's spread through Liberia. To read this work during the coronavirus pandemic is to recognize Yasmin's prescience, and her ability to unpack how disease intersects with prejudice, race, myth, and poverty." —*The Millions*

"**IF GOD IS A VIRUS** proves that poetry and public health together make and contain medical language, which makes the language of an epidemic more visible, more veracious. What breaks through is a voice of interiority telling us what's not told about our bodies and what it means to function." —**Janice Sapigao**, poet laureate, Santa Clara County, author of *like a solid to a shadow*

"In a time of heartbreak and devastation due to the world pandemic, Seema Yasmin's brilliant **IF GOD IS A VIRUS** takes a timely and critical look at disease and its sociopolitical contexts, including multi various forms of domination and hubris: colonization, White supremacy, patriarchy, capitalism. This is a necessary book for our times. Read it and be changed." —**Cathy Linh Che**, author of *Split*, executive director Kundiman

"Seema Yasmin's fantastic hybrid poetry collection overthrows the dry mindlessness of scientific halls, their power points and false Gods in the face of racism and global domination. God is a virus, and she teaches us to see through data while teaching us to love." —**Fady Joudah**, author of *Tethered to Stars*

"One always wants a poem to have such high stakes, wants a book to feel inevitable, that it couldn't have been written and that no one else but the poet could have written it, so unique to an individual experience it is. Well, this is such a book. And only Seema Yasmin could have written it." —**Kazim Ali**, author of *The Voice of Sheila Chandra*

"In her hands, a sole headline in *Scientific American* becomes a poem, as does the Hippocratic oath, the Broca's region. Every journalist should read this book, every doctor, every patient. Gird your heart, though, she's on a mission to break it with her tongue." —**Lulu Miller**, co-host of *Radiolab* and author of *Why Fish Don't Exist*

"Dr Seema Yasmin writes so evocatively, patiently, in her debut book of poetry, **IF GOD IS A VIRUS**. While reading this book waves of feeling seen ruptured through me multiple times. Yasmin plucks words so precisely that their mere utterance causes a deep, *deep* recognition. She is also embodying the Golden Age of Islam, where poets were physicians and physicians were poets, using the divine to understand mankind and its art-making, challenging what lies within the psyche, as well as the heart. This book is a revelation, I am grateful for both its lucidity and profundity." —**Fariha Róisín Hasan**, author of *Like A Bird*

"I was blown away by this collection. Profound and poignant, it illuminates so much of the grief, outrage, and raw humanity that accompany epidemics, and that manifest within the people who have to deal with them." —**Ed Yong**, science journalist for *The Atlantic*, author of *I CONTAIN MULTITUDES*

"In **IF GOD IS A VIRUS**, Seema Yasmin approaches describing viruses with an unusual combination of humility and confidence for such a nearly impossible task. She achieves what journalistic and scientific writing often fails to do: to sketch viruses with a sense of wonder. But Dr. Yasmin asks and poetically answers another question: **IF GOD IS A VIRUS**, perhaps we must stop thinking of our relationship with viruses as 'us' and 'them,' and understand that we *are* viruses, and they are us?" —**Steven W. Thrasher, PhD**, professor and author of *The Viral Underclass: How Racism, Ableism and Capitalism Plague Humans on the Margins*

[Youtube promo dialogue with Steven Thrasher](#)

### Editorial review:

Cosmopolitan, medical, professional, antiseptic, ethnic, messy, skeptical, feminist, Muslim, Indianian, British, impersonal, concise, bloody, compassionate, clinical, jargonish, technocratic, cynical, subjective, personal, impersonal, mothers, heritage, global, intimate, personal-in-a-whitecoat-and-face-shield, Yasmin's voice is irresistible and infectious, strange, hypnotic hyperbolic Ebola, feverish.  
<>

## OUR UNFINISHED BIOLOGICAL EVOLUTION by Seymour Itzkoff [Academica Press, 9781680539226]

Seymour W. Itzkoff is one of the world's leading intelligence researchers. His exciting new book *Our Unfinished Biological Revolution* offers a bold and highly original new study on the evolution of human intelligence from the origin of life to our times. With the help of evolutionary theory, Itzkoff explains the nature of human intelligence as we know it today. Most importantly, it demonstrates that evolution led to the rise of what intelligence researchers call the general intelligence factor: the human ability to plan ahead and solve problems for which natural selection did not prepare us. The book also argues that humans vary in intelligence (as with all traits shaped by Darwinian evolution), and hence in their propensity to think abstractly and anticipate long-term consequences of their actions. ***OUR UNFINISHED BIOLOGICAL REVOLUTION*** explores the social implications of these two factors as they unfold in modern technological societies, in which intelligence plays an increasingly important role. Finally, the book argues that human intelligence may offer our best hope in solving the daunting problems of the present era—including population growth, the exhaustion of natural resources, and the rise of simplistic and devastating ideologies.

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All animals do what natural selection programmed their ancestors to do ( ... ). If any species in the history of life has the possibility of breaking away from short-term selfishness and of planning for the distant future, it is our species. — Richard Dawkins

## Where from/Where to: Evolutionary Perspective

### Awakening experience

In 1968, the wonderful president of the college at which I taught gave me a grant to participate in a European study group's investigation of European educational efforts and underlying philosophical support system. During the course of five weeks, we traveled to London, Moscow, Copenhagen, Prague, and East Berlin, with short stops in Lithuania, somewhere in Yugoslavia, and Sweden.

Growing up in New York City and educated in its public schools, including a couple of years at City College of New York, later as a faculty member at Hunter College and Lehman College, all these then free tuition institutions in New York City, I was a city boy. Given New York City's buzzing, blooming diversity of races, ethnicities, social classes, the European tour, my first, was a shock.

I expected the diversity of political ideologies and the Cold War antithesis of values. What shocked me were the faces of the citizens of these locales. For example, except for a hint of Genghis Kahn in Moscow, the Soviets had the same blondish hair, blue eyes, skin complexion as residents of Copenhagen, Berlin, and the other nations. Looking at Europeans was like looking at an extended family.

Why and what meaning could one attach to the bloody internecine past and the then possibility of a new horror in the not too distant future? Of course, I thought about the American Civil War. After the five weeks of thought awakening, I guess I was a better teacher of Comparative Educational Systems, even considering the expense of the trip for my institution. To say the least, it was an eye and mind opening experience. It set me on a course of research into the evolutionary meaning of this visual and cultural reality.

### Where from these people?

Thirty years later, in the late 1990s, during my third work in the study of general evolution and human evolution especially, I came across a series of articles studying the genetic relationship of Europeans. These articles attempt to trace back Europeans' origins in terms of the genetic variation that supposedly affects individuals at a genetic and probable geographic distance. The writers called this the "genetic blockade." I believe a better description of what was going on would be "the funnel effect," as in pouring a quart of oil into the oil reservoir of the motor of your automobile. Only in this case, the action would start at the narrow opening of the funnel. Perhaps this process of Europeanization occurred over quite a long extension and then suddenly widening (into where you pour the oil) Europe.

Their timeline analysis back in evolutionary history shows a much shorter period of genetic deviation than, for example, the human residents of Africa. In Eurasia, the expansion of the to-be Europeans occurred some two to four hundred thousand years in the past. Again, these writers saw this

happening somewhere in Eurasia, where other long-term residents of the Eurasian land mass, such as the Neanderthals, lived. These new genes, which entered the funnel, and then probably a long time afterward, exited it with very different survival adaptations, were probably sister and brother relatives of the Neanderthals. During these two to four hundred thousand years of undergoing a funnel/genetic blockade transformation, they had undergone a radical genetic and thus a phenotypic (external body) revolution.

### A different animal

The products/descendants of this genetic/phenotypic revolution were the modern Europeans. First appearing in fossil and cultural form (with tools-physical evidence of their way of life) throughout mainland Europe and west Asia, we have named these humans and their associated culture the “Cro-Magnons.” This evidence for the flourishing of a people with an evolving, non-literary civilization comes into view about 40,000-45,000 years ago. This is quite a long span of time, let us say, 200,000 to 45,000 years BP (before the present), for these people, and their cultural and social systems to have been hidden.

Along with the Neanderthals in c. 600,000-40,000 (Before the Present, BP), there were other humans living in Europe; Asia; west and east Africa; but not in North and South America, and certainly not in Antarctica. The characteristic heaviness of bone and body structure, which we see in the Neanderthals, at least partially attributed to adaptations to the sometime colder climate of the Eurasian north during the “ice ages,” is also seen in their contemporaries south and east, in Africa and Asia.

A characteristic of the evolutionary process is the manner in which successful mammals, as they exploit their adaptations and create an economics of success, tend to become specialized physically and behaviorally, capitalizing on their success, leaving little room for new breakouts. This seems to have become true of humans, having had many millions of years heading forward onto the pathways of adaptive success, in terms of hunting, scavenging, and scrounging for fruit and vegetables. The result of this was a comfy heaviness of the body structure, ever more deepening their dependency on the status quo of environment, ecology, animal competition.

This occurred until the coming of the revolutionary creature, hominin Cro-Magnon, who had long exited that genetic funnel. In addition to wandering and spreading their genes around in small but potent quantities, the Cro-Magnon clearly had gradually discovered the meaning of behavioral/adaptive success. By 45,000 BP, the key genetic and physical dimensions of their lives, and even the technology they wielded now set them clearly apart.

## Pandemic: Perspective on Our 21st-Century Apocalypse

In a dark time, the eye begins to see. — American poet Theodore Roethke (1908–1963 CE)

### Nature's autonomy

The global infection of the Corona Virus gives sharp factuality to the warning described in Chapter 20 of this writing; a prediction about our species' impending future. That chapter focused on the still to be worldwide crude oil and natural gas shortages. Still, in less than a decade, given no future pandemics, these shortages will be sharply felt by the economy of most of the nations of the world and especially those with the greatest population to natural resource imbalances. The serious economic consequences for our world will be direct. To add to future concerns, the impact of this 2020 Covic-19 pandemic will long be felt, unlike previous plagues—the pandemics of the 20th and 21st centuries.

The Corona Virus is the latest “black swan” event hinted at in the above chapters. As predicted, there are already resources mustered to bringing this pandemic under scientific, medical control and then, hopefully, economic resuscitation. Soon, there will be a great effort to rebuild to the model of the current status quo. It will not work. Compounded by the inevitable drying up of fossil fuel resources, and possibly recurring virus attacks, the future of our species is opaque and vulnerable.

### Where we are

As argued throughout this book, our species is an unfinished evolutionary work in progress. We are, as the present chaos reveals, reaping the harvest of a runaway set of dynamics in clear violation of the Darwinian adaptive and selective rules of the game. Fundamentally, we are an integral part of organic life’s fight against the implications of Carnot’s 2nd law of thermodynamics—entropy—requiring constant mobilizing of external energy sources to maintain our existence. Our human part in this galactic struggle is to create an adaptive and selective defensive position for the long-run, to try to protect our form of life against evolutionary events still beyond our ken, and perhaps ever beyond our control.

### Four Horsemen of the Apocalypse

The theme of human weakness and the appeal for supernatural intervention goes back long in human history. Today we put our hopes in the mysterious powers of our “medicine men.” The four horseman theme constitutes the back ground noise of every society, we also, are struggling against ourselves and nature.

New Testament, Revelations 6. These four horsemen appear to symbolically portray four disastrous occurrences that will take place before the second coming of Jesus Christ. Historians have argued over whether these events had already happened or whether mankind had yet to experience them. Most evidence points to the fact these had yet to have taken place. The prophetic characters of the “four horsemen” previously appeared in the Old Testament’s Book of Zechariah, and in the Book of Ezekiel, where they are named as punishments from God.

We can propose four horsemen of the modern apocalypse, three, human initiated, the monstrous fourth, beyond the hands of human kind:

1. Overpopulation
2. Intellectual capital
3. Ideology/war/terrorism
4. Fear of Nature: resource depletion; radical climate/geological change; desertification/starvation, pandemics.

### Overpopulation

We now consider this issue in the light of the Covid-19 pandemic. What was an ignored cloud on the horizon in 2019, now becomes a factor in the survival of Western civilization. For a few years, we will not have to face the looming prospect of demand for fossil fuels out-spanning possible supply; or, even the willingness of fossil energy surplus nations to deliver the last readily available barrel of oil to the wider world.

Some seers estimate the 2100 world population at 11 billion. Today, we have 7.9 billion. The increase is predicted to be centered in the so-called developing world. European and North American indigenous Homo sapiens sapiens population are slated to remain stable and even be reduced. Remember, even while humanity was engaged in the blood baths that characterized the 20th and 21st centuries, human fecundity, scientific medicine, and fossil fuels still exploded the total demographic imprint of Homo sapiens.

Immigration into wealthy lands will give rise to their increase. But that increase is estimated on the basis of our former global economic fortunes. It is clear that the quarantines around our planet, the wave of unemployment, and the psychological impact of happy generational dreams now evaporated, else placed on hold, will soon give us a very different set of predictions for economic growth.

We have, in earlier chapters, chronicled the explosive growth of world-wide populations, both of *Hs* and *Homo sapiens sapiens*, in terms of potential intellectual capital. But it was the *Homo sapiens sapiens* who created and developed the harnessing of fossil energy, including coal, as well as invented the medical miracles that the scientific mentality created. These two factors were fundamental in lifting up our world demography to what every educated person should long have realized are unsustainable levels. And now we will know this reality.

The shutdowns of the economies of all the nations by the governmental response to the virus has left vast numbers of the least educated in limbo, momentarily supported by printed “dollars” in the trillions. Many predict that the recovery by both the private and public spheres will fail. Already, governors of the states are teetering on the edge of “bankruptcy,” as their budgets are deeply in the red and they cannot pay their current workers as well as the pensions of those in retirement.

The corona virus, while having infected the powerful as well as the weak, is by and large an urban catastrophe. The United Nations estimates that there are eighty-one cities in the world with populations over five million, and many more vastly beyond this figure. This is hardly the demographic picture we have described, which created the proto civilization of the Cro-Magnons, as well as the literacy of the urban Sumerians. Here, we tabulate hundreds of thousands of generations in the making. We have had devastating plagues in the recent past, such as the terrible flu epidemic of 1918. They were not global in impact.

We are only on first base in seeing the consequences of this 2020 event. When governments are printing untold monies in the attempt to help the masses, there are still consequences to be discovered. The financial system itself is slated for collapse. Forget the democratic institutions as we have built them since the Enlightenment. Forget the dreams of the libertarians. It is difficult enough management for any nation when coal, crude oil, and natural gas are plentiful and cheap. Uranium, and the wind that blows over the wheat field, the minerals that create the solar panels, dream on! The governments that print the Euros will have to manage (control) the masses of humans in panic within these imploding urbs.

The viruses that continually challenge modern human life confront us—a memory from the earliest eons of life itself. They mutate constantly and kill, especially as they penetrate the cancer that is human overpopulation.

### Intellectual capital

In the period before the Enlightenment and the beginning of the scientific/industrial period, the world population had many ups and downs. One might deem it a continuum of prosperity and decline. We write here of the progeny of Cro-Magnon, discussed earlier in the context of civilizational advances from the Atlantic, east to the Pacific Ocean. Inevitably, the rise and decline of these *Homo sapiens sapiens* societies gave impetus to varying skill and educational levels. The example of Rome, the urban center of the empire, is illustrative. Rising up over a period of 500 years, it had attained through conquest and economic unification a cosmopolitan mix of the educated, which engendered games, sometimes brutal, to entertain the 1–2 million inhabitants who resided there, under Augustus, 1st century CE. The continual wars with the invading German tribes over the following centuries reduced the population, so that when Alaric the Visigoth gained control in 410 CE, there were only several hundred thousand inhabitants.

As time went on, even under Papal control, the city became a shell of its greatness. Estimates are that in the period 1000–1200 CE, there may have been only 30 thousand inhabitants in Rome. One wonders about the character of the populations, not only of Rome, but of the other cities and towns of Italy during the supposed “dark ages” of Europe. Where one would describe the culture of imperial Rome, compared to the Hellenistic Greeks’ of a similar time frame, leading up to c.100 CE, as populist and brutally low in intellectual elan except for a literary minority, the later burst of Renaissance creativity, now under the aegis of a religious hierarchy, and in the same geographical space and economic and technological advance as imperial Rome, must have arisen from a very different “populist” ecology. Clearly, quiet events in the demographic transition of the populace provided an environment of hardship, struggle and a selective intellectual rise in the character of the people. It could not alone have been the mere addition of those “violent” gothic genes to the population of Italy that created this oncoming Renaissance.

Many view the “Black Death” of 1346–1369, which ravaged Europe as well as the Near East and killed more than 50 million people, as a puzzling event in the history of humanity. Coming at the beginning of the Renaissance in Europe, it seemed to have ricocheted into a turning point in the humanistic perspective on life. The pickup in economic activity was one puzzling element, as was the seeming emancipation from the fatalism of the religious explanations of its horror—it was an invitation to secular thought and inquiry.

The Italian writer and poet, Giovanni Boccaccio (1313–1375 CE), author of *The Decameron*, which recounts the tales of a group of ten citizens trying to escape the plague by seclusion, describes in his introduction the main ways in which people reacted to the pestilence:

There were some people who thought that living moderately and avoiding any excess might help a great deal in resisting this disease, and so they gathered in small groups and lived entirely apart from everyone else. They shut themselves up in those houses where there were no sick people and where one could live well by eating the most delicate of foods and drinking the finest of wines, allowing no one to speak about or listen to anything said about the sick and dead outside...Others thought the opposite: they believed that drinking excessively, enjoying life, going about singing and celebrating, satisfying in every way the appetites as best one could, laughing, and making light of everything that happened was the best medicine for such a disease...Many others adopted a middle course between the two attitudes just described: They did not shut themselves up, but went around carrying in their hands flowers, or sweet-smelling herbs, or various kinds of spices and they would often put these things to their noses, believing that such smells were wonderful means of purifying the brain, for all the air seemed infected with the stench of dead bodies, sickness, and medicines. (Mark 2020, 7–8)

There is a possible message here from our own pandemic, which, if not as devastating in terms of human mortality as the “Black Plague,” is sure to leave its economic, intellectual capital, psychological and even ideological mark. Our world being so interconnected and heavily populated, will feel the sharp brand of this Pandemic, as well as the consequences of the spectacular efforts made around the world to protect vulnerable humans.

Note, the new heroes of this battle to protect the civilians of our nations are the medical savants, from the brainiest medical researchers to those assigned to clean and disinfect the hospitals and research labs. In this war, the tanks, missiles, aircraft carriers are in abeyance except as mobile hospitals. The strategists against this mysterious enemy are the medical experts, here garbed in an almost religious mantle of prophetic leadership. The vast amounts of debt nations are issuing are to protect the viability of least specialized members of the economic hierarchy. The expectation in this descent into defensive expediency is that we will have to fight hard to recover a decent working-

class economy for masses of humans now furloughed or laid off their jobs. Many of these jobs will disappear, as the employer classes attempt to maintain solvency by biting hard on the human and taxation costs. Instead of an advancing, growing financial economy that needs to absorb more hands, a world in fear of a recurrence of viral pandemics will now tread very carefully as they plan for the future. An economy which again begins to use fossil fuels—the blood that flows through the arteries of a 20th and 21st-century prosperity and war—will soon reveal to its users that these resources are not immune from history.

In the short run, the next few decades, things will be rough in terms of the political conflicts over government controls, attempts at egalitarian socialism, the inevitabilities of debt repayment and progressive tax policies. We are likely to witness a universal search for skilled, abstract, intellectual abilities to do the work that a modern robotic economy will now demand. Soon, from the police to the military, even parking lot and cleanup skills, the efficient mind will move to the front. Governments which are not lean in the use of tax revenues, along with the private sector's efficiency in the use natural and human resources, will bankrupt their nation. As the parable notes, "when the tide goes out we will know who is swimming naked."

Every nation that is an ethnicity will be selfishly pulling in its borders for protection in the search for economic and then social survival. The smart ones at the top will be rewarded for creating the most efficient modes of production. Even Vladimir Lenin, taking his lesson from Marx's historical view of economic modernity, realized that the Soviet Union could never compete with its neighbors unless it allowed the free mentality of his people to drive the nation towards modernity. By freeing brain power with all its sociological and economic hybris, Lenin, in 1921, was opening the door to national survival.

What we will be witnessing in the decades to come is the continuation of an ancient evolutionary dialogue between the dynamics of plenty and scarcity. For two centuries, the human species has been expanding on the wings of an indulgence of plenty. Science and natural resources have exploded our population within the world of Homo sapiens sapiens humans. They have also extended philanthropy to the outlier Hs domains. It is doubtful that this dynamic can continue to maintain a large portion of our nearly 8 billion humans aboard this planet.

From plenty, we slip into scarcity, to witness a new human move. The war for survival between the intellectually competent producers and protectors of our civilization, and those who are the receivers of this diminishing surplus of care for the poor, continues. In the West, will we continue the maintenance of Medicare and Medicaid, government-subsidized health, food stamps, varieties of government assistance to the "needy," including "great society" grants to single parents? Government policy is built on the taxes produced by the free marketplace, else in a totalitarian state, ladled out by fiat. The poor have little philanthropic recourse. In semi-democracies, this war for survival becomes political. How long will the tax payers tolerate such "misuse" of their labor? In any case, scarcity argues for the renewed dominance of the Homo sapiens sapiens mentality, as it adjusts to the now ever-advancing cognitive demands of science and technology for social survival.

## Ideology

We have noted in earlier chapters of the historical transition in humanity's need to believe, this from theistic and monarchical obeisance, given the failures to predict and realize their commands, to a more secular search for factual, symbolic methodologies that one could commit to. The issue of hierarchy in human society has always been a contentious element in our social interrelationships. For a few thousand years, priests, with their literate and intellectual skills, along with the charisma of warrior kings, gave these groups authority and privilege.



Even in the democratic and republican political environment exemplified by ancient Greece and Rome, the oligarchic classes held sway in many communities, fighting for privilege with egalitarian and populist persuasions. Indeed, in dynamic expansive times, wealthy privilege was sustained, while the hoi polloi, engorged on their crumbs, kept quiet. In our own dynamic centuries, wealth has accumulated outside of the political arena due to the creative thrust of industrial and technological innovation. When this innovation and wealth began to create significant institutional class and political power difference, the masses shifted their allegiance to socialism's claim of populist intellectual equality. And therefore, social class power immorality, a la Marx.

As we have previously explained, there came to be one massive, century-long and worldwide ideological commitment of belief that this wealth and seeming power differential was not earned. Rather, it was an illegitimate and grasping moral evil that required extirpation. And thus, the 20th century saw hundreds of millions of talented Homo sapiens sapiens humans destroyed in wars and genocides by their fellow Homo sapiens sapiens compatriots, often because of their ethnicity.

In so-called leftist circles, mostly in "democratic" environments such as the USA, enormous accumulations of private wealth have been created along with a thriving working and middle class. Yet, a very large part of its population is still essentially economic and political wards of the state. What the USA had going for it in the late 20th and 21st centuries was a dynamic which allowed for the government subsidization of a large welfare class, including millions of illegal immigrants magnetized by the "freebies"—medical, educational, and economic benefits not available in their countries of origin.

Hypothetically, our new virus might never obtain classical immunity relief for its recipients. Other viruses have remained beyond medical reach. If this occurs, it could engender a permanent imprint on the world, of fear, scarcity, and morbidity, such that the generosity of political philanthropy both within nations and between nations could create a "me first" nationalistic tonality in our planet of disappointed expectations. It will be fatal for globalization and the wars of ideology will return.

Argument 1: Why are groups of humans within and between nations having such tough luck? Is it not a conspiracy of the well-off, the power makers, to take it out on the poor, especially when they are identified by having different ethnic orientation or skin coloration?

What will the other side counter to this revolutionary accusation?

Argument 2: No, the other side will say, it is a matter of personal lack of discipline, not of studying, working hard enough, or engaging in bad behavior.

In democratic societies, the poor can still vote and agitate, assisted by committed ideological leaders, "socialist or fascist." The issue of human intelligence variability is on the prohibition index. Such ideas cannot be entertained without significant duress. One cannot predict the outcome in a universal environment of blindness and ignorance.

If secular rationality could obtain a place in our discussion, as we have argued in this and in other writings, there could be mustered national and international efforts to gradually complete our "unfinished biological revolution." We could be on our way to create a world wherein all humans have sufficient intellectual and educational capacities to compete economically and socially. This, while the smartest Homo sapiens sapiens are creating ever-heightening, abstract educational and work skills. Remember, we are on the road for a new intellectual direction in economic productivity.

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## THE PORNIFICATION OF AMERICA: HOW RAUNCH CULTURE IS RUINING OUR SOCIETY by Bernadette Barton [NYU Press, 9781479894437]

Pictures of half-naked girls and women can seem to litter almost every screen, billboard, and advertisement in America. Pole-dancing studios keep women fit. Men airdrop their dick pics to female passengers on planes and trains. To top it off, the last American President has bragged about grabbing women “by the pussy.”

This pornification of our society is what Bernadette Barton calls “raunch culture.” Barton explores what raunch culture is, why it matters, and how it is ruining America. She exposes how internet porn drives trends in programming, advertising, and social media, and makes its way onto our phones, into our fashion choices, and into our sex lives. From twerking and breast implants, to fake nails and push-up bras, she explores just how much we encounter raunch culture on a daily basis—porn is the new normal.

Drawing on interviews, television shows, movies, and social media, Barton argues that raunch culture matters not because it is sexy, but because it is sexist. She shows how young women are encouraged to be sexy like porn stars, and to be grateful for getting cat-called or receiving unsolicited dick pics. As politicians vote to restrict women’s access to birth control and abortion, **THE PORNIFICATION OF AMERICA** exposes the double standard we attach to women’s sexuality.

### Reviews

"Zippy and well illustrated, this book persuasively argues that 'equating hypersexualization with sex positivity is a form of Orwellian doublespeak.'" ~*New York Times Book Review*

"Barton, a professor of sociology and gender studies at Morehead State University, assembles her case against porn and pornification through a blend of pop-culture analysis and interviews (mostly with young women in their 20s)... **THE PORNIFICATION OF AMERICA** is a solid update of the traditional feminist case against porn." ~*The Washington Post*

"Once dismissed as a teenage phase, raunch culture is now a path to the presidency. Barton inspires us to take America back. Deftly teasing apart notions of sex positivity, sexual liberation, and radical feminism, she exposes raunch culture's pernicious lie: that pornification is empowerment. And not a moment too soon." ~*Lisa Wade, author of American Hookup: The New Culture of Sex on Campus*

"Feel anger, rage, or hope. It is impossible to read **THE PORNIFICATION OF AMERICA** without feeling *something* about the thorny issues of mediated sexual desire in the 21st century. Bernadette Barton writes about the relentless capitalist commodification of female sexiness and the people who participate in it. From incels to pastors to politicians, nobody is exempt from the objectified and self-objectified raunch culture that Barton portrays. This book aims to deprogram readers' subconscious conditioning and create the mental space to imagine a sex-positive revolution, not merely sexist shadows of that goal." ~*Shira Tarrant, author of The Pornography Industry: What Everyone Needs to Know*

"In **THE PORNIFICATION OF AMERICA**, Bernadette Barton offers a multi-faceted examination of what she calls 'raunch culture' in American society. She has a sophisticated awareness of feminist debates that are attuned to both protecting women's right to bodily self-determination—and our right to do what we please with our bodies—while simultaneously remaining critical of sexist and

racialized cultural commodifications that can have insidious effects on women's sense of feminist freedoms." ~Lynn Chancer, author of *After the Rise and Stall of American Feminism: Taking Back a Revolution*

"In her timely book, Bernadette Barton shows us how raunch culture has invaded every aspect of our lives—personally, professionally and politically. This book should be used on college campuses across the country to stimulate debate on how we got here, why it matters and what we can do to change it." ~Kathleen A. Bogle, author of *Hooking Up: Sex, Dating and Relationships on Campus*

"**THE PORNIFICATION OF AMERICA** is an excellent book for considering how sexism shapes popular culture and consequently public vernacular and social relationships. This is a great read for students or for any reader curious about the politics of raunch culture." ~Kristen Barber, author of *Styling Masculinity: Gender, Class, and Inequality in the Men's Grooming Industry*

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Raunch culture pervades popular culture. It is fueled by reactive mostly male form of sexual entitlement. Raunch permeates daily life as manifested through social digital medias. It includes people addicted to commodity sexuality rather than a sexuality of interpersonal connection and mutual care. Raunch arises from seeking to control sexual expression by reducing sexual pleasure to that one-sidedness of a thing without annoyance of other autonomous subjectivities. This thing-orientation (rather than person-orientation) is easily universalized by our ubiquitous consumerist digital media as passive ingestion of images and our active exercise emotions through interactive media. Raunch arises as an especially aggrieved male entitlement expressive frustration and rage. Where the real world does not match the fantasy of the pornographic double standard. The hypersexualization in a solitary environment of autonomous fantasy cannot effectively substitute for a matrix of communication and mutual care. Dick pics may pander to the male gaze but rarely to stranger.

## Seeing Raunch Culture: "It's Hijacking Our Lives without Us Even Knowing"

I've heard it so many times, it's comical. I'm chatting with someone—a friend, an acquaintance, a neighbor, a colleague—about my project on raunch culture. I receive a polite smile, a blank look, followed by a flicker of indecision, and then most say, "Oh, how interesting." "Do you know what raunch culture is?" I ask helpfully, and 98% of people do not. Recognition of raunch culture suffers, as I wrote earlier, from the condition of inarticulation. Most people do not have words to describe the hypersexualized images, speech, and attitudes of contemporary culture. Then, without language to quickly convey small and large concepts, communication can be laborious and confusing, perhaps

more work than it is worth, especially if others consider the ideas one is expressing controversial. So part of making raunch culture visible entails circulating words that name the phenomenon.

Linguists have long known that language influences how we perceive social life.<sup>1</sup> For example, consider the phrases "racial profiling" and "sexual harassment." Both these concepts entered into public use in the past 30-40 years. Did racial profiling and sexual harassment exist before people named these practices, and critiqued the abuse? Of course! Racial profiling was simply life as a racial minority, and sexual harassment what a woman expected without a male escort (and sometimes from the one supposedly "protecting" her). The new words facilitate awareness and the possibility of change. Dylan, who is white and 28, specifically discussed this. He said that raunch culture "has to be visible" before we can dismantle it:

It's super invisible for people who have the untrained eyes. People need to know it exists, how it harms people, and they need to know how it could possibly affect issues in our society. To be honest, a lot of those people probably wouldn't care anyway. But the more you make it visible, or are critical of it, and look at how it's affecting people, then the tide of history starts to ebb and flow and it may help.

Kayla thinks that it is difficult for young people to see raunch culture because "there's no contrast. It's highjacking our lives without us even knowing." She explained, "If everything in a room is gray, then how can you tell the difference between this gray item and that one. It should be glaringly obvious how awful these things are, but because it's just what is, people don't have anything to compare it to." Millennials and those in Generation Z urgently need more conversations about raunch culture because, as previously explored, hypersexualization is culture for them. In an image-based digital culture, the average consumer sees up to 10,000 advertisements a day, switches between screens up to 21 times an hour, and has an attention span of eight seconds.<sup>2</sup> Westerners thus encounter a smorgasbord of pouty female faces and provocatively arranged female bodies in many places: the grocery checkout, on billboards, on buses, really anywhere there is ad space. Those on social media see sexy pictures of women and girls scrolling through their feeds. Embedded in many of these images are the values of raunch culture: women's bodies are consumable.

Since children see this very specific raunch beauty ideal from the moment they begin looking at screens (which may be as young as two years old), Rebecca, who is white and 25, wondered how the images unconsciously affect consumers. She said,

I don't even notice it, because I just see it everywhere. You're inundated with this all the time. How do you change what your subconscious is telling you? My subconscious is saying women who look a certain way and behave a certain way are the epitome of femininity. How do I say that I don't believe that anymore? You have to decide to value something else other than that.

Thus, the first way to begin transforming raunch culture is to circulate words that allow people to perceive, name, and discuss it, words that logically dismantle the gender inequality on display, and empower people to express their support for the bodily autonomy of all people.

## Feminist Values as Antidote to Raunch Culture

Researching and writing about raunch culture in the dystopian Trump years has, at times, been a grim task. Still, I see much to be hopeful for. I am hopeful as I see people discuss feminist ideas about bodily autonomy, with the #metoo reckoning, in the grassroots work of progressives to make political change, with the results of the 2018 midterm election creating the most diverse Congress in the history of the United States, the enthusiasm shown for the progressive policies put forward by Alexandria Ocasio-Cortez, the admiration and reverence given to superhero and cultural meme Supreme Court justice Ruth Bader Ginsberg, and the rapid evolution in norms about gender

expression. As a culture, we are moving beyond sex/gender binaries of female/male and feminine/masculine. Despite a loud and at times violent backlash, trans and nonbinary people are changing the culture, carving new sex and gender paths, and thus weakening the armor of patriarchy with young people leading the way.

As I write this in April 2020, in the middle of the global Covid-19 quarantine, I am also hopeful that the sudden pause on social life may nudge Americans away from raunch culture. Unsurprisingly, it's still easy to see evidence of raunch in, for example, the swift creation of coronavirus porn' and terms like "dickstancing," which describes men sending out dick pics while practicing social distancing. Further, Pornhub responded to the international lockdown by making premium content free for a month. Data shows that traffic to Pornhub increased 10-20% in March and April 2020.<sup>16</sup> However, 'I also observe people focusing on art, family time, and good deeds—I see Zoom choral concerts and elaborate chalk-art creations, YouTube lessons from chefs fixing meals out of what's in their cupboards while children bound in and out of the kitchen, stories about healthcare workers rocking out to Journey songs with each patient recovery, universities and companies donating personal protective equipment, and people dancing in unicorn costumes. I am hopeful we are remembering that who we are, and what matters in our lives, encompasses much more than how "hot" we look.

More than anything else, young people make me hopeful. Unfairly maligned as spoiled and entitled, they suffer while the social safety net erodes. In my classrooms, I observe that they are thoughtful and careful how they speak, less interested in materialism than older generations, and more willing to delay gratification. They are fed up with the trolls and "haters:" and seek out opportunities to be positive and support one another as Kelly, passionately demonstrated. She said, "We need to be genuine and fight for each other instead of fighting each other. Don't focus on the negative, don't try to change anybody. It's their job to change. Be you, spread love, don't try to fix people"

Millennials and those in Generation Z deserve better than raunch culture. As Timothy thoughtfully explored, raunch culture pits women and men in a zero-sum game in which one person (usually the woman) has to lose so that the other can win. He explained, "Nobody should have to lose from human sexuality, but with raunch culture somebody does have to lose. There has to be this loss of dignity, loss of social status, or loss of personhood. I think that's one of the defining features of raunch culture is the loss or the void of something" We can reject this zero-sum end product of winner/loser in favor of the feminist paradigm of win/win. Feminism, the political, social, and intellectual movement for gender equality and human uplift, rests on three basic beliefs: that patriarchy exists, that greater equality improves social life, and that everyone has the right to bodily autonomy. We all win when feminists win. For example, feminist gains in the workforce improve everyone's work/life balance, feminist victories in climate change legislation protect the globe for all its inhabitants, and feminist initiatives for LGBTQ people foster better relationships between multiple groups—sexual and gender majority and minority members, encompassing women, men, trans, and non-binary people.

The path out of raunch culture must also include envisioning new paradigms, and perhaps Covid-19 is helping Westerners do this. Happiness research finds that the values of raunch culture—fame, status, and money—are directly opposed to those that actually foster happiness—meaningful relationships, engaging work, and feeling connected to something bigger than oneself. We can make individual choices that lessen the grip of raunch by allowing ourselves to be silly and vulnerable, having fun, lightening up, and paying attention to how we feel, not how we look. We can take social media fasts, let ourselves off the hook, appreciate women, be voices for social justice, support young people, and follow our inner guidance. We can reject the values of raunch in favor of love, connection, community, and intimacy. <>

## When Faiths Collide

The lofty goal of developing America into a center of Jewish culture, creativity, and scholarship collided from the start with a more mundane aspiration: to preserve from dilution the faith, culture, and community that rendered Jews distinct. Freedom emboldened Jews to dream great dreams, but it also empowered them to shape their own religious destinies, whatever those might be. As a result, every generation of American Jews wondered anew how their own children would come to terms with America and whether their grandchildren would be Jewish at all.

Sometime in 1903 or 1904, the great Talmudic scholar Rabbi Jacob David Willowski of Slutsk (1845-1913), then serving a brief and contentious term as chief rabbi of Chicago, took time from his studies to explore this theme. Writing in Hebrew for a limited audience, he expounded on the state of Judaism in America as part of an introduction to his scholarly *Sefer Nimukei Ridvaz* (1904).

"Jews were exiled to the United States, a land blessed with prosperity," he began. "Here they prospered and won respect from the people. But the ways and customs of this land militate against the observance of the laws of the Torah and the Jewish way of life." First and foremost, he objected, the state requires young Jews to attend public school with non-Jewish children, "boys and girls together." A young person who "spends most of his days in the public school: he warned, 'learns the ways of the gentiles and becomes estranged from Judaism.'" He also condemned the "difficulty of observing the holy Sabbath" in America; the widespread violations of Jewish dietary laws (*kashrut*) and marital precepts; and even the "great evil" caused by "freedom of the press," which permitted "wicked men" to establish periodicals that vilified God, Torah, and religious scholars, all with impunity. In the end, he offered a suggestion based upon what he had learned from Jews' Catholic neighbors in Chicago: he urged Jews to establish Jewish "parochial" schools where Jewish boys could learn Torah as well as secular subjects. "The Poles who came to this country did this," he observed, "establishing schools in their churches to prevent the corruption of their faith. Why should we not do the same for our children?"

Rabbi Willowski's jeremiad points to significant issues discussed in the final section of this book. First, his concern was for the survival of his own minority faith in the face of overwhelming majority pressure to assimilate. American Judaism, he understood, did not operate in its own little world, cut off from the Christian mainstream; it was instead in constant and ongoing tension with "the ways and customs of this land," and that threatened its continuity. He perceived American religion as a whole as dynamic and contentious, a battleground of clashing cultures and minority faiths struggling to maintain their separateness in a "land blessed with prosperity." Assimilation and accommodation, central themes to historians and scholars, were anathema to him. He emphasized resistance to the mainstream instead.

Second, Rabbi Willowski's comments underscore the significance of education as a focal point of religious and cultural contention. Defenders of the faith worried, and not without reason, that public schools would imbue their children with the values of the mainstream, leading them to become estranged from their parents and their cultural heritage. At a time when the majority of Americans (including most Jews) celebrated public schools as vehicles for imbuing children with "American values," he posed disturbing questions concerning the compatibility of nonsectarian public education with the goal of preserving a minority faith.

Finally, Rabbi Willowski's disquisition demonstrates that even those most resistant to cultural domination recognized that they were not swimming all alone against the tide. They saw themselves, instead, as part of a community of religious outsiders and understood that they had much to gain from observing those swimming beside them who shared parallel goals. Just as Polish-Catholic



parochial schools captured Rabbi Willowski's imagination, so too in many other cases, Jews selectively borrowed survival strategies learned from their neighbors. The desire "to prevent the corruption of their faith" was a goal that even those who disagreed mightily with one another could rally around.

This dynamic relationship between minority outsiders and majority insiders forms the subject of chapters 10-15. Chapter 10, focused on the nineteenth century, shows how Jews fought back against Christian missionaries determined to convert them. It traces a range of different responses—public and private, through words and through deeds—and concludes with a paradox: instead of converting America's Jews, the conversionist challenge helped to transform them into a more cohesive and secure community than they were before.

Chapter 11, likewise focused on the nineteenth century, examines a pervasive tension between received wisdom and perceived wisdom concerning Jews. Received wisdom produced a "mythical Jew," a Christ-killing, cursed figure of Christian tradition deeply embedded in Western culture. Perceived wisdom, by contrast, reflected the "Jew next door," the upstanding fellow-citizens whom Christians increasingly encountered as friends and neighbors. The more Christians and Jews interacted, the more likely it was for myths and realities concerning Jews to clash. The many attempted resolutions to such clashes, in turn, have shaped Jewish-Christian relations in the United States to the present day.

On the micro level, Jews and Christians often first collided in the schoolhouse. Long before Rabbi Willowski held up education as a focal point of religious and cultural contention, Jewish and Christian Sunday school textbooks battled over the Bible and theology wherever American Jews lived. Chapter 12 introduces two nineteenth-century American Jewish Sunday school textbooks that reflected these battles, both illuminating the themes of cultural borrowing and cultural resistance so critical to Jewish-Christian relations across time. In education, as in many other settings, Jews both learned from their non-Jewish neighbors and also contended with them. They sought, as good Americans, to form part of the larger community and, as good Jews, to stand apart from it.

Chapters 13 and 14 explore macrocosmic features of Jewish-Christian relations in the United States. They show, first, how Christians often combined love for Jews and support for Jewish rights with the hope that Jews would ultimately be incorporated into the Christian fold; and second, how Christians sometimes employed state power to gain an edge in the marketplace of American religion, disadvantaging Jews and other non-Christians in the process. Christian supersessionism, to be sure, has been mitigated over time, by countervailing factors such as mainstream commitments to religious freedom and pluralism, and the growth of voluntarism, coalition politics, and interfaith and community-relations organizations. Anticompetitive features that advantaged Christianity in the public square, public schools, armed forces, and correctional institutions have likewise been countered, sometimes through the courts and sometimes by voting out the party in power. When the religious marketplace functions free of state interference, of course, ordinary competition drives change. Time and again, as Rabbi Willowski himself did, American Jews have studied the successful methods and practices of their religious neighbors and harnessed them to strengthen their own faith community.

If America is not a Christian society—as Jews have long insisted—what kind of society is it, and what is the relationship of that society to the state? Chapter 15, "Church-State Dilemmas of American Jews," shows that the Jewish response has been historically divided. Some Jewish leaders have argued for the equality of all faiths under the Constitution, while others, echoing Thomas Jefferson, have sought to erect a high wall separating the state from any faith whatsoever. Which of these visions—

equal footing under the law or total church-state separation—best serves Jewish interests? Should Jews, in defense of their interests, ally even with atheists? To what extent should Jewish group interests ever prevail over separationist ideals, for example in seeking state funds for Jewish day schools, or for the security needs of Jewish institutions? No final resolution to these questions has ever emerged.

The defining question of how to be both Jewish and American likewise remains unresolved. Informed by the past, shaped by the present, and inspired by visions of an idyllic future, coming to terms with America is a process that never ends. <>

## **THE DISINFORMATION AGE: POLITICS, TECHNOLOGY, AND DISRUPTIVE COMMUNICATION IN THE UNITED STATES** edited by W. Lance Bennett and Steven Livingston [SSRC Anxieties of Democracy, Cambridge University Press, 9781108823784] [Open Access](#).

The intentional spread of falsehoods – and attendant attacks on minorities, press freedoms, and the rule of law – challenge the basic norms and values upon which institutional legitimacy and political stability depend. How did we get here? The Disinformation Age assembles a remarkable group of historians, political scientists, and communication scholars to examine the historical and political origins of the post-fact information era, focusing on the United States but with lessons for other democracies. Bennett and Livingston frame the book by examining decades-long efforts by political and business interests to undermine authoritative institutions, including parties, elections, public agencies, science, independent journalism, and civil society groups. The other distinguished scholars explore the historical origins and workings of disinformation, along with policy challenges and the role of the legacy press in improving public communication. This title is also available as [Open Access on Cambridge Core](#).

Brings together perspectives from history, communication studies, data science, political science, and sociology to offer a richer, more sophisticated view of disinformation than is available through any one discipline alone

Examines the political and historical origins of today's 'post-fact era', connecting current challenges to a longer-term constellation of actors and changes that have undermined public trust in the institutions that citizens once turned to for authoritative information

Proposes solutions that are focused on addressing root causes rather than treating symptoms

### **Reviews**

This is a hard-hitting book that is richly layered theoretically. It adds much to our understanding of disinformation in democracy while also serving as proof of the necessity of making research on disinformation an area of study across disciplines. The intellectually diverse and distinguished contributors have produced a must-read volume for all interested in disinformation and anyone interested in the future of democracy.' Bruce Bimber, University of California, Santa Barbara

'This volume traces the deep, thorny, and twisted roots of disinformation in American politics. In sobering detail, it lays bare the psychological, institutional, economic, partisan, technological, (geo)political, and regulatory underpinnings of disinformation, making it urgently clear why and how disinformation is neither accidental nor (easily) curable. Yet this book also offers a sliver of hope in

the form of implicit and explicit guidance for changes that could help keep disinformation in check.'  
Amber E. Boydston, University of California, Davis

'The Disinformation Age offers a sweeping series of chapters from leading scholars that cover the history, politics, implications, and potential solutions to the problem of disinformation in democracy. This expertly curated book eschews disciplinary boundaries to offer a sophisticated holistic understanding of the problem of disinformation. Even more, it knits together the voices of scholars seldom in the same conversation and reveals the power of this emerging field to provide us with ways to protect democracy from those who seek to destroy its epistemological foundations.' Daniel Kreiss, The University of North Carolina at Chapel Hill

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## Excerpt: The Origins and Importance of Political Disinformation

Democracies around the world face rising levels of disinformation. The intentional spread of falsehoods and related attacks on the rights of minorities, press freedoms, and the rule of law all challenge the basic norms and values on which institutional legitimacy and political stability depend. The many varieties of disinformation include: politicians lying about their policies and political activities; attacks on the scientific evidence surrounding important issues such as climate change; the spread of "deep state," "globalist" and various bizarre conspiracy theories; and the invention of stories to inflame existing social and political conflicts.

The sources of these claims include elected politicians, movement leaders, social media influencers, foreign governments, and political information sites that often use familiar journalistic formats to

package propaganda. Many of these efforts come from the radical-right movements, parties and wealthy libertarian interests that oppose broad and inclusive democratic representation, and the public interest protections of government. The Disinformation Age traces the origins, mechanisms, effects, and possible remedies for the spread of these forms of disruptive communication. While this volume focuses on the United States, similar patterns can be found in many other democratic nations.

Consider just one example of how disinformation can disrupt democratic political institutions. Following an historic reign of error and the promotion of thousands of “alternative facts,” Donald Trump ventured into new and uncharted territory by inviting various leaders of foreign nations to investigate the activities of his domestic political rival, Joe Biden. Most of his concerns were specifically framed in terms of the disinformation circulating in right-wing circles, which challenged official government investigations concluding that Russian operatives had hacked Democratic National Committee email servers; leaked information damaging to presidential candidate Hillary Clinton; and spread “fake news” stories via Facebook and other social media during the 2016 election. Trump’s alternative account of these events was typical of the fluid nature of information unhinged from evidence, reason, and credible sources.

Although years of lies and false claims had become routine in the course of Trump’s “Twitter presidency,” he seemed to cross a constitutional line by pressuring a foreign leader to intervene in US domestic politics. A whistleblower reported a phone call between Trump and Ukrainian President Zelensky during which Trump urged the Ukrainian leader to dig up dirt on Joe Biden and his son Hunter, in exchange for the US military aid needed to fight a Russian-backed insurgency in the country. The whistleblower complaint to the Inspector General of the Intelligence Community described how Trump used the power of his office to “solicit interference from a foreign country in the 2020 election.”<sup>1</sup> Among the favors Trump asked of the Ukrainian president was a demand for him to look into the whereabouts of a “missing” computer server used in the Democratic National Committee (DNC) hack. Trump’s request followed the logic of a conspiracy theory originating, in part, with Russian sources, which claimed that actors in Ukraine had organized the hack.

This wasn’t the first time Trump raised the matter of a “missing” DNC server or implied a Ukrainian link, specifically that the cyber-security firm, CrowdStrike, that investigated the hack was connected to Ukraine. On another occasion, Trump said, “That’s what I heard. I heard it’s owned by a very rich Ukrainian, that’s what I heard.” In a 2017 interview with the Associated Press, Trump referred to CrowdStrike as a “Ukraine-based” company. None of these claims were true. CrowdStrike is in fact headquartered in Sunnyvale, California, with an office in Arlington, Virginia. It was founded in 2011 by an accountant from New Jersey named George Kurtz and a Russian-born American citizen named Dmitri Alperovitch. What about the missing server that, according to the right-wing conspiracy theorists, was spirited away to Ukraine by CrowdStrike? In actuality, no servers located locally to the DNC were involved in the breach. Even though the facts of the case led to Trump’s impeachment by Democrats in the US House of Representatives and an eventual trial in the Senate, Trump and his supporters continued to rely on the conspiracy theory.

Reporting by Ashley Parker and Philip Rucker in the Washington Post covered a presidential Twitterstorm that went on for weeks after the start of the impeachment inquiry (one burst included thirty-three tweets in twenty minutes). Trump told his sixty-five million followers that the proceedings amounted to a coup. He charged the head of the congressional impeachment inquiry with treason. And he retweeted a warning from a prominent religious leader that his impeachment would “cause a civil war-like fracture in this nation.” Stephen Miller, a Trump senior policy adviser, told Fox News’s Chris Wallace that the whistleblower was “a deep state operative, pure and

simple.” Rather than a half-baked conspiracy, Trump’s supporters saw a lying press colluding with the “deep state” to produce fake news in support of endless witch-hunts against a beleaguered president fighting to save America.

The story that developed interactively between Trump and his supporters did not spring from thin air. It was spread in timely fashion by a distributed propaganda network backed by wealthy political interests and amplified by various political organizations and related media platforms. According to Jane Mayer writing in the *New Yorker*, the Ukraine conspiracy got its start with a Florida-based organization called the Government Accountability Institute (GAI), which bills itself as “America’s Premier Investigative Unit Exposing Cronyism and Corruption.” GAI was founded in 2012, by Stephen Bannon, the same erstwhile Trump ally who once headed Breitbart News and cofounded the ill-fated Cambridge Analytica, which compromised the accounts of more than fifty million Facebook users in spreading stealthy propaganda for Trump in the 2016 elections, and in support of the “Leave” campaign in the UK Brexit referendum earlier that year. GAI had been given millions of tax-exempt dollars by Robert Mercer’s family foundation. The Mercers also supported Breitbart, and Robert Mercer cofounded Cambridge Analytica with Steve Bannon. Rebekah Mercer, Robert’s daughter, is the GAI’s board chair. The Mercers also donated generously to the Trump campaign. GAI president Peter Schweizer, also an editor-at-large at Breitbart News, was well-known for his conspiracy writing about Hillary Clinton. His later book about Biden and his son laid out the basic outlines of Trump’s Ukraine conspiracy theory, and earned Schweizer an appearance on Hannity and other Fox News programs to publicize the conspiracy.

Mission accomplished: the damaging evidence-based account that Trump was trading foreign aid for political favors was thus neatly repaired by the alternative story that he was, in fact, making sure that countries with which the USA does business were not corrupt. According to the disinformation account, Trump and his team were investigating the real corruption of the past government and Joe Biden. The core audience for this alternative version were Trump supporters who follow him on Twitter, Fox News, Rush Limbaugh’s radio talk show, and many other media outlets involved in amplifying the story.

How is such strategic disinformation produced and spread, and with what effects? These are core questions around which a new field of communication research is emerging: the study of disinformation and networked propaganda. This field has room for both qualitative research (e.g., who funds the disinformation sites, political organizations and think tanks?) and quantitative work (e.g., how do large volumes of dubious content flow through various information and communication networks?). This emerging area of study, as illustrated by the range of work in this book, also looks at challenges to the traditional press and the practice of journalism, as well as the erosion of democratic legitimacy and liberal values. These threats raise important questions about how to protect democratic institutions and values, and how to regulate disruptive information and the political organizations and media companies implicated in its spread.

## How Did We Get Here?

There are many explanations for how we arrived at our current “post-truth” era. Some point to social media’s propensity to algorithmically push extremist content and to draw likeminded persons together with accounts unburdened by facts. Others emphasize the role of the Russians, Iranians, North Koreans, or Chinese in efforts to disrupt elections and exaggerate domestic divisions. Other standard accounts point to voter ignorance, racial resentments or religious intolerance. Adherents to these explanations advocate better media literacy and citizenship education, and more fact-

checking in journalistic accounts. While there is merit to these and other accounts, they fail to address the full scope of the problem.

In varying ways, several of the contributors to this volume focus on the erosion of liberal democratic institutions, particularly parties, elections, the press, and science. These institutions produce information anchored in norm-based processes for introducing facts into public discourse, including peer-review in science, rules of evidence in courts, professional practices and norms of fairness and facticity in journalism. At the end of the day, Trump's unhinged conspiracies reflected not just his personal psychological condition, but also a broader institutional crisis that brings with it an epistemological crisis. In the absence of authoritative institutions, Trump and his enablers were unanchored by facts. Instead, they had "alternative facts."

### Why The Institutional Crisis?

Some erosion of trust in institutions stems from historic incidents of government deceit, such as years of lying about the Vietnam War, followed four decades later by the lies supporting the disastrous invasion of Iraq in 2003. As the messenger for government communications, journalism also suffered because of its uncritical coverage of the pretext of the war. The business press also could have added more critical reporting to its boosterish coverage of Wall Street prior to the financial collapse of 2008. Meanwhile, business has also contributed to the spread of disinformation by promoting harmful products that have put public safety and health at risk, with particularly egregious examples including the denial of scientific evidence about the risks of cigarette smoking, pesticides, and other chemicals, as well as climate change.

While this legacy of deceptive communication may have weakened public trust in traditional, authoritative information sources (e.g., government and science), the recent era has witnessed more systematic efforts by political organizations and media companies to ramp up public anger and mistrust. Further complicating these problems is the proliferation of communication technologies that enable citizens to produce and spread content, as well as to consume it, from a greater range of questionable sources than ever before. This book explores the rise of the current disinformation order and the role of democratic institutions, political organizations, and information and communication technologies in that story. While this is largely a story about the United States, the political and communication processes involved also apply in different ways to other democracies. We hope that our frameworks will be of use to scholars in other countries.

### About This Book

The authors gathered here are distinguished representatives of the interdisciplinary perspectives of history, political science, sociology, law, and communication – fields that are all helpful to understanding the origins and importance of the problem. While some observers approach disinformation as something that has emerged seemingly from nowhere, the chapters in this book trace various origins, such as: the history of business deception in promoting corporate interests over the public interest, government lying to promote dubious policies, and the rise of political influence networks that limit the capacities of government to represent the public interest. These historical factors have contributed both to the erosion of trust in public institutions, and to a related decline in confidence in the news media that have traditionally connected public authorities and citizens. As authoritative information is increasingly challenged, new digital platforms and social media networks supply the demand for alternative political truths that are actively consumed by disaffected citizens. The growing volume of disinformation fuels political movements and parties largely on the radical right, resulting in attacks on the press, the fostering of hate, efforts to exclude various minority groups, and the rise of ethnic nationalism in many nations. The book traces the



origins of this decline of institutional authority, the state of current disinformation systems, the historical origins of systemic disinformation, the importance of independent public media, and possible regulatory and political remedies for these problems.

In Chapter 1, Lance Bennett and Steven Livingston define the nature of disinformation, and outline the challenges to healthy democratic discourse. Disinformation is often explained in terms of individual-level psychological processes, including the tendency to seek information that is supportive of existing beliefs or to be more skeptical of information that runs contrary to existing beliefs. These might be thought of as demand-side explanations. With its endless supply of unfiltered and often unhinged claims, social media is said to exacerbate these mental proclivities. With the problem understood in this way, obvious solutions involve media literacy programs, fact-checking, and some form of content regulation.

While not dismissing the significance of cognitive processes, Bennett and Livingston step back to consider the broader political and economic attacks on public institutions that have traditionally produced authoritative information in democracies. This account focuses on the rise of political influence networks anchored in think tanks, lobbying campaigns, tax-supported “charitable” political organizations, and electoral campaign finance laws. These efforts to undermine the representative capacity of parties, governments and state institutions have also undermined the credibility of many elected officials, along with the legacy press which carries their messages. The result has been a political backlash against previously authoritative institutions by those on both left and right. The right especially has organized around ethnic nationalism, antiimmigration, and other divisive political issues. These political ruptures are magnified and supported by the large disinformation networks that have grown with the help of wealthy business interests and the elected officials that they support. Understood through a political and economic lens, solutions are found in reforms designed to strengthen authoritative institutions.

The following section of the book covers the current political communication situation, beginning with Chapter 2, by Yochai Benkler that describes the results of a large-scale study of the political media ecosystem during the 2016 US presidential campaign and the first year of the Trump presidency. The major finding is that the American political media ecosystem is asymmetrically polarized, with an insular, well-defined right wing, and the rest of the media, from the center-right to the far left, forming a single media ecosystem anchored by traditional media organizations like the New York Times or the Washington Post. The analysis shows that the American radical right is more active in producing and sharing disinformation than the left. The chapter then offers an analysis of why political economy, rather than technology, was the source of this asymmetry. Benkler outlines the interactions between political culture, law and regulation, and communications technology, which underwrote the emergence of the propaganda feedback loop in the right wing of the American media ecosystem.

Chapter 3 by Paul Starr describes how we became so vulnerable to disinformation in this digital era. He argues that, like recent analyses of democratization, which have turned to the reverse processes of democratic backsliding and breakdown, analyses of contemporary communication need to attend to the related processes of backsliding and breakdown in the media – or what he refers to as “media degradation.” After defining that term in relation to democratic theory, Starr focuses on three developments that have contributed to increased vulnerability to disinformation: 1) the attrition of journalistic capacities; 2) the degradation of standards in both the viral and broadcast streams of the new media ecology; and 3) the rising power of digital platforms with incentives to prioritize growth and profits and no legal accountability for user-generated content. Policies of limited government

and reduced regulation of business, along with partisan politics, have contributed to these developments.

The next section of the book examines key historical roots of the problem. Chapter 4 by Naomi Oreskes, Erik Conway, and Charlie Tyson asks a deceptively simple question: how did so many Americans come to believe that economic and political freedoms are indivisible from one another? One part of the answer involves organized campaigns by trade associations to sell these principles to the American people. This chapter examines one such campaign: the National Association of Manufacturers' propaganda effort of 1935–1940. A central part of this campaign was the radio show *The American Family Robinson*. This folksy drama of small-town American life didactically warned of “foreign” socialist theories and reassured listeners of the beneficence of business leaders. The program offers a case study in corporate propaganda. In its bid to convince listeners that the American way of life depends on the free market – and that any move toward social democracy presents a threat – the show dramatizes argumentative and rhetorical procedures that continue to shape American political culture.

Chapter 5 by Nancy MacLean examines an important source of the strategic disinformation now rife in American public life: the Koch network of extreme right donors, allied organizations, and academic grantees. She argues that these architects of the radical transformation of our institutions and legal system have adopted the tactic of disinformation in the knowledge that the hard-core libertarian agenda was extremely unpopular, and therefore required stealth to succeed. The chapter tells the story of how Charles Koch and his inner circle, having determined in the 1970s that changes significant enough to enable a “constitutional revolution” (in the words of the political economist James McGill Buchanan) would be needed to protect capitalism from democracy, then went about experimenting to make this a reality. In the 1980s, they first incubated ideas for misleading the public to move their agenda forward, as shown by the strategy for Social Security privatization that Buchanan recommended to Koch's Cato Institute, and by the operations of Citizens for a Sound Economy, the network's first astroturf – or fake grassroots – organizing effort. Subsequent practices of active disinformation by this network, for a project that could not succeed by persuasion and organizing alone, become more comprehensible when understood as driven by a mix of messianic dogma and self-interest. Later cases include tobacco “scholarship” for hire by Buchanan's colleagues at George Mason University to deter the public health campaign against smoking; climate science denial to stop action on global warming; promotion of the myth of mass voter fraud to leverage racism to restrict the electorate; assurances of the benefits of an Article V Constitutional Convention, restricted to a few pre-announced changes; and the use of concocted memes of violent mobs requiring restraint, in order to win passage of new legislation to criminalize protest, particularly against the fossil fuel industry.

The next section bridges the historical roots of the problem with the challenges of making contemporary policy to regulate these abuses of transparent communication. Chapter 6 by Dave Karpf explores how online conspiracy theories, disinformation, and propaganda have changed over the twenty-five-year history of the World Wide Web. Drawing a historical comparison between digital disinformation in the 1996 presidential election and the 2016 presidential election, the chapter explores how the mechanisms of online diffusion, the political economy of journalism and propaganda, and the slow, steady erosion of load-bearing norms among political elites have combined to create a much more dangerous context today than in decades past. The chapter concludes with a discussion of how technology platforms, political elites, and journalistic organizations might respond to the current state of online disinformation.

Chapter 7 by Heidi Tworek explores five historical patterns in information manipulation and suggests how these patterns can guide contemporary policy-making about the Internet. The historical resonances remind us to pay attention to physical infrastructure, understand disinformation as an international relations problem, examine business structures more than individual content, consider long-term consequences of regulation, and tackle broader economic and social issues beyond media. The framework of five patterns emerged from Tworek's testimony before the International Grand Committee on Big Data, Privacy, and Democracy in 2019.

Ben Epstein (Chapter 8) concludes the policy section by explaining that although the dangers of disinformation campaigns are real and growing quickly, effective interventions have remained elusive. Why is it so difficult to regulate online disinformation? This exploration builds on the chapter by Heidi Tworek and analyzes three major challenges to effective regulation: 1) defining the problem clearly so that regulators can address it, 2) deciding who should be in charge of creating and enforcing regulations, and 3) understanding what effective regulation might actually look like. After analyzing these challenges, Epstein suggests four standards for effective regulation of disinformation. First, regulation should target the negative effects, while consciously minimizing any additional harm caused by the regulation itself. Second, regulation should be proportional to the harm caused. Third, effective regulation must be able to adapt to changes in technology and disinformation strategies. And fourth, regulators should be as independent as possible from political and corporate influence.

The following section examines the possible role of, and challenges to, public broadcasting in restoring trusted public information. In Chapter 9, Patricia Aufderheide asks: Can US public broadcasting provide a unique bulwark against disinformation? At a time when commercial journalism's business model has eroded and disinformation abounds, there are ample reasons to turn to the public broadcasting service model. The service was founded with Progressive-era rhetoric about an informed public, and has withstood relentless attacks from neoconservatives, although not without casualties. Public broadcasting has two of the most trusted media brands in the USA, National Public Radio (NPR) and Public Broadcasting System (PBS). Aufderheide shows how the structure of public broadcasting both limits its ability to serve as a counter to disinformation, and also in some ways protects it against attacks.

In Chapter 10, Victor Pickard makes the case for why a new public media system is necessary to confront the "systemic market failure" plaguing American journalism. While underscoring normative foundations, this chapter tries to address the "how did we get here?" and "what is to be done?" questions. After contextualizing problems with disinformation and the contemporary journalism crisis, the chapter explores various criteria for what this new public media should entail, and concludes with a discussion about the necessary policies for actualizing structural alternatives to the overly commercialized American media system. This analysis addresses similar recent developments with other public systems around the world, including the BBC.

The concluding chapter by Steven Livingston and Lance Bennett (Chapter 11) reviews the historical attacks on authoritative public institutions, and raises the question of why many of the political organizations responsible for eroding trusted information sources should continue to be granted tax-protected status as charitable organizations. This seemingly bizarre reality shows how far public institutions in the United States have become bent to the service of private interests that aid the spread of disinformation. This conclusion invites readers to think about why there is so little attention devoted to the protection of democracy and the quality of citizen information upon which it depends. <>

# THE HUMANITY OF PRIVATE LAW: PART I: EXPLANATION by Nicholas J McBride [Hart Publishing, 9781509911950]

**THE HUMANITY OF PRIVATE LAW** presents a new way of thinking about English private law. Making a decisive break from earlier views of private law, which saw private law as concerned with wealth-maximisation or preserving relationships of mutual independence between its subjects, the author argues that English private law's core concern is the flourishing of its subjects.

## THIS VOLUME

- presents a critique of alternative explanations of private law;
- defines and sets out the key building blocks of private law;
- sets out the vision of human flourishing (the RP) that English private law has in mind in seeking to promote its subjects' flourishing;
- shows how various features of English private law are fine-tuned to ensure that its subjects enjoy a flourishing existence, according to the vision of human flourishing provided by the RP;
- explains how other features of English private law are designed to preserve private law's legitimacy while it pursues its core concern of promoting human flourishing;
- defends the view of English private law presented here against arguments that it does not adequately fit the rules and doctrines of private law, or that it is implausible to think that English private law is concerned with promoting human flourishing.

A follow-up volume will question whether the RP is correct as an account of what human flourishing involves, and consider what private law would look like if it sought to give effect to a more authentic vision of human flourishing.

**THE HUMANITY OF PRIVATE LAW** is essential reading for students, academics and judges who are interested in understanding private law in common law jurisdictions, and for anyone interested in the nature and significance of human flourishing.

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Delivered in a more self-confident age, Richard O'Sullivan KC's 1950 Hamlyn Lectures on The Inheritance of the Common Law begin with the ringing declaration that 'The Common Law of England is one of the great civilising forces in the world: In this book, I want to explore whether he was right - at least so far as English private law is concerned.'

It must be admitted that the prospects of vindicating O'Sullivan's faith in the common law do not look good. At the level of both doctrine and theory, it might be thought easier to write a book entitled The Inhumanity of Private Law. In Section 1 of this introduction, I will set out five tough cases that make it hard for us to think of private law as seriously concerned with promoting the welfare of its subjects. In Section 2, I will set out three currently popular explanations of private law - economic, Kantian, and moralistic - and argue that if any of these explanations are correct, then we cannot say that private law achieves anything that is of real value to those who are subject to it.

Having set out the obstacles in the way of thinking of private law as humanistic in its goals and aspirations, I turn in Section 3 to see what can be said in favour of a humane view of private law, which I will call 'F' for short. According to F: (1) private law is pervaded by a concern to promote the flourishing of all its subjects as human beings, (2) the particular conception of what amounts to

human flourishing that underlies private law is a very familiar conception that I will call the t-picture, or the 'RP' for short, and (3) in trying to promote human flourishing, private law is constrained by the need to maintain its legitimacy. (3) results in private law doing both more and less than we would expect it to do if just (1) and (2) were true.

The rest of this volume is devoted to substantiating the claims that F makes about private law. But doing this only amounts to Part I of my exploration of the links between private law and human flourishing. Section 4 introduces Part II of the project, which will be published in a second, forthcoming, volume. Part II mounts a critique of English private law off the back of the claims made about private law by F. I will argue in Part II that the RP is wrong as an account of human flourishing and that a private law based on an authentic vision of human flourishing will look very different from the private law we have now. If this is right then we cannot endorse O'Sullivan's paean in favour of the common law. The best we can say is that private law is a noble failure - it aspires to promote human flourishing, but is betrayed in that aspiration by its failure to understand what authentic human flourishing involves.

K Kantian theories of private law, which see private law as working to constitute us as persons enjoying relationships

of mutual independence.

LE Economic theories of private law, which see private law as geared towards promoting wealth-maximisation.

RP The picture of human flourishing that is widely accepted by reflective people in modern Western liberal societies, and is received in that it is promoted by the culture of those societies.

RP-flourishing Living a life that is flourishing according to the RP.

F The claim, made in this book, that English private law is concerned to promote the RP-flourishing of its subjects, while maintaining its legitimacy.

The Basic Obligation Claim The claim that private law is concerned to promote the (or BOC) RP-flourishing of its subjects in determining what basic obligations they owe each other.

The Property Claim The claim that the rights and powers that constitute a particular interest in an item of property exist for the benefit of the holder of that particular interest because having those rights and interests will (or is likely to) promote the holder's RP-flourishing.



**The Transaction Claim** The claim that private law enables us to enter into various different types of transaction in order to enhance our RP-flourishing.

UKSC United Kingdom Supreme Court

### Rejecting the Same Reason Requirement

The first reason is that there is no evidence that any judge or legislator has ever endorsed the Same Reason Requirement, or even contemplated that they might be subject to such a requirement in shaping private law. As F would predict, the common law is an institution that is pragmatic[ to its core, and pragmatism has no respect for the Same Reason Requirement. Any number of statements by nineteenth or twentieth century judges or jurists could be instanced here in support of this pragmatic view of the common law. Lest these be taken as reflecting some corruption or decline in thinking about the common law, consider instead the following seventeenth century statements by Matthew Hale:

The common laws of England are not the product of the wisdom of some one man, or society of men in any one age, but of the wisdom, counsel, experience, and observation of many ages of wise and observing men: where the subject of any law is single, the prudence of one age may go far at one essay to provide a fit law, and yet even in the wisest provisions of that kind, experience shows us that new and unthought of emergencies often happen, that necessarily require new supplements, abatements, or explanations, but the body of laws, that concern the common justice applicable to a great kingdom, is vast and comprehensive, consists of infinite particulars, and must meet with various emergencies, and therefore requires much time and much experience, as well as much wisdom and prudence successively to discover defects and inconveniences, and to apply apt supplements and remedies for them; and such are the common laws of England, namely the productions of much wisdom, time, and experience.

He that thinks a state can be exactly steered by the same laws in every kind, as it was two or three hundred years since, may as well imagine that the clothes that fitted him when he was a child should serve him when he is grown a man. The matter changeth the custom; the contracts the commerce; the dispositions, educations, and tempers of men and societies change in a long tract of time; and so must their laws in some measure be changed, or they will not be useful for their state and condition ... These very laws, which at first seemed the wisest contribution under heaven, have some flaws and defects discovered in them by time. As manufacturers, mercantile arts, architecture and building, and philosophy itself; receive new advantages and discoveries by time and experience; so much more do laws, which concern the manners and customs of men.

It seems obvious that Hale would have regarded the Same Reason Requirement as a peculiar limit on private law's functioning and development.

For Weinrib, the Same Reason Requirement is not peculiar at all, but demanded by reason:

(C)ohereance ... requires that (a) justification occupy the entire conceptual space to which its normative content entitles it. If it fails to do so, then a determination that the defendant is liable to the plaintiff would involve either arbitrarily extending the justification, so that it

occupies space to which its own normative force does not entitle it, or arbitrarily truncating the justification, so that it recedes from the space to which it is entitled.

However, this does not dispel the air of peculiarity around the Same Reason Requirement. In fact, it compounds it.

For example, suppose we find (as we do) that a duty of care was owed in *Kent v Griffiths* on the basis that the defendant ambulance service interfered with the claimant's finding alternative ways of getting to hospital by assuring her doctor that they were on their way. We then decide that given this, we must also find that a duty of care is owed whenever the ambulance service tells a patient that they are on the way - on the ground that it would be invidious and bring the legal system into disrepute if the law said that such an assurance will give rise to a duty of care if (i) the patient is not so badly off that they could get to hospital under their own steam, whereas it will not if (ii) the patient is so badly off that they can only get to a hospital in an ambulance. Weinrib seems to think that we are acting arbitrarily in extending the finding of a duty of care in *Kent v Griffiths* in this way, because the original justification for finding such a duty of care only applies in (i) and not in (ii). But this seems obviously untrue - we are not acting arbitrarily, but wisely, in saying that if we are going to find a duty of care in (i), we had better do so in (ii) as well.

Again, take the case where A pays £100 into B's bank account, mistakenly thinking that he owes B £100, and then consider the alternative scenarios: (i) B is still 'up' by £100 as a result of A's payment, and (ii) as a result of actions performed in good faith by B, B is no longer enriched as a result of A's payment. Our reason for wishing to help A get his money back applies just as strongly in (ii) as it does in (i), but the fact that B is no longer 'up' as a result of A's payment in (ii) means that there is no reasonable way of satisfying that desire in (ii), whereas there is in (i). So in (ii) we allow B to defeat A's claim via a defence of change of position; whereas in (i), we hold that B is liable to pay A £100. Weinrib seems to think that we would be acting arbitrarily if we did not give effect to our desire to allow A to get his money back in (ii) when we do in (i), given that the reason we have for wanting to see A get his money back applies just as much in (ii) as it does in (i). However, this is again obviously untrue. It is those who insist that A be allowed to sue B for £100 regardless of the impact that doing so will have on B who are being unreasonable; not those who take the contrary position.

Given this, there seems no good reason why anyone would adopt the Same Reason Requirement. As a result, it is not surprising that no judge or legislator in history seems to have been motivated by a desire to give effect to the Same Reason Requirement. Faced with a choice between Kant or incoherence (in the sense that Kantians use that term), they have opted over and over again for incoherence, and for good reason.

### Rejecting a Right to Independence

The second reason for thinking that it is implausible that the judges and legislators who shaped private law sought to observe the Same Reason Requirement in so doing lies in the nature of the Kantian master idea that allows Kantians to explain private law in a way that respects the Same Reason Requirement. This master idea - which lies at the heart of Kant's Doctrine of Right - is that 'Freedom (independence from being constrained by another's choice), insofar as it can coexist with the freedom of every other in accordance with a natural law, is the only original right belonging to every man by virtue of his humanity.

I will not endeavour to show here how accepting this master idea and its sequelae allows Kantians to explain private law (after a fashion) in a way that respects the Same Reason Requirement. Instead, I

want to argue that it is unlikely that the judges or legislators who shaped private law accepted this Kantian master idea - what we can call, for short, the idea that each of us has a 'right to independence. If this is right then it is unlikely that those judges or legislators could have sought to abide by the Same Reason Requirement because - we are assuming - the only way to abide by that requirement is to accept that each of us has a right to independence.

So why is it unlikely that the judges and legislators who shaped private law accepted that each of us has a 'right to independence'? I have already touched on part of the reason that none of them would have heard of such a thing, at least in its Kantian form.' But a further, and deeper, reason for thinking that the judges and legislators who shaped private law would not have accepted that each of us has a 'right to independence is that not even Kantians have a good reason for thinking that we have a right to independence. If Kantians have no good reason for thinking that each of us has a right to independence, it is hard to believe that the judges and legislators we are focussing on would have thought they had good reason to believe in a right to independence. The point being made here does not rest on the fact that Kant himself did not try to show that we have a right to independence. Rather, the point rests on the fact that if we accept Kant's metaphysics, as laid out in his Critique of Pure Reason (1781), we will conclude that we have good reason to doubt whether there is such a thing as a right to independence.

Imagine that you are looking at a tree. Kant's Critique tell us that what you are seeing is not the tree as it is (the Ding an sich), but rather the tree as it appears to us given the senses that are available to us to experience the world (sight, touch, smell, sound and taste) and a mental matrix of sensibilities that allow us to experience the world. These sensibilities account for why we experience things as having an identity, as existing in space and time, and as having causal relationships with other things. If we are to have any experiences at all, our experiences have to take this form: we don't have the sensibilities that allow us to have any other kind of experiences. Kant uses the word noumenal to describe the tree as it is, and the word phenomenal to describe the tree as it appears to us. The noumenal world is therefore the world of things as they really are, while the phenomenal world is the world of those things as we experience them given the beings we are and the senses and sensibilities with which we are equipped. It is impossible for us to penetrate beyond the phenomenal world and know things as they really are in the noumenal world: 'it is only of things as they appear to us that we can have any knowledge or awareness: whatever it is that they are in themselves must for ever remain inaccessible to us human beings'.

What Kant overlooked in making this brilliant distinction between the noumenal and the phenomenal is that if our experience of things as having an identity, and existing in space and time, are merely products of our sensibilities that allow us to experience the world, then the noumenal world - the world as it really is - is not made up of lots of noumenal trees and cars and people and houses and so on, all existing as they really are. Instead, the noumenal world is undifferentiated. This is because for

[O]ne object to be different from another it must either occupy the same space at a different time or a different space at the same time, or a different space at a different time: if it occupies the same space at the same time it is the same object ... But ... space and time are forms of sensibility. They have no purchase in a subject-less realm, the realm of whatever exists in itself independently of experience. Therefore differentiation can obtain only in the world of experience, and can have no being in the noumenal realm. Therefore there cannot be things (in the plural) as they are in themselves independently of being experienced.

This crucial development of Kant's philosophy was made by Kant's most devoted follower, Arthur Schopenhauer. On 'Schopenhauer's view of total reality ... there is an immaterial, undifferentiated, timeless, spaceless something of which we can never have direct knowledge but which manifests itself to us as this differentiated phenomenal world of material objects (including us) in space and time. Including us:

In the phenomenal world we exist as individuals: we come into existence as material objects occupying space, and persisting for a time; but this differentiation can obtain in the phenomenal world only. Noumenally, in the ultimate ground of our being, outside space or time or embodiment, it is impossible that we should be differentiated. Therefore we must all be 'one'...

Schopenhauer called this undifferentiated noumenal reality, which manifests itself at the phenomenal level in differentiated form, 'Will' - hence the title of his masterwork, *The World as Will and Representation*, first published in 1818. 'Will' denotes noumenal reality; 'Representation', phenomenal appearance. Bryan Magee - the British philosopher from whom the last few quotes have been taken, and who has done more than anyone else to popularise Schopenhauer's work in the English-speaking world - calls Schopenhauer's choice to use the word 'Will' to describe the undifferentiated noumenal reality disastrous because of the misunderstandings to which that choice gave rise. While Magee makes various suggestions as to what term Schopenhauer could have used instead to describe the undifferentiated, impenetrable noumenal reality, the most obvious is 'Being'. Such a usage fits in well with well-established ideas that Being is 'one and timeless, and that Being is something that both underpins and transcends our merely phenomenal existence in the world - and by so transcending calls on us (in so far as we participate in Being) to go beyond our merely phenomenal existence.

The implications of an undifferentiated noumenal reality for a 'right to independence' should be becoming clear. For Kant - who, remember, was operating under the assumption that for every phenomenal me and phenomenal you, there corresponds a noumenal me and a noumenal you - all the moral duties we owe each other are rooted in the fact of who we are at the noumenal level:

In the context of his rights in relation to others, I actually regard every person simply in terms of his humanity, hence as *homo noumenon*;...

Now the human being as a natural being that has reason (*homo phaenomenon*) can be determined by his reason, as a cause, to action in the sensible world, and so far the concept of obligation does not come into consideration. But the same human being thought in terms of his personality, that is, as a being endowed with inner freedom (*homo noumenon*), is regarded as a being that can be put under obligation ...

In the system of nature, a human being (*homo phaenomenon*, *animal rationale*) is a being of slight importance and shares with the rest of the animals, as offspring of the earth, an ordinary value (*pretium vulgare*) ... But a human being regarded as a person, that is, as the subject of morally practical reason, is exalted above any price; for as a person (*homo noumenon*) he is not to be valued merely as a means to the ends of others or even to his own ends, but as an end in himself, that is, he possesses a dignity (an absolute inner worth) by which he exacts respect for himself from all other rational beings in the world."

But if - given Kant's own metaphysics - there is, at the noumenal level, no individual you and no individual me, but we are all one, Kant cannot appeal to our individual existence at the noumenal

level to explain why we owe each other moral duties, let alone assert that each of us has a 'right to independence'.

This explains why not even Kantians have reason to believe that there is such a thing as a 'right to independence' - but it also explains why even if the judges and legislators we are focussing on had heard of a 'right to independence' (in its Kantian form), they would have emphatically rejected the idea that there is such a thing. This is because while those judges and legislators would have been unfamiliar with the idea of a 'right to independence'; they would have been very familiar with the ideas that there is such a thing as a phenomenal world and a noumenal world, and that at the noumenal level all things are one and exist outside space and time. They would have been very familiar with these ideas for the same reason that they would have been very familiar with the idea that the universe began with a Big Bang, long before physicists endorsed the idea in the second half of the twentieth century - they were all practising Christians. As such, they were very familiar with passages such as:

[Me look not at the things which are seen, but at the things which are not seen: for the things which are seen are temporal; but the things which are not seen are eternal.

Neither pray I for these alone, but for them also which shall believe on me through their word; that they all may be one; as thou, Father, art in me, and I in thee, that they also may be one in us: that the world may believe that thou hast sent me. And the glory which thou gavest me I have given them; that they may be one, even as we are one: I in them, and thou in me, that they may be made perfect in one; and that the world may know that thou hast sent me, and hast loved them, as thou hast loved me.

Given this, it becomes almost impossible to think that the judges and legislators who shaped English private law sought, in doing so, to comply with the Same Reason Requirement. The only way they could have done so would have been by accepting the Kantian idea that we enjoy a 'right to independence' - and such an idea would have been deeply antithetical to their worldview, as it is to the worldview that Kantians themselves adopt (or should adopt), given the arguments laid out by Kant in his Critique of Pure Reason.

## Final Thought

As an explanation of English private law, F stands up better than any of its competitors. While it does not fit every detail of English private law, it does not need to and indeed should not do so. But the details of English private law that are incompatible with F can easily be explained away as historical excrescences, carbuncles on the law that can be scraped off without loss. And F provides a more plausible account of English private law than any of its competitors.

While as instrumental as economic accounts of private law, F does not see private law as pursuing an ideal as empty as wealth-maximisation but rather an ideal - the RP-flourishing of private law's subjects - that we have every reason to think is an ideal that the judges and legislators who shaped private law would have had in mind in the noon and afternoon stages of the common law's development. And the account of private law presented here pays far more respect to private law's fundamental building blocks - in particular, the notion of duty - than economic explanations of private law ever have.

And while F may not present an account of private law that is as 'coherent' (in the Kantian sense of the word) as K does, we have no reason to think that those who shaped English private law sought to ensure that it was 'coherent' (in the Kantian sense) and every reason to think they would have

rejected (as, paradoxically, Kantians would also want to reject) the key idea that would allow one to create a 'coherent' system of private law - that of everyone enjoying a 'right to independence'.

So F stands up, and should be accepted as correct in its explanation of private law until something better comes along - but we have every reason to think that that 'something better' will merely be a refined version of F, and not radically different from F. However, if F is correct, and English private law is concerned to promote the RP-flourishing of its subjects, while maintaining its own legitimacy, a final thought occurs - what if human flourishing does not consist in RP-flourishing? After all, the arguments laid out in the previous section indicate that we are far stranger beings than we might first think. If we are, at base, the beings who are aware (or are capable of being aware) that we participate in Being, what does that mean for what is involved in our flourishing? It seems unlikely that the RP accurately describes what it means for beings like that to flourish. So it may be that our flourishing does not involve RP-flourishing, and involves something else entirely. If so, then English private law has been barking up the wrong tree for all these years, and would look very different if it were to concerned to promote an authentic vision of what human flourishing involves. It is this, final and disquieting, thought that I will explore in Part II of this project. <>

## The Procedural Law Governing Facts and Evidence in International Human Rights Proceedings: Developing a Contextualized Approach to Address Recurring Problems in the Context of Facts and Evidence by Torsten Stirner [Series: International Studies in Human Rights, Brill | Nijhoff ISBN: 9789004463127]

This book provides a comparative assessment of the procedural law governing facts and evidence with references to over 900 judgments and decisions of the European and the Inter-American Court of Human Rights as well as the UN Human Rights Committee. It identifies underlying principles which govern the procedural law of these international human rights institutions. Based on the premise of a contextualized procedural law governing facts and evidence, the book analyzes where current approaches lack a foundation in the contextualization premise and offers solutions for recurring procedural problems relating to questions of subsidiarity in fact-finding, burden and standard of proof, as well as the admissibility and evaluation of evidence.

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Chapter I I Rationalizing and Advancing the Law Governing Facts and Evidence on the Basis  
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Excerpt: Contrary to procedures before domestic courts, the procedural law governing the introduction of facts and evidence in international tribunals has been described as lacking a high level of codification and detail. Rules governing facts and evidence were “brought in” by the appointed judges as well as by the parties to a dispute, often applying legal approaches of their domestic backgrounds. With the inception of international tribunals, the basic documents barely contained regulations, if any, addressing facts and evidence. Article 43 *et seq.* of the Statute of the Permanent Court of International Justice regulated oral and written procedures. Yet there were no guidelines as to the evaluation of evidence or the burden and standard of proof. The PCIJ was aware of this lack of standard rules, even indicating that this *lacuna* was deliberately created. In the case of *Free Zones of Upper Savoy and the District of Gex* the Court stated “the decision of an international dispute of the present order should not mainly depend on a point of procedure, the Court thinks it preferable not to entertain the plea of inadmissibility [...]”. *Max Huber*, former Judge of the PCIJ, declared in a similar vein that the risk should be minimized that “a case between two States [is] decided on the basis of a purely formal administration of justice”. The consensus was that the tribunal was to arrive at the truth whatever form it would take. International Courts were considered not to be bound by strict judicial rules governing facts and evidence. No limits were imposed either with regard to the admissibility or the evaluation of evidence. The PCIJ highlighted that it was “entirely free to estimate the value of statements made by the Parties”. The ICJ has since not deviated from the approach towards evidence taken by its predecessor. Bearing in mind the substantial jurisprudence and scholarly dialogue on the issue of exclusionary rules of evidence in the Common Law legal system, Judge Fitzmaurice added in a separate opinion that: “Of course the [primary evidence] would, if produced, constitute what is known in Common Law parlance as the ‘best evidence’, and unless [it] could be shown to have been lost or destroyed, it is unlikely that a municipal court would admit secondary evidence of their contents. International tribunals are not tied by such firm rules, however, many of which are not appropriate to litigation between governments”. In the *Nicaragua* judgment, the Court addressed the question of the probative value of certain evidence. The Court opted for flexibility and highlighted that it “has freedom in estimating the value of the various elements of evidence”. *Sandifer* noted that an unrestricted approach was deliberately taken since decisions based upon a misconception of the facts would directly affect vital interests of the States. Accordingly, a decision was only to be taken on the broadest factual basis possible which in international litigation was only possible if the Court was to adopt a flexible approach towards establishing the said factual basis. *H. Lauterpacht* stated similarly that international adjudication does not necessarily and by virtue of its own exclude more detailed rules of evidence. Much rather the “importance of the interests at stake precludes excessive or decisive reliance upon formal or technical rules”. *E. Lauterpacht* proposes that rules of procedure are rather servants and “not authoritarian or dictatorial masters”. Instead “as far as the ICJ is concerned, and in the case of most international courts and tribunals, rules of procedure must be approached in a common sense and flexible manner”.

With the rise of individual complaints proceedings past the 1960s, the human rights institutions’ approaches to facts and evidence are to some extent comparable to the above-described approach of the world courts. The establishing documents barely contained insight into the approach towards the law governing facts and evidence. By way of example, the first optional protocol to the ICCPR, remaining unchanged in this regard, contains two, rather marginal, provisions regarding the underlying facts and evidence. Article 2 op requires the individual to submit a written

communication to initiate the proceedings. Article 5 op stipulates that the HRC will consider communications in “the light of all the written information made available to it by the individual and by the state party concerned”. The rules of procedure are just as scarce on the topic of evidence. The ECHR, while making extensive reference to fact-finding, does not contain any provision regarding the admissibility, assessment and weighing of evidence. Consequently, the ECtHR stated, that it “is not bound under the convention or under general principle applicable to international tribunals, by strict rules of evidence”. “In order to satisfy itself, the Court is entitled to rely on evidence of every kind [...]” While the number of decisions and views issued by international human rights institutions receiving individual complaints has significantly increased during the last decades, evidentiary rules in the treaty frameworks did not grow to more detail alongside. Just recently, for example, on 15 April 2014, yet another review body, the Committee for the Convention on the Rights of the Child allowed via an additional protocol for individual complaints. The additional protocol in its Arts. 10 et seq. provides insights on fact-finding, yet in no more detail than Arts. 4 and 5 of the Optional Protocol to the ICCPR. Jurisprudence and procedures gained in sophistication as well as in complexity, yet the growth of international human rights institutions allowing for individual complaints did not lead to a similarly strong development of codified procedural law governing facts and evidence.

Parallel to the developments before the two world courts, the scarcity of regulations addressing evidence seemed to be created intentionally. The International Court of Justice as well as international human rights institutions reiterated that the judicial mandate to establish a sufficient factual basis requires an unrestricted approach towards facts and evidence. The limitations with respect to facts and evidence need to be countered with non- “formalistic” rules addressing the burden and standard of proof as well as the evaluation of evidence to address potential factual impasses and to address a procedural imbalance between the individual and the State. Therefore, international human rights institutions have generally welcomed the limited guidance in the treaty frameworks allowing them to develop flexible procedural solutions. The IACtHR, for example, stated that “its criteria for admitting items into evidence are flexible.” The Human Rights Committee’s members argued in one instance against a precisely formulated procedural rule “for the sake of flexibility”. These are but a few examples where human rights institutions, implicitly or explicitly, reasoned with the need for flexibility when drafting procedural rules. These examples show that there is a general tendency towards flexible approaches which should be borne in mind when interpreting the institutions’ jurisprudence relating to procedural law.

Because of the limited guidance in the treaty frameworks, international courts have resorted to establishing standard formulae in their jurisprudence to fill the void. The jurisprudence shows a tendency to include or at least reflect on elements of domestic jurisdictions’ procedural law. The ECtHR provides a prominent example for the first characteristic when “it reiterates that, in assessing evidence, it has adopted the standard of proof ‘beyond reasonable doubt’”. At the same time, the ECtHR added that “it has never been its purpose to borrow the approach of the national legal systems that use that standard. Its role is not to rule on criminal guilt or civil liability but on Contracting States’ responsibility under the Convention.” The IACtHR referred to a standard of proof where the truth of the allegations must be established in a “convincing manner”. The semantical similarity to the U.S. procedural law standard of proof of “clear and convincing evidence” could be by design or coincidental. With respect to the evaluation of evidence, the IACtHR has referred to the concept of *sana critica* which has its origins in the Spanish domestic legal sphere. At the same time, international human rights institutions have also referred to certain concepts of procedural law negating their application entirely. The ECtHR has stated that “it does not rely on the concept that the burden of proof is borne by either party”. The Inter-American Court

highlighted that it is not “subject to the same formalities required in domestic courts” regarding the admission of evidence. These examples manifest *Sandifer*’s hypothesis that procedural rules were “brought in”, or at least designed in comparison to domestic solutions, by the appointed judges as well as by the parties to a dispute applying the legal approaches of their domestic backgrounds with which they were familiar with. \*\*\*

## Structure of This Volume

This volume will, after an overview of the sources of the law (Chapter 1.5), first elaborate on the procedural concepts which are universal to every judicial procedure determining facts and evaluating evidence. It will then define a set of terms necessary to describe a law of facts and evidence. A consistent application of evidentiary terms is a prerequisite to compare the procedural laws’ domestic origins and to develop a consistent approach (Chapter 2).

The volume will identify the underlying principles which govern the procedural law in the international human rights institutions (Chapter 3). These principles shall serve as the parameters based on which the current procedural law will be assessed, and they will form the basis for a proposal for a contextualized, sui-generis procedural law governing fact-finding and the processing of evidence.

Based on the foundation of a contextualized procedural law governing facts and evidence, this volume will analyze the current law of the international human rights institutions and will identify issues where current solutions lack rationalization within the contextualizing premise or where no principled solutions exist at all (Chapters 4 – 10). The procedural parameters will serve as the premises in the deductive analysis of the framework. The assessment will be done in chronological relevance for the procedure of facts and evidence. First, the volume will address the question under which circumstances the human rights institutions will defer to the findings of the domestic courts and authorities (Chapter 4). In these instances of deference, there is little room for the application of procedural law governing facts and evidence. Next, this volume will examine the standards of proof in the proceedings (Chapter 5). Examining the standard of proof is a prerequisite for an assessment of the persuasive burden and the introduction of facts in the proceedings (Chapters 6 and 7). The persuasive burden must be addressed before analyzing the introduction of facts, because its allocation correlates with the burden on the parties to come forward with evidence if the procedure adheres to the adversary paradigm. This volume will then examine the framework for non-cooperation by the respondent State (Chapter 8) as well as the admission and evaluation of evidence (Chapters 9 and 10). In its conclusion, the volume will assess the problems and potential approaches which have been identified in the previous chapters and rationalize solutions on the premise of a contextualized procedural law (Chapter 11).

## Sources of the Law of Facts and Evidence in International Human Rights Proceedings

The sources of the law governing facts and evidence in human rights proceedings may comprise all elements to be found in Art. 38 ICJ Statute. Obviously, the treaties and the respective rules of procedure provide the most fertile ground. The detail of codification strongly varies with regard to the different elements of the evidentiary process. While treaties and the rules of procedure do contain some insights with regard to the fact-finding process, other elements such as the burden and standard of proof are not mentioned at all. The human rights treaties contain the basic constituent provisions for the human rights institutions, including composition, terms of office and other administrative matters. The Statutes of the Inter-American Court and Commission provide further constituent provisions. The legal basis for the individual communications/complaints procedures is

established in the treaties except for the Human Rights Committee, whose competence to receive individual complaints is set forth in the Optional Protocol. The treaties include provisions relating to the initiation of proceedings and the correspondence with the State party, which incorporate the basis fact-finding regulations. Pursuant to Art. 24 (1) ECHR, the ECtHR may and shall lay down its Rules of Court. Similarly, Art. 39, respectively 60 ACHR, authorizes the Court, respectively the Inter-American Commission, to lay down its own regulations and rules.

Subject to considerable discussion is the question of whether international customary law or general principles of law may serve as sources for the procedural law governing facts and evidence in international proceedings and individual communication proceedings in particular. *Benzing* highlights that customary international law as a source for procedural law cannot overcome persistent methodical concerns. State practice cannot be derived from decisions of international courts as the decisions of said courts are not attributable to the States, which are parties to a dispute. International courts' approaches to addressing disputed aspects, such as the standard of proof, do not relate to States' behavior and thus cannot implicate state practice. In any event, international courts lack sufficient uniform practice on these matters. On the other hand, the States' behavior in the proceedings, e.g. the submission of certain documents, may qualify as State practice. However, the treaties and the rules of procedure of international courts mostly do provide for codified rules with regard to party-court correspondence and fact-finding. And then again, the procedures differ too substantially in international courts to recognize sufficient common ground for uniform state practice. For these concerns, international customary law does not function as a source for the procedural law governing facts and evidence in international proceedings, including individual complaints/ communication proceedings.

The lack of a detailed and exhaustive codification of the law governing facts and evidence in international human rights proceedings appears to leave room for the application of general principles. The role of general principles of law pursuant to Art. 38 (1) (c) ICJ Statute was subject to lengthy discussions during the drafting process of the ECHR. During the debates in the Committee of Ministers, delegates proposed to include a specific reference to general principles. Although in the discussion, the inclusion of general principles evolved around the question of whether rights and guarantees should be supplemented by a list of definitions or whether general principles sufficed to clarify the content of said rights and guarantees, the outcome of the discussion nonetheless provides important insights with regard to the relationship of the Convention and general principles. In the report to the Consultative Assembly, the Legal Committee elaborated on the later prevailing opinion:

The Committee, while recognizing the importance of the proposal that the European Commission and Court should apply the general principles of law [...], were of the opinion that the insertion of a specific clause to this effect was unnecessary [...]. It is anticipated that the Commission and the Court must necessarily apply such principles in coming to a decision.

The Legal Committee highlighted what most likely applies to most international adjudicative bodies. They do not *per se* exclude the application of general principles in their procedural framework. The ICJ referred to general principles as well when elaborating on procedural rules. The ICTY, on the other hand, implicitly contradicted the application of general principles when it argued that "in international law every tribunal is a self-contained system (unless otherwise provided)." The Mexico-USA General Claims Commission stated

The Commission expressly decides that municipal restrictive rules of adjective law or of evidence cannot be here introduced and given effect by *clothing them in such phrases as*

‘universal principles of law’, or ‘the general theory of law’, and the like. On the contrary, the greatest liberality will obtain in the admission of evidence before this Commission with the view of discovering the whole truth with respect to each claim submitted.

The ICTY’s, as well as the Claims Commission’s, reasoning reflects the criticism voiced against the application of general principles in international tribunals. The application of general principles would lead to a lack of flexibility. The criticism of the two tribunals also refers to the paradox of deriving procedural rules as ‘general’ principles from domestic jurisdictions where there are – due to different procedures – only quite basic universally applicable rules. More so, the law governing facts and evidence with regard to certain elements of the evidentiary procedure may differ substantially in Common Law and Civil Law courts. Lastly, assuming that general rules may be identified, their application in international proceedings, which pursue different procedural aims and adhere to different rationales, is problematic. *Brown*, for example, names *audi alteram partem*, *iura novit curia*, and *actori incumbit probatio* as general principles of law being applied by international courts in their proceedings. If international courts can identify general principles applying in the procedural context of human rights proceedings, then their application is not excluded as a matter of principle. The ICJ, for example, referred to “safeguards of elementary principles of judicial procedure such as the equality of the parties and the need to hear both sides”. ‘Case law’ is of great importance to the law governing facts and evidence before international tribunals. Despite the lack of a *stare decisis* doctrine in international proceedings, precedents play an important role as compelling arguments in judgments for the courts, which aim to establish consistency. Case law is only attributed an auxiliary nature in Art. 38 (1) (d) ICJ-Statute. However, a consistent case law may form the basis of general principles of international dispute settlement. <>

## **A HARP IN THE STARS: AN ANTHOLOGY OF LYRIC ESSAYS** by Randon Billings Noble [University of Nebraska Press, 9781496217745]

What is a lyric essay? An essay that has a lyrical style? An essay that plays with form in a way that resembles poetry more than prose? Both of these? Or something else entirely? The works in this anthology show lyric essays rely more on intuition than exposition, use image more than narration, and question more than answer. But despite all this looseness, the lyric essay still has responsibilities—to try to reveal something, to play with ideas, or to show a shift in thinking, however subtle. The whole of a lyric essay adds up to more than the sum of its parts.

In **A HARP IN THE STARS**, Randon Billings Noble has collected lyric essays written in four different forms—flash, segmented, braided, and hermit crab—from a range of diverse writers. The collection also includes a section of craft essays—lyric essays about lyric essays. And because lyric essays can be so difficult to pin down, each contributor has supplemented their work with a short meditation on this boundary-breaking form.

### **Review**

“I’ve been searching for a book like this for over twenty years. Its remarkable dazzle—a sharp, eclectic anthology combined with whip-smart craft essays—carves out a fascinating look into the bright heart of what the lyric essay can be.”—Aimee Nezhukumatathil, author of *World of Wonders*

“Perhaps the best way to define the lyric essay—a notoriously borderless, slippery literary form—is to gather several dozen finely written examples that invite the reader to engage in acts of mapping and naming themselves. This anthology does just that, with the added bonuses of thought-provoking craft pieces with decidedly lyric bents and a special attention to intersections of the lyric and the personal. I can easily imagine assigning this book in any forward-thinking class, graduate or undergraduate, that involves writing or analyzing expressive prose.”—Elena Passarello, author of *Let Me Clear My Throat: Essays*

“Randon Billings Noble has assembled a stellar collection of lyric essays that truly highlights the best these forms have to offer. This book will be pulled from my shelf again and again—for my own reading and as a resource for my students.”—Brenda Miller, author of *An Earlier Life*

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Late Middle English (in the sense 'bring [a person] into a place or group'): from Latin *introducere*, from *intro-* 'to the inside' + *ducere* 'to lead'

Where to begin?

In 1993, when Deborah Tall first used the term lyric essay?

Or back in the late 1500s, when Montaigne used the word essay to describe what he had been writing?

Or at the turn of the tenth century, when Sei Shonagon wrote her pillow book full of what we might now call list or nonce or :lash essays?

Or further back, with the ancient Greeks, and the invention of the lyre that eventually gave us the word lyric?

ORIGIN late 16th century: from French *lyrique* or Latin *lyricus*, from Greek *lurikos*, from *lura* 'lyre'

*Lurikos*, *lura*, *lyre*. To the ear, "lyre" and "liar" sound the same, which I resist because I do not condone lying in essays, lyric or otherwise. But mythology tells us that the origins of the lyre come from a kind of lie.

Hermes, the gods' messenger and something of a trickster, stole Apollo's sacred cattle. Taking off the cattle's feet, he reattached them backward to hide their tracks as he drove them to a secret cave. When Apollo could not find them, he was furious. Hermes tried to deny his theft but ultimately confessed. In atonement, he gave Apollo a new way to make music: the lyre. First made of a tortoise shell, reeds, and gut, it evolved into a U-shaped instrument, similar to a harp, with a crossbar and seven strings. It was played alone or as an accompaniment to songs or poems. Music to sweeten a story.

Apollo accepted the gift (or payment, really) and became the god of music. Later he taught Orpheus how to play the lyre. Orpheus became the best musician and poet known to humankind. He charmed trees, rocks, and rivers. While sailing with the Argonauts he overpowered the Sirens with his songs, allowing the ship and its crew to pass safely on their quest to find the Golden Fleece. And when his wife died, he sang his way into the dark

underworld to retrieve her. His music was so powerful it could almost—almost—raise the dead.

Lyric essays have the same power to soothe, to harrow, to persuade, to move, to raise, to rouse, to overcome.

Like Orpheus and his songs, lyric essays try something daring. They rely more on intuition than exposition. They often use image more than

narration. They question more than answer. But despite all this looseness, the lyric essay still has the responsibilities of any essay: to try to figure something out, to play with ideas, to show a shift in thinking (however subtle). The whole of a lyric essay adds up to more than the sum of its parts.

But the lyric essay is slippery. There's no widespread agreement on what it is or what to call it. When Montaigne first started writing his *essais*, he was just essaying—trying out new lines of thought. Only later would the idea—and the name—of "essay" stick.

And when Sei Shonagon was noting observations in her pillow book she wasn't thinking about whether her lists and notes would be considered essays, lyric or otherwise. But by the 1990s, a thousand years after she had written them, excerpts were anthologized in books like Philip Lopate's *The Art of the Personal Essay*, and they became, indeed, essays—lyric essays.

Around this same time the *Seneca Review*, edited by John D'Agata, published an anthology called *We Might As Well Call It the Lyric Essay*. Deborah Tall had used the term lyric essay in an email to D'Agata, who quickly took up the term and popularized it. He also stretched it—perhaps too far—to include poems and some fictions. The last line of the introduction to his anthology is "We might as well call it the lyric essay because we need as many terms as there are passions for the form."

With this I agree. Lyric essays require a kind of passion, a commitment to weirdness in the face of convention, a willingness to risk confusion, a comfort with outsider status. When I'm writing a lyric essay, I'm not worried about what it is or what to call it. But when I started teaching lyric essays, I needed to put words to the form, to try to define it, to make

it at least a little more accessible and understandable—even as I kept running into contradictions in my own thinking. Sometimes I enjoyed the lyric essay's elusiveness; other times I felt like I was the one following the backward hoofprints. But the lyric essay's wily capaciousness is among its strengths.

I came to define a lyric essay as

a piece of writing with a visible / stand-out / unusual structure  
that explores / forecasts / gestures to an idea in an unexpected way

But about that visible / stand-out / unusual structure, those gestured-to ideas: lyric essays are tricky. If you try to mount one to a spreading board, it's likely to dodge the pin and fly away. If you try to press one between two slides, it might find a way to ooze down your sleeve. And if you try to set it within a taxonomy, it will pose the same problems as the platypus—a mammal, but one that lays eggs; semiaquatic, living in both water and on land; and venomous, a trait that belongs mostly to reptiles and insects. It will run away if on land—its gait that of a furry alligator—or swim off in the undulating way of beavers. Either way it can threaten you with a poisoned spur before it ripples off.

Despite its resistance to categorization, there are broad forms of the lyric essay that are worth trying to define. In this anthology you will find four of them.

## Flash Essays

ORIGIN Middle English (in the sense 'splash water about'): probably imitative; compare with flush and splash

I've defined flash essays as being one thousand words or fewer. They are short, sharp, and clarifying. The shortest ones illuminate a moment or a realization the way a flash of light can illuminate a scene. Longer ones may take a little more time but regardless of their length, the meaning of the essay resonates more strongly than its word count might suggest. Nels P. Highberg's "This Is the Room Where" unpacks decades of life in one room and one sentence. "The Sound of Things Breaking" by Ru Freeman centers around a broken plate but encompasses infinitely larger questions of loss amid identity. And Marsha McGregor's "On Beauty Interrupted" stumbles upon a grisly sight on a forest floor that redefines our very notion of beauty.

Lightning flashes, as do cameras, flares, signals, and explosions; all show a brief moment in a larger scene. A small syringe can deliver a powerful drug. A capsule can too—unless it dissolves in a glass of water to reveal a paper flower. Regardless of their content, flash essays are imitative of their form. They give the reader a splash of a moment and leave us flushed with emotion and meaning.

## Segmented Essays

ORIGIN late 16th century (as a term in geometry): from Latin segmentum, from secare 'to cut'

Segmented essays are divided into segments that might be numbered or titled or simply separated with a space break.

These spaces—white space, blank space—allow the reader to pause, think, consider, and digest each segment before moving on to the next. Each section may contain something new, but all still belong cogently to the whole. Sarah Einstein's essay "Self-Portrait in Apologies" is comprised of a series of apologies to wronged parties from ex-boyfriends to ancestors. Lia Purpura writes about sparrows, fires, and open space—all united under a single "Loss Collection?" And the hurts in Sayantani Dasgupta's "The Boys of New Delhi: An Essay in Four Hurts" add up to reveal the lingering effect of a certain kind of pain but also the new understanding that follows.

## Segmented essays are also known as Fragmented

(ORIGIN late Middle English: from French, or from Latin fragmentum, from frangere 'to break')

## Paratactic

(ORIGIN mid-19th century: from Greek parataxis, from pare-'beside' + taxis 'arrangement'; from tassein 'arrange')

## Collage

(ORIGIN early 20th century: from French, literally 'gluing')

## Mosaic

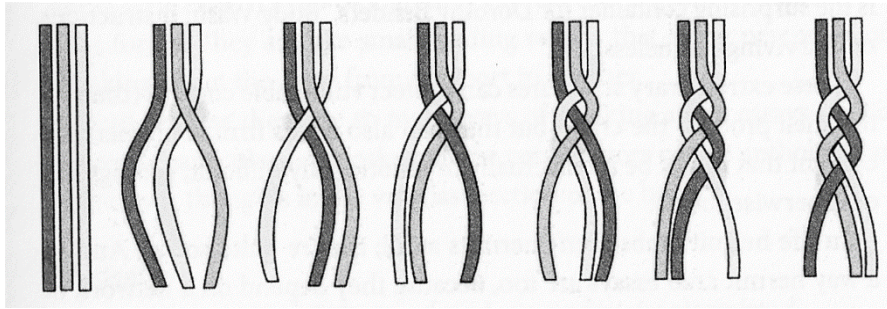
(ORIGIN late Middle English: from French mosaïque, based on Latin musivum 'decoration with small square stones, perhaps ultimately from Greek mousa 'a muse')

How you think of an essay may influence how you write it. Citrus fruits come in segments; so do worms. Each segment is part of an organic whole. But a fragmented essay may be broken on purpose and a collage or mosaic deliberately glued together.

## Braided Essays

ORIGIN Old English bregdan 'make a sudden movement, also 'interweave, of Germanic origin; related to Dutch breien (verb)

Braided essays are segmented essays whose sections have a repeating pattern—the way each strand of a braid returns to take its place in the center.



Each time a particular strand returns, its meaning is enriched by the other strands you've read through. In this anthology, Elissa Washuta's braided essay "Apocalypse Logic" weaves together the United States' history of treaties and betrayal, the 2016 election, Chinuk Wawa, and her own family's history; by the end of the essay you have a new understanding of the destructive pressure whiteness imposes on Native American life. Aimee Baker's "Beasts of the Fields" starts with an infestation of rats and weaves in seasonal cycles and her brother's increasing distance and decline to reveal how some threats are nearly impossible to eradicate once they take hold.

You can braid hair for containment or ornamentation. You can braid tubers into a basket to carry something or into a rope to tie something. Maybe it's something you want to hold fast. Or maybe it's to tense a kite against the wind—to fly.

### Hermit Crab Essays

ORIGIN Middle English: from Old French *hermite*, from late Latin *eremita*, from Greek *eremites*, from *erēmos* 'solitary'

ORIGIN late 16th century (referring to hawks, meaning 'claw or fight each other'): from Low German *krabben*

Hermit crab essays, as Brenda Miller named them in *Tell It Slant*, borrow another form of writing as their structure the way a hermit crab borrows another's shell. Laurie Easter uses a word-search puzzle as the form for her essay about a missing friend, "Searching for Gwen." The footnotes to "Informed Consent" tell more of the story behind Elizabeth K. Brown's participation in a study on families of alcoholics. And a bottle of body wash is the surprising container for Dorothy Bendel's "Body Wash: Instructions on Surviving Homelessness."

These extraliterary structures can protect vulnerable content (the way the shell protects the crab), but they can also act as firm containers for content that might be intellectually or emotionally difficult, prodigious, or otherwise messy.

In life hermit crabs aren't hermits at all; they're quite social. And in a way hermit crab essays are too, because they depend on a network of other extraliterary forms of writing—recipes, labels, album notes—and what we already know of them.

I've always thought that a hermit crab's front looks like a hand reaching out of the shell, a gesture that draws the onlooker inwards. Instead of a needing a shell that protects, the content of a hermit crab essay might lie in wait—like the pellets in a shotgun shell or a plumule of a seed—ready to burst beyond the confines of the form and take root in the reader's mind.

But some of these forms overlap. Sandra Beasley's "Depends on Who You Ask" is a flash essay that's also segmented; its diptych structure gives you the needed space to understand each part until you realize what the essay as a whole is really about. Tyrese L. Coleman's "Why I Let Him Touch

"My Hair" is both flash and a kind of braid, with the scene that leads up to the hair-touching acting as the repeated strand. A lyric essay can be many things at once, the way a square is also a rectangle, a parallelogram, a quadrilateral. One shape, but many ways of naming it. Near the end of this book is another kind of overlap:

### Craft Essays

ORIGIN Old English *crft* 'strength, skill', of Germanic origin; related to Dutch *kracht*, German *Kraft*, and Swedish *kraft* 'strength'. *Craft* (sense 3 of the noun), originally in the expression *small craft* 'small trading vessels, may be elliptical, referring to vessels requiring a small amount of 'craft' or skill to handle, as opposed to large oceangoing ships.

These craft essays are also lyric essays. They are separated out for easy reference but also because they are united by content (they all think overtly about lyric essays) even though they express that content in a variety of lyric forms. They are like small trading vessels that bring new ways of thinking about the essay from one port to another.

And because there are so many ways of thinking about essays—lyric essays in particular—I've asked all the contributors of this anthology to share their thoughts in the very last section of the book.

### Meditations

ORIGIN mid-16th century: from Latin *meditat-* 'contemplated, from the verb *meditari*, from a base meaning 'measure'; related to *mete*

Here you will find a wide range of thinking about the lyric essay: how it can leap, search, wander, hint at, unravel, excavate, and create; how it can both replicate and explain trauma; how it comes from or leaves behind fiction and poetry; how it acts like a panther, an iceberg, an on-ramp, an artichoke; how it's defined and how it can never be defined; how it tries and how it delivers; how it sings and how it plays.

Orpheus's lyre accompanied him through all sorts of adventures. It traveled with him as deep as the underworld and after his death was sent by Zeus to live among the stars. You can see its constellation—Lyra—in the summer months if you live in the Northern Hemisphere, the winter months if you live in the Southern. This feels like an apt metaphor for the lyric essay:

The stars are there, but their shape is what your mind brings to them. It is my hope that writers, readers, students, and teachers will both learn and take pleasure from the surprising, beautiful, wily, and diverse lyric essays that follow. <>

## HOW TO WRITE A MYSTERY: A HANDBOOK FROM MYSTERY WRITERS OF AMERICA edited by Lee Child with Laurie R. King [Scribner, 9781982149437]

From the most successful mystery writers in the business, an invaluable guide to crafting mysteries—from character development and plot to procedurals and thrillers—a must-have for every aspiring mystery writer.

Mystery Writers of America (MWA) is known for providing unparalleled resources on the craft, art, and business of storytelling, helping writers of all levels improve their skills for nearly a century. Now, this new handbook helps authors navigate the ever-shifting publishing landscape—from pacing,

plotting, the business side of publishing, to the current demand for diversity and inclusivity across all genres, and more.

Featuring essays by a new generation of bestselling experts on various elements of the craft and shorter pieces of crowd-sourced wisdom from the MWA membership as a whole, the topics covered can be categorized as follows:

- ➔ Before Writing (rules; genres; setting; character; research; etc.)
- ➔ While Writing (outlining; the plot; dialogue; mood; etc.)
- ➔ After Writing (agents; editors; self-pub; etc.)
- ➔ Other than Novels (short stories; true crime; etc.)
- ➔ Other Considerations (diverse characters; legal questions; criticism)

Also included is a collection of essays from MWA published authors—including Jeffery Deaver, Tess Gerritsen, and Charlaine Harris—selected by bestselling authors Lee Child and Laurie King and arranged thematically answering, “What piece of writing advice do you wish you’d had at the beginning of your career?”

Highly anticipated and incredibly useful, this new and trusted guide from MWA’s experts provides practical, current, easily digestible advice for new and established authors alike.

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Excerpt: Let's get the jokes out of the way first: "Every successful mystery novel must have two specific attributes. Unfortunately, no one knows what they are." "What's the difference between a thriller and a mystery? An extra zero on the advance." And so on, and so forth.

In fact, the attributes a successful mystery must have are many and various, and the successful mystery writers in this book explore them in depth. The question of definition is equally complex. What actually is a mystery? The word means different things to different people. Publishers, editors, reviewers, and genre buffs tend to infer an exact specification, narrow enough to be precise yet broad enough to include several even more precise subcategories. By contrast, I have known several older folks, all very well educated, who call anything south of, say, Haruki Murakami a "mystery."

Publishers, editors, and reviewers need to be precise, and genre buffs like to be, but writers don't have to join them. I write without a plan or an outline. The way I picture my process is this: The novel is a movie stuntman, about to get pushed off a sixty-story building. The prop guys have a square fire-department airbag ready on the sidewalk below. One corner is marked Mystery, one Thriller, one Crime Fiction, and one Suspense. The stuntman is going to land on the bag. (I hope.) But probably not dead-on. Probably somewhat off center. But biased toward which corner? I don't know yet. And I really don't mind. I'm excited to find out.

I think most writers are like that. And they should be, because most readers are. Or, nowadays, most consumers. Mystery Writers of America was founded around the slogan "Crime doesn't pay. Enough." We acknowledge commercial realities, because we're all subject to them. The demand for story is still huge. But the supply is growing. In the old days, movies and TV competed with books for leisure time, but they didn't really scratch the same itch. Now, quality long-form narrative television gets dangerously close.

Therefore we need to write better than ever. And we should feel free to use the whole airbag. "Mystery writers" is a noble and evocative term, but we shouldn't think it limits us. Far from it. From day one, MWA was all over the map. We need to keep it that way, fluid and flexible—and better than ever.

You can make a start on figuring out how by reading this book. It's all here. I'm deeply grateful to all the contributors—and I think you will be, too, eventually—and to those who worked hard behind the scenes. A lot of people gave up a lot of time. Why? Because they want you to be them, twenty years from now. Hopefully even better. They're telling you how. Weird, I know. Maybe that's one of the attributes. A successful mystery novel must be written by a good human being. Plus one other thing. Unfortunately, no one knows what it is. <>

## **WE ARE THE LAND: A HISTORY OF NATIVE CALIFORNIA** by Damon B. Akins (Author), William J. Bauer Jr. [University of California Press, 9780520280496]

*"A Native American rejoinder to Richard White and Jesse Amble White's CALIFORNIA EXPOSURES."*—*Kirkus Reviews*

### **Rewriting the history of California as Indigenous.**

Before there was such a thing as "California," there were the People and the Land. Manifest Destiny, the Gold Rush, and settler colonial society drew maps, displaced Indigenous People, and reshaped the land, but they did not make California. Rather, the lives and legacies of the people native to the land shaped the creation of California. *We Are the Land* is the first and most comprehensive text of its kind, centering the long history of California around the lives and legacies of the Indigenous people who shaped it. Beginning with the ethnogenesis of California Indians, **WE ARE THE LAND** recounts the centrality of the Native presence from before European colonization through statehood—paying particularly close attention to the persistence and activism of California Indians in the late twentieth and early twenty-first centuries. The book deftly contextualizes the first encounters with Europeans, Spanish missions, Mexican secularization, the devastation of the Gold Rush and statehood, genocide, efforts to reclaim land, and the organization and activism for sovereignty that built today's casino economy. A text designed to fill the glaring need for an accessible overview of California Indian history, **WE ARE THE LAND** will be a core resource in a variety of classroom settings, as well as for casual readers and policymakers interested in a history that centers the native experience.

#### Reviews

"A Native American rejoinder to Richard White and Jesse Amble White's **CALIFORNIA EXPOSURES**. . . [And] a welcome contribution to Native studies and the rich literature of California's first peoples." —*Kirkus Reviews*

"In what seems an overdue departure from standard histories, Akins and Bauer's comprehensive account places indigenous people at the heart of California's story."—*Boston Globe*

"**WE ARE THE LAND** is an astonishing work of scholarship, storytelling, and solidarity. . . . It will set the standard for the many other stories of the People waiting to be told."—*Sierra Magazine*

"Combines lyrical storytelling with academic narration to foreground Indigenous oral stories. . . . The book's well-researched micro-histories coalesce to create a necessary rewriting of Californian history."—*Civil Eats*

"Akins and Bauer have written a classic. . . . A relocation of the region's indigenous peoples from a history based on their erasure to a history based on their preeminence."—*CounterPunch*

"This is a history of personal stories. Many make for painful reading. All are to the point."—*Geography Realm*

"The colonial assault on California's Native communities has come in many toxic forms, including the many bad history books that have painted Indigenous Peoples as doomed and now vanished. With **WE ARE THE LAND**, Damon Akins and William Bauer offer a powerful tonic. This masterful history presents the experiences of California Indians as marvelously complex, grounded in land and place, and most of all *continuing*, from the days of Indian autonomy before the Spanish through the

maelstrom of the Gold Rush and on to the conflicted, postindustrial American present. A remarkable and welcome accomplishment, this book will change the way we understand California's Indians and California's history."—Louis S. Warren, author of *God's Red Son: The Ghost Dance Religion and the Making of Modern America*

"Damon Akins and William Bauer have succeeded brilliantly in writing the first ever comprehensive history of Native California. Centering Indigenous perspectives and deep connections to place, **WE ARE THE LAND** provides an erudite and moving account of California's Native peoples as explorers, adapters, workers, visionaries, artists, activists, sometimes victims but always survivors, and an enduring part of California history."—Jeffrey Ostler, author of *Surviving Genocide: Native Nations and the United States from the American Revolution to Bleeding Kansas*

"An ambitious project to reclaim California history as inherently Indigenous. Grounded in land and place, it is not so much a history but rather--and rightfully--histories, interwoven stories of peoples created in and of the land. This is a long-awaited and monumental book."—Terri A. Castaneda, author of *Marie Mason Potts: The Lettered Life of a California Indian Activist*

"This book is a must-read for anyone interested in California history. Bauer and Akins have produced a powerful and richly narrated history of the Indigenous experience from time immemorial to the present. From cover to cover, this book values Indigenous voices and knowledge systems to produce an incredibly engaging story of our collective past. **WE ARE THE LAND** is high narrative and scholarship at its best!"—Kent Blansett, author of *A Journey to Freedom: Richard Oakes, Alcatraz, and the Red Power Movement*

"This monumental effort seeks nothing less than reimagining California's history. It's an important contribution not only to California but also a template for other regional, national, and global histories. Simply put, this book is a breathtaking, sweeping, and inspiring read."—Natale Zappia, author of *Traders and Raiders* and co-author of *Rez Metal: Inside the Navajo Nation Heavy Metal Scene*

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Excerpt: On August 4, 2011, Native and non-Native activists extinguished their "sacred fire" at Glen Cove, near Vallejo, California. Three months earlier, the land protectors built the fire to protest the city of Vallejo's proposal to bulldoze a burial site, which Ohlones call Sogorea Te, to make way for a city park. When the land protectors put out the fire, they marked the end of a long but successful campaign to claim Ohlone lands in the Bay Area. For twelve years, Bay Area Natives and their allies resisted the city of Vallejo's proposal to develop the land. When city officials finally decided to consult California Indians, they contacted the Yocha Dehe Wintun Nation and Cortina Indian Rancheria, whom the Native American Heritage Commission of California identified as the "most likely descendants" of those interred at Glen Cove. City officials did not reach out to Ohlones, who have lived in the Bay Area since their creation, in part because the Ohlones are not a federally recognized tribe, as the Yocha Dehe and Cortina Bands are. In April of 2011, Vallejo city officials announced their intention to go ahead with plans to build a public park, with a parking lot, restrooms, picnic tables, and paved walking trails. Chochenyo and Karkin Ohlone Corrina Gould led scores of Native and non-Native People to occupy Glen Cove and prevent the city from building the park. The land protectors' "sacred fire" burned at the center of tents and two tepees. Dozens of people kept up the vigil to protect the land and Ohlone ancestors. "Sogorea Te is one of the last burial grounds still on open land where we can actually touch our feet to the ground and say our prayers the way we're supposed to and pass that teaching on to the next generation," Gould said. Protectors set up tables laden with food, sat down on the earth, and enjoyed one another's company. After nearly one hundred days of occupying the site, the Yocha Dehe and Cortina Bands brokered a deal between the protectors and the city of Vallejo. The three parties agreed to a "cultural easement," like a cultural right-of-way, that guarantees Yocha Dehe and Cortina Bands joint governance over the burial sites without transferring ownership. Protectors celebrated guarding one of the last visible burial sites in the Bay Area.

To many non-Indians, stories like the Ohlone protecting Glen Cove seem as if they came out of nowhere. Despite the long and rich history of Indigenous People in California, historians, anthropologists, and everyday people disconnected California Indian history from California history. Histories of California mention that Indigenous People lived within the current state boundaries and perhaps discuss the amazing diversity of languages, cultures, and political bodies. California histories recognize that Indigenous People lived in and worked at the missions established by Spanish

colonists on the California coast. Yet California Indians often disappear from those histories after the demographic catastrophe of the California Gold Rush, in which the population of California Indians declined from about 150,000 to 30,000. In the twentieth century, many people believed California Indians vanished. Some Californians expressed amazement, and sometimes anger, when California Indians seemingly reappeared on the political scene when fighting for gaming rights in Southern California, to protect land at Glen Cove, or to challenge cherished stories about the state's Catholic missions. Histories that ignore how California's Indigenous People lived within the state boundaries for centuries, maintained relationships with the land, and shaped the state's history undermine the sovereignty of contemporary California Indian communities. We hope this book contributes to efforts to correct the misperceptions that exist about California Indian, and California, history.

Rather than being peripheral to or vanishing from California history, Indigenous People are a central and enduring part of the state's history because of their relationship to the land. Before the arrival of Europeans, California's Indigenous People developed and maintained relationships with the land and other peoples across the region that was not yet California, Arizona, Nevada, Oregon, or Mexico. When Europeans first arrived, California Indians sailed out to meet and trade with them, striving to incorporate these newcomers into preexisting social, political, and economic relationships. Beginning in the 1760s, though, Spaniards, Russians, Mexicans, and, especially, Americans attempted to control California and divorce Indigenous People from the land. All four colonial nations sponsored policies that uprooted Indigenous People and communities from the lands in which they were created, and all four deployed violence, in the form of slavery, genocide, and an administrative state bent on eliminating California Indian people. Yet California Indian people, nations, and lands remain. California Indians have built and rebuilt communities, developed practices to maintain ties with the land, and remade policies intended to separate them from their homes. At times, California Indians hid to survive, but they never left.

By titling this book **WE ARE THE LAND**, we do not mean to hearken back to antiquated beliefs about Indigenous People as an intrinsic part of the natural world. Rather, the title evokes the two parallel arguments we put forth in the following pages: California is both a place and an idea. As a place, California has always been and remains Indigenous land, and Indigenous People are central to the history and future of the place. Creators made Indigenous People at specific locations. Indigenous People ground their ways of knowing in those places. They developed strategies to work on, with, and protect the land. One cannot separate Indigenous People from the land that makes up California. But as an idea—or, as it was often described, a dream—that colonial entities brought with them, "California" represented a natural abundance of resources to be exploited; it could not be Indigenous land. Spain, Mexico, Russia, the United States, and the state of California extracted resources from Indigenous communities and appropriated the land. Colonists took the abundant resources often associated with California from the state's Indigenous People. In this sense, policies intended to dispossess Indigenous People of the land also directly attacked Indigenous Peoples' identity and existence.

For many Californians, the region's history stretches back only 150 years. People misunderstand the settler invasion of Indigenous California as California history rather than as an unsustainable and disruptive episode in it. This book recenters Indigenous People's fight to retain their land in the place that is California, as a way of challenging the idea of California. When we take a less compressed historical view, we see the continuity and persistence of Indigenous communities as they adapted to dramatic changes. We see the people of a specific place changing as the place itself changed. As

"California" becomes California, Indigenous People become California Indians. We see a different California, and we see a future those communities are building there.

We Are the Land is divided into ten chapters. Chapter 1 describes the creation of California. Rather than treating Indigenous People as isolated and historically static "tribelets," this chapter examines how Creators made the land and the People, how the People worked with the land to survive, and how People lived with one another. Any examination of Indigenous Peoples before the arrival of Europeans is difficult. The chapter attempts to provide a holistic understanding of early California peoples by foregrounding Indigenous knowledge.

Chapter 2 explores the historical era commonly known as the "age of exploration." Rather than retelling the romanticized first encounters between "civilized" sailors and "savage" Indians, or dwelling on the brutal exploitation of Native Peoples, this chapter positions itself on beaches, hillsides, and riverbanks to examine Indigenous People as explorers and discoverers cautiously observing and then engaging with European travelers. In the early sixteenth and seventeenth centuries, Native Peoples studied newcomers to their land, such as Juan Rodriguez Cabrillo, Francis Drake, and Juan de Oñate. Following these initial encounters, Native Peoples scrutinized Europeans indirectly, as European manufactured goods followed consumer demand into Indigenous communities via preexisting trade routes that linked much of western North America. Diseases also traveled these trails, harming Native People. Often, Indigenous Peoples left their homelands and joined other peoples in response to these new illnesses. The discovery of new technologies and sicknesses produced conflict as well as cooperation. Some Europeans captured Indigenous People, causing them to prey on others for captives to replace the dead or to trade with other peoples. In the dynamic process of adaptation and resistance, Natives expanded into the territories of other native communities in an attempt to secure marketable goods. Far from being a static period in California history, the period immediate to the creation of the Spanish missions featured pulsating trade networks, cross-cultural encounters between different Indigenous nations, and technological innovations far beyond the purview of European witnesses.

Chapter 3 explores the relationship between Indigenous People and Spanish colonists. It avoids the perspective of looking over the shoulders of Spanish priests and soldiers who came to the area in the late eighteenth century, in favor of considering the Spanish missions from the perspectives of Indigenous communities. Missions posed significant risks to Indigenous People and their relationship to the land. Priests brought strangers to Native communities, disrupting established and delicately managed political relationships and contributing to the spread of the diseases the missions hosted. The missions' domesticated livestock devoured the People's food and trampled the places where the People harvested plants for their baskets. Despite these dangers, Indigenous People sometimes left their communities and moved to the missions and other Spanish settlements. At other times, Spanish officials forced Indigenous People to the missions and presidios. Other Native People created new social, economic, cultural, and political relationships with the Spanish at missions, presidios, and pueblos. Spanish communities offered new kinds of food and trade items, which Native leaders used to provide for their people. The priests, who did not become sick when many Indigenous Californians did, preached a different religion with an obvious power. From the viewpoint of the countless Indigenous communities along the California coast, the Spanish missions offered a host of risks and opportunities.

Chapter 4 focuses on the period of Mexican independence from Spain and the drive to secularize the missions. It begins by describing Native Peoples' relationships with Russian fur traders, American merchants, and Franciscan missionaries in the emerging regional market for trade goods. These new markets increased the demand for Indigenous labor, natural resources, and new commodities. The

dynamic relationships among these various actors created new spaces in which Indigenous People asserted their power. Some leveraged political instability to resist the pressures placed on their communities, such as the Chumash, who rebelled in 1824. Others, such as Pablo Tac and Pablo Apis, two Luisenos who followed very different paths, acclimated themselves to the new cultural and economic landscape and the markets it created. Most California Native Peoples fell somewhere between these poles, leveraging their labor power to resist increasing attempts to limit their freedom. Growing American interest and presence in the area hinted at further drastic changes on the horizon.

It is exceptionally difficult to see the middle of the nineteenth century as anything but horribly destructive to California's Native Peoples. But it is also critical to resist the victimizing tendencies implicit in such a focus. Indigenous People suffered greatly, but they are more than just victims. Chapter 5 tracks how they resisted attempts at their wholesale destruction. Native Peoples ultimately survived the transition to American rule and the Gold Rush by creatively asserting what power they had through their labor, limited acts of violence, and—less frequently, but importantly—the law. Despite the dynamic political and demographic changes to California, Indigenous Peoples' land and labor remained vital concerns in the new state. The Constitution of 1849 wrestled with Indigenous Peoples' citizenship, labor, and rights. The 1850 Act for the Government and Protection of Indians attempted to retain Indian labor while limiting Indian sovereignty and mobility through indenture. The State Land Commission and the eighteen federal treaties signed, but ultimately not ratified, in 1852 sought to quiet Indian claims to land in a way that advantaged settler society. The 1850s and 1860s were incredibly destructive times for Indigenous People in California, as they faced extermination campaigns and a system of slavery that eventually brought tens of thousands of them under its provisions. This chapter also focuses on collective acts of resistance, such as the Garra rebellion of 1851, and individual ones, such as Indigenous workers killing their employers. Other Indigenous People retreated from contact with Americans, turning the state's diverse geography into sites of refuge and resistance.

Chapter 6 explores the unmistakable direction of demographic changes that occurred in California in its first two decades after statehood. California would be an Anglo state. While California Indian labor remained critical in some industries, it declined in importance overall as Anglo interest shifted from labor to California Indian land. These changes forced Indians to deploy new strategies, such as pooling their resources to purchase land where they could resist and negotiate the demographic changes in the state or leveraging non-Indian benevolence to their advantage. High profile evictions, dispossessions, and disputes, such as those at Temecula, Round Valley, and Capitan Grande, brought California Indians to the attention of reformers across the nation. Change meant actively seeking rancherias and reservations as sites for temporary forays into the local wage-labor economy and as refuges from reliance on it. It also meant fighting dispossession in the courts and on the ground.

Chapter 7 traces the growth in California Indian—led political and legal activism in the early twentieth century to illustrate the changing power relationships California Indians faced across the state. Increased non-Indian awareness of the challenges they faced, as well as growing interest in their languages and material culture, gave California Indians traction in their efforts to assert control over land, labor, and citizenship. The impulse to mobilize refracted through the distinct circumstances Indigenous People faced across the state, producing divergent outcomes. California Indians fought the allotment of their land when it cut against their own landholding patterns, as it often did in the southern part of the state. Where allotment furthered Indian claims for land, they tended to support it, as often occurred in the northern part of the state. Chapters 6 and 7 together trace the long arc of Indian activism before it emerged into the public eye.

Chapter 8 tracks the emergence of a legal, political, and cultural California Indian identity. The forces that brought California Indians from all over the state and nation into contact with each other, and the legal challenges Indians mounted, meant that California Indians actively created a statewide identity that built on local communities without subsuming them. The "Indians of California" collectively sued the federal government for the loss of their land. While the victories they won were tokens in terms of actual compensation, the organizational work in which California Indians engaged paid bigger dividends. The federal government, through its termination policy, sought to break apart that identity to diminish California Indians' power.

Chapter 9 follows the experiences of California Indians from the onset of termination to the era of self-determination. It highlights the different path tribal nations—such as the Pit Rivers, Round Valley Indians, and the multinational protesters at Alcatraz—took to make claims on Indian land in California. Pit Rivers initially looked to the courts. Round Valley Indians hosted and negotiated with Governor Ronald Reagan to prevent a dam from flooding their reservation. Those at Alcatraz occupied the former federal penitentiary, located in San Francisco Bay. Although all three groups experienced varying levels of success, they each influenced other California Indians as they argued for respect and self-determination. California Indians living on reservations and rancherias weighed the costs and apparent benefits of terminating their relationship with the federal government. The American Indian Historical Society, led by Cahuilla Rupert Costo, battled in the 1960s to alter the negative perception of California Indians that permeated statewide elementary textbooks. Porno Tillie Hardwick successfully sued to reverse the termination of the Pinoleville Rancheria, winning a court decision that set a precedent for other tribes in the 1980s. Finally, a small, impoverished group of Indians in Southern California opened a bingo hall, ushering in a period of unprecedented political and economic growth for California Indians.

Chapter 10 examines the ways in which California Indians transformed their social, economic, political, and cultural practices after the development of Indian gaming. In 1980, the Cabazon Band of Mission Indians in Palm Springs opened a bingo and poker hall on their small reservation. This action produced two decades of conflict. State officials attempted to stop Indian gaming, while California Indians fought to expand their gaming operations. After successful lobbying, California Indians secured the right to operate casinos on their reservations. The resulting economic boom in California supported and expanded various programs of ethnic renewal, convinced many California Indians to return to their reservation homelands (reversing more than a century of diaspora), and enabled other groups to launch efforts to repurchase ancestral homelands. Meanwhile, other tribal nations have pursued the tortuous path of federal recognition to reclaim indigenous lands and assert their sovereignty. Yet the struggle over land continues. California Indians, recognized and unrecognized, have fought for indigenous landuse rights on off-reservation and off-rancheria sites across the state, such as the Ohlones' effort to protect gravesites at Glen Cove, which led to the establishment of the Sogorea Te Land Trust to act as a legal entity to represent Ohlone interests. As we move through the twenty-first century, empowered California Indian nations are returning to their homelands, invigorating their economies, and flexing their political power.

Spatial vignettes interspersed between each chapter make the California Indian presence more visible in some of the state's most populous, important, and iconic places. These short segments interpret Yuma, San Diego, Sacramento, Ukiah, the Ishi Wilderness, Riverside, Los Angeles and the East Bay, and even Rome, Italy, as Native spaces across time. By emphasizing these places, we resist the erasure of California Indians. The vignettes connect the region's diverse geology, topology, ecology, climate, and flora and fauna to the institutions that wove the people and the land into a state.

Characterized by the twin themes of flux and abundance, the broad geological forces that formed California supported distinct forms of Indigenous life. In the Atsugewi, also called Pit River, creation story, Kwaw and Ma'Kat'da struggled with each other over the mist, the dough with which they kneaded a world. Kwaw created; Ma'Kat'da destroyed, and in that creative destruction, they created the California landscape. Thirty million years ago, the Pacific, North American, and Farallon tectonic plates collided and created the region's mountains and craggy coastline, as well as the region's climatic, topographic, and geological diversity. Mountains captured rain and served as barriers to migration. The interstitial spaces of the coast created refuges for peoples and animals. The climatic and topographic diversity facilitated and condensed seasonal rounds and trade routes, allowing Indigenous People to develop sedentary communities with distinct lifeways. In a Pomo creation story told by William Benson, Marumda formed the world out of wax, shaping specific habitats to support distinct life. Rivers served as thoroughfares for fish. Fire regimes regenerated oak groves and basket-making materials. The abundance of flora and fauna supported Pomo life. Scientists, however, point to the sedimentary settlement, which formed the Central Valley's rivers and wetlands and served as a source for food, as well as providing the grasses and forbs used for baskets. The grasslands and foothills nurtured the oak forests and acorns critical to native diets. Alluvial deserts in the south, and massive granite uplifts in the central and north, formed barriers to migration and shaped cultural patterns. The vignettes peel back the present to look into the past and examine how these forces shaped California Indian communities. They also bring the past into the present to emphasize California Indian persistence. <>

## **CALIFORNIA EXPOSURES: ENVISIONING MYTH AND HISTORY** by Richard White, photographs by Jesse Amble White [W. W. Norton & Company, 9780393243062]

Winner of the 2021 California Book Award (Californiana category)

A brilliant California history, in word and image, from an award-winning historian and a documentary photographer.

"This is the West, sir. When the legend becomes fact, print the legend." This indelible quote from **THE MAN WHO SHOT LIBERTY VALANCE** applies especially well to California, where legend has so thoroughly become fact that it is visible in everyday landscapes. Our foremost historian of the West, Richard White, never content to "print the legend," collaborates here with his son, a talented photographer, in excavating the layers of legend built into California's landscapes. Together they expose the bedrock of the past, and the history they uncover is astonishing.

Jesse White's evocative photographs illustrate the sites of Richard's historical investigations. A vista of Drakes Estero conjures the darkly amusing story of the Drake Navigators Guild and its dubious efforts to establish an Anglo-Saxon heritage for California. The restored Spanish missions of Los Angeles frame another origin story in which California's native inhabitants, civilized through contact with friars, gift their territories to white settlers. But the history is not so placid. A quiet riverside park in the Tulare Lake Basin belies scenes of horror from when settlers in the 1850s transformed native homelands into American property. Near the lake bed stands a small marker commemorating the Mussel Slough massacre, the culmination of a violent struggle over land titles between local farmers and the Southern Pacific Railroad in the 1870s. Tulare is today a fertile agricultural county, but its population is poor and unhealthy. The California Dream lives elsewhere. The lake itself disappeared when tributary rivers were rerouted to deliver government-subsidized water to big agriculture and cities. But climate change ensures that it will be back—the only question is when.



## Reviews

A work of art that brings an evocative intimacy and lucidity to California's past. — Jack E. Davis, author of *The Gulf*

A master class in how to interpret California landscapes past and present. — William Cronon, author of *Nature's Metropolis*

Richard White's California history is brilliant and dark. — Anne Hyde, author of *Empires, Nations, and Families*

In this ingenious, entertaining book, Richard White, the preeminent chronicler of the American West, alters our understanding of how the Golden State came to be. — Geoffrey C. Ward, author of *A First-Class Temperament*

Richard White's brilliance is his ability to excavate history from myth. With wit, grace, and wisdom, he has written an inimitable, indispensable history. — Miriam Pawel, author of *The Browns of California*

Masterful explorations of the Golden State by a leading historian of the American West. — Kirkus Reviews (starred review)

White tells his stories with economy, but nevertheless with considerable nuance, subtlety, wry humor, and in fierce confrontation with the unvarnished truth. As its title puns, *California Exposures* is a powerfully muckraking work, in the great California tradition of Upton Sinclair, Carey McWilliams, and Mike Davis. If one has time for only one book on the history of California, this one stakes a strong claim to being it. — Wade Graham, Santa Barbara Independent

Every page of this book displays history as surprising, confounding, unsettling, and—more often than the cynical might expect—spirit lifting. — Patty Limerick, author of *The Legacy of Conquest*

A deeply original work. No one who reads this book will see the state's landscape in the same way again. — Claudio Saunt, author of *Unworthy Republic*

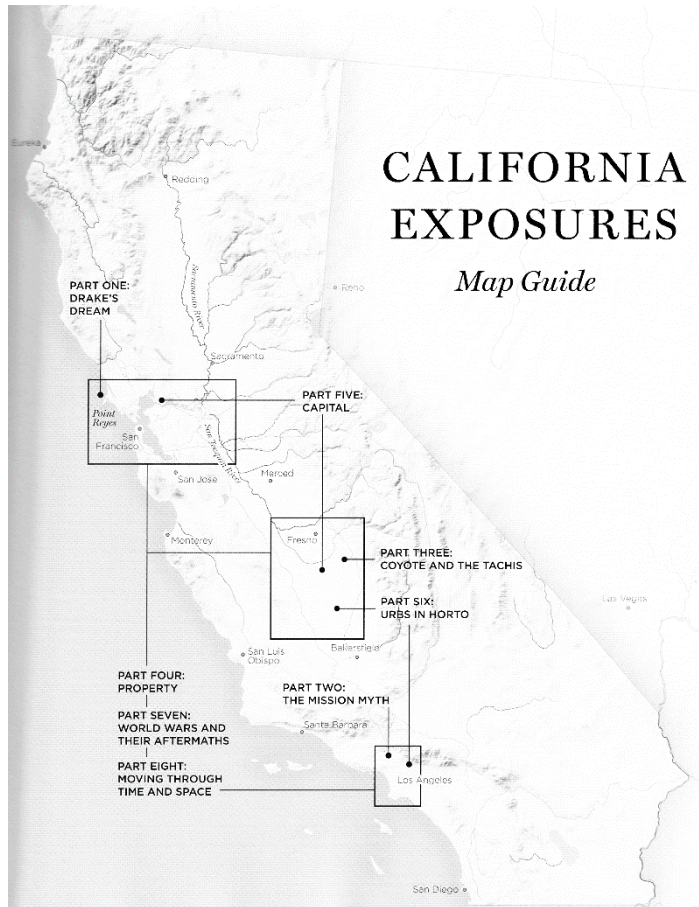
A highly original, important rumination on myth and history, images and words, memories and meaning. This is a beautiful book. — William Deverell, Director, Huntington-USC Institute on California and the West

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Excerpt: This book is a collaboration between a historian and a photographer who happen to be father and son. Relations between the present and past are fraught, but so too are relations between fathers and sons. We do not necessarily agree on the work a photograph can do. Jesse White has no illusions that his photographs are simple slices of reality. He selects, he frames, he alters, and he reacts. He regards a photograph as an artifact of a moment, a captured slice of time that was different before the now often metaphorical shutter clicked and will change again the second after it clicked.

I do not deny that this is true, but I also think, as I will explain, that every photograph reveals a history because every element in the frame existed before the photograph—often long before the photograph. Starting from a photograph, I can tell a story of a place by attaching the elements of the photograph—trees, buildings, land, animals, roads, levees, and more—to documents in archives, books, other photographs, maps, and memories. Our work focuses on three places, with remnants of a fourth. In moving back and forth from place to place, I use the photographs to tell stories. When I stitch the stories together, the result is a montage that is also a history—a peculiar and very partial history—of California.

D Ranch on Point Reyes, the Tulare Lake Basin, and the lands of the cojoined San Gabriel and San Fernando missions are not the usual vantage points for writing a history of California. None of them, except perhaps the missions, are iconic; but all of them are revealing. As I deciphered the photographs, I began to realize that they are like tree rings in that big events and trends have left traces on them.

It is easiest to define the book by what it is not. It is not a photography book, although the photographs are at its center and without them there would be no book. It is not an art history book, which would focus more narrowly on the photographs themselves and on the photographer. Nor is it a conventional history, for in no histories that

I know does the narration proceed from the photographs. Usually, photographs illustrate the historical text. They are decorative.

The book can be read as a collage, but I intend the collage to function like the frames of a graphic novel whose illustrations are an intrinsic part of the narrative. I would like to claim R. Crumb's *Short History of America* as an inspiration, but I cannot since I looked at it carefully only when this book was nearly complete, though I claim it as an analogy.

I put photographs at the center because I am pursuing a particular way of looking and seeing. I want to see the past in the present. I do not mean in museums, although Jesse took some of the photographs in museums. I do not mean at historical sites or in archives, although Jesse has photographed historical sites, and I have spent considerable time in archives. I mean seeing the past in plain sight, in the quotidian places where we live, work, and travel. People cannot recognize the importance of the past, and of history, if they cannot even see it and recognize how pervasive it is.

If this sounds like proselytizing, then so be it. I have spent my adult life teaching and writing about history in ways that now often seem quixotic. History has become less and less important in the schools and in public discourse and public policy. It seems irrelevant to daily life even as I cannot imagine daily life without it. We ignore at our peril the dead who walk among us, jostle us, constrain us, and enable us.

Traces of the dead surround us. The dead have made things, broken things, planted things, and killed things. The sum total of their actions and thoughts, along with what we have added and what nature has provided, constitutes our world. Our societies, economies, politics, and cultures are composed mostly of what the dead have done. We, like our world, are their progeny. Subtract the works of the dead, and the world would be diminished and unrecognizable. This is why history matters. Without history, we are strangers in a strange land, never understanding what we are seeing and unable to grasp how it came to be there.

In everyday life, the past remains visible. It not only can be photographed, but virtually every photograph of our contemporary world is a historical photograph.

Why? The photographer's arrangement of the elements of the past, as Jesse insists, might be of the moment and vanish the instant it is captured, but the elements themselves endure for varying amounts of time. These elements are fragments of once-more-complete pasts. They lead away from their present configuration and into the past, into earlier and different configurations.

But if the past is everywhere in our lives, why not just look around? Why do we need photographs? We need them because photographs allow us to concentrate. They corral our attention away from the flux of vision that is always rushing us on to the next scene. This book is an extended exercise in expanding a lived experience and recovering context.'

The lived experience, more unconventionally, includes my own. This is not the first time I have encountered many of the places in this book. History is just one way that humans approach the past; memory is another. The personal does not belong in all histories, but I think it belongs in this one.

I have several techniques, not wholly compatible, for using photographs. Some are more elliptical than others. I excavate, I dismember, and I associate. What I do with the photograph determines how a chapter unfolds. When I excavate, I usually concentrate on digging down into a particular place. In others I follow the references I find in the image; I can move far from the site of a given photograph. Just as Jesse sometimes employed a drone to take a photograph, sometimes my views can hover above the photograph's subject as I seek a panoramic view. The result is that the chapters, like the photographs, are not all of a kind. The asymmetry arises from the technique.

The premise of my excavation is that a modern photograph represents the temporal top layer of a sedimentary construction that extends below it. I am engaging in a kind of historical archaeology without the shovels. Going through the sediments yields a history. The logic is spatial, and the goal is to recover what was on the site of the photograph at various times in the past. For this I often use old maps as well as old photographs and contemporary descriptions.

No sedimentary layer is pure. All around us are erratics, as geologists call deposited materials transported by glaciers from somewhere else. Space—the site captured in the photograph—always reflects time. When viewers concentrate on a particular space, they inevitably move backward in time.

My second technique, dismemberment, approaches a photograph the way a coroner approaches a corpse. Dismembering a photograph isolates and explores a single element or group of elements. Coroners use parts of the body or alien objects present in the body to construct a larger story, a history of what turned a body into a corpse. The disease, the bullet, the split cranium all point to things beyond the body itself. Similarly, isolating and following the elements in a photograph can carry me to other places and to people connected to but separate from the places I am describing. I find these elements compelling because no matter how wispy they might seem, the photograph led me to them.

Dismembering thus leads to the third technique: association. Association often connects me to previous attempts to understand and shape California's past. I have found that I am hardly the first person to think that he can see the past. Americans have not only told stories about California almost as soon as they arrived, but they have preserved the past, re-created the past, memorialized the past, pictured the past, and reenacted the past. All of these activities claim a visualized past in order to shape a future. The mythic stories of California are like the fogs at Point Reyes where this book begins. They can seem to obscure the actual landscape until you realize they are parts of the landscape.

## ORGANIZATION

Taken together, the chapters proceed roughly chronologically as most histories do; but within chapters, time bounces around. Each chapter begins in the present (or rather the near past)—the moment the metaphorical shutter clicked—before darting off into various sectors of the past. The guides to the narrative's path are the brief introductions of each part.

I fully recognize that in harnessing photographs to history I need to hold the reins tightly. These powerful images would just as readily pull the narrative along as myth, by which I mean timeless stories that differ from history.

My first section is an examination of myths, and I do not use myth pejoratively. Myths are not so much falsehoods as explanations. Myths, as Richard Slotkin has written, are representations that collapse into a single emblematic story the assumptions and values of a culture. History and myth both aspire to tell why things and people are the way they are. But where historical stories tend to be particular, contingent, and relatively open-ended—anything can happen—myths seek universal meanings and claim to explain why things have to be how they are.

The very framing, and thus meaning, of landscape photographs is mythic: wide open spaces, men to match the mountains, home sweet home. Once a myth makes a photograph its host, the line between myth (an explanation) and reality (what it explains) nearly vanishes.

While writing this book, I began to recognize that the three mythic stories about the origins of California that appear in the book's photographs—Sir Francis Drake and discovery, the mission myth, and the gold rush myth—are all just variants of a larger Anglo-Saxon myth of California that is remarkably hard to shake. It is the myth of the preordained white man, the idea that California always awaited the white men who would give the state its proper form. Another set of myths belongs to Native California. They revolve around the character known as Coyote. My goal in examining these myths is not to debunk them but to historicize them, treating them as consequences rather than causes.

The first three parts of this book examine myths and then yield to parts focusing on property and capital. Their chapters usually concern the simultaneous process of dividing and allocating land and the new connections that the movement of people and capital forge between what has been severed.

The last parts seek to reunite the myths and the culture they inform with the economic and social realities of modern California. Here the span between the taking of the photographs and the pasts they reveal are foreshortened.

This book began as a wager between Jesse and myself. I bet I could turn his photographs into a history of California. I have lost the bet—what follows is too partial to be a complete history. The book is more a proof of concept than the complete history of California I envisioned. The time and topics that the book covers are critical, but they are not complete. I touch on the state's deep racial divisions, but Watts, for instance, lies outside the frame. I spend time on technological innovation, but Silicon Valley, where I teach, lurks only around the edges. The rise and rapid decline of the state's educational system and Proposition 13, which precipitated the decline, receive only glancing mention in the book. The state's frequently peculiar politics sometimes enters the story, but more often does not.

The photographs led me to pursue five themes. The first is the mythic structure of California—the California Dream—that California politicians still refer to. The second is environmental

transformation, for better or worse, which accelerated rapidly with American conquest and whose consequences pose immense challenges today. The third is California's self-image as a land of individualists and its reality as a creature of the state—both the state and federal governments. The fourth is the hybrid nature of the place, not only in its environment but in its population. That today California is a majority-minority state with no single racial or ethnic group forming a majority was not inevitable, but it was foreshadowed in the nineteenth and early twentieth centuries. California's American history began in 1848 when the United States annexed Mexican territory, and more than any other part of the United States, California has grasped the Pacific and Central and South America as essential to its identity and future. It is no wonder that Asian and Latino immigrants and their descendants form such a large proportion of the state. The fifth theme is the dynamism of the California economy, which began less with the gold rush than the agricultural developments of the nineteenth and early twentieth centuries. Economic promise and individual opportunity have been hallmarks of the California Dream since the gold rush, but large periods of the state's history have been marked by dangerous levels of economic inequality.

I may have lost the wager with Jesse, but few bets have proved more profitable to me. I am astonished at what a photograph can reveal. I do not have to pretend that it reveals everything. In California, as elsewhere, history will never displace myth and memory. Its goal is not to eliminate them but to encompass them. <>

**A TIMELESS OLDIE WORTH A SECOND LOOK:**

## **THE VISIONARY STATE: A JOURNEY THROUGH CALIFORNIA'S SPIRITUAL LANDSCAPE** by Erik Davis, photographs by Michael Rauner [Chronicle Books, 9780811848350]

With a rich cultural history and Hollywood stars publicly attesting to a wide range of faiths, it's no surprise that California's spiritual landscape is as diverse as its natural surroundings. **THE VISIONARY STATE** weaves text and image into a compelling narrative of religion, architecture, and consciousness in California, from neopaganism to televangelism, UFO cults to austere Zen Buddhism. Acclaimed culture critic Erik Davis brings together the immigrant and homegrown religious influences that have been part of the region's character from its earliest days, drawing connections between seemingly unlike traditions and celebrating the diversity of California's spiritual composition. Michael Rauner's evocative photographs depict the sites and structures where these traditions have taken root and flourished. **THE VISIONARY STATE** is a landmark look at what is likely the most varied locale for religious activity anywhere.

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Excerpt: When I'm abroad, I usually tell people I am from California rather than the United States. I'm not just trying to be clever, or to slough off the increasingly heavy load of being an American in foreign climes.

I actually identify that way. I was born in the Bay Area in June of the Summer of Love and grew up in Del Mar, a town of university profs, oddballs, and longhairs name-dropped by the Beach Boys in "Surfin' U.S.A." When I was a teenager, my family moved to Rancho Santa Fe, into a rambling ranch house that lay about a mile from the Spanish Revival mansion where the Heaven's Gate UFO cult later committed mystic suicide. Since 1995, I have lived in San Francisco, where in the fortuitous year of 1847 my great-great-great-grandfather I. C. C. Russ disembarked with his family from the Loo Choo. My roots are here, in this rootless place.

When I tell people I'm Californian rather than American, I'm also letting them know something about the forces that shaped me. Like Texas and New York City, California seems in some ways separate from the rest of the United States, a realm apart. Even as a little kid, I knew that my home was different: the granola state, the land of fruits and nuts, the space-case colony with a moonbeam governor that collected, like a dustbin, everything in America that wasn't firmly rooted down. Time has not dulled this reputation. We Californians are still routinely mocked for our flakiness, our self-obsession, our fondness for fads and health regimens and strange notions. But the familiar jokes also reflect something much more substantial about the place: its intensely creative and eccentric spiritual and religious culture. If the American West is, as Archibald MacLeish once said, a country of the mind, then California is clearly a state of mind—an altered state, for sure, or, better yet, a visionary one.

When the United States seized the territory from Mexico in 1848, California became the stage for a strange and steady parade of utopian sects, bohemian mystics, cult leaders, psychospiritual healers, holy poets, sex magicians, fringe Christians, and psychedelic warriors. There are many and complex reasons for this efflorescence of marvels. Between its Edenic bounty and multicultural mix, its wayward freedoms and hungry dreams, California quickly became an imaginative frontier exceptional in the history of American religion. Less a place of origins than of mutations, California served as a laboratory of the spirit, a sacred playground at the far margins of the West. Here, deities and practices from across space and time became mixed and matched, refracted and refined, packaged and consumed anew. Such spiritual eclecticism is not novel, of course, and similar scenes have popped up throughout history, often with more rigor and depth. But nowhere else in the modern world has such unruly creativity come as close to becoming the status quo. I call this loose spiritual ethos "California consciousness": an imaginative, experimental, and often hedonistic quest for human transformation by any means necessary.

Defining California consciousness is no easier than defining the New Age. Though world faiths like Buddhism and Christianity have marked the West Coast's alternative spirituality in fundamental ways, many of the paths that cross California are, in the words of the religious scholar Robert Fuller, "spiritual, but not religious." Even that wan word spirituality barely helps, since many paths crisscross the realms of sacred and profane, and look more like diets or art or crazy fun than sacred pursuits. But that is the point, since the quest for insight, experience, and personal growth can take you anywhere: a mountaintop, a computer, a yoga mat, a rock 'n' roll hall.

In his book *The Varieties of Religious Experience*, William James defined religion as "the feelings, acts, and experiences of individual men in their solitude, so far as they apprehend themselves to stand in relation to whatever they may consider the divine." California seekers could be said to have taken the bait that James dangled. For James, the cornerstone of religion was personal experience, a

perspective that decoupled the religious life from questions of dogma and institution, and brought it into the sphere of the individual. This shift also opened up the wunderkammer of consciousness, redefining mysticism and so-called altered states as valid points of departure. Experimenting with psychedelic compounds like peyote and nitrous oxide, James argued that exalted states of consciousness had to be integrated into any philosophy worth its salt. Though James's approach hardly exhausts our understanding of religion, it certainly helps illuminate California consciousness. Solitude, especially, is key: though California has hosted scores of sects and cults, seekers are often driven by the sneaking suspicion that, in many ways, they are on their own. In California, though, James's "individual men" are as often as not women—the feminization and even "queering" of the sacred being one of California's defining, and most controversial, characteristics.

Although I was not raised within the bosom of religion, my adolescence was shaped by a variety of religious experiences. Like most of my peers, I received only the most garbled version of the good word that has sustained most Westerners for centuries. Neither baptized nor churched, I learned the gospel from obsessive and repeated listenings to my mom's beat-up LP copy of Jesus Christ Superstar. For the most part, the world around me was defined by skate parks, Star Wars, Led Zeppelin, and pot. But because I grew up when and where I did, I was also surrounded by the spent fuel rockets of the spiritual counterculture. By the time school beckoned me east, I had met and broken bread with teen witches, born-again surfers, Hare Krishnas, wandering Christian mendicants, Siddha yogis, est seminar leaders, psychedelic Deadheads, and a spindly metaphysician who taught English at my junior high and read my aura after class.

Years later, in a time of existential freefall, I yearned for something more: I wanted to be rooted in an authentic religious tradition. I was envious of the people I knew who had been raised with faith, for they at least had something formative to wrestle with, something they had no choice but to engage. I had nothing but what sociologists call "the religious marketplace"—the vast array of books, gurus, practices, paths, and healing modalities that burdens the modern seeker with choice. Conversion felt too much like consumerism; real religion, it seemed to me, should lie at the root of the self, before choice enters the matter. But then it dawned on me: what if California was my tradition? Like Hinduism, which is really just a catchall term for a riot of sects and paths and teachings, California consciousness is a great polytheistic collage. It is essentially pluralistic, even contradictory, although it speaks so much of wholeness and the One. To study this heterodox tradition, then, was to take it all in: transplanted religions, self-help systems, nature mysticism, Jesus freaks, creepy cults, tools of ecstasy.

California consciousness, I came to see, is like the landscape of the state: an overlapping set of diverse ecosystems, hanging, and sometimes quaking, on the literal edge of the West. This landscape ranges from pagan forests to ascetic deserts to the shifting shores of a watery void. It includes dizzying heights and terrible lows, and great urban zones of human construction. Even in its city life, California insists that there are more ways than one, with its major urban cultures roughly divided between the San Francisco Bay Area and greater Los Angeles. Indeed, Northern and Southern California are considered by some to be so different as to effectively constitute different states. But that is a mistake. California is not two: it is bipolar.

If California consciousness is a kind of landscape, then it makes sense for a student of this tradition to hit the road. And so I traveled across the state, visiting monasteries and mountaintops, churches and homes, storefronts and desert arroyos. I found that, while so many of California's spiritual subcultures have come and gone, many relics remain, preserving traces of spiritual passage in physical space. Some of these traces are well-known structures, monuments to God or Art or both; others are marginal places, slipping into oblivion or disguised by later owners. I found nearly all of

these spots to be beautiful and strange, and they brought to life, if only for a spell, the people and stories that created them and that continue to shape the spirit of the West. My research began to take the form of a psychogeography: a dreamlike movement through space that uncovers subliminal stories and symbolic connections. This book is a reflection of those trips.

Accompanying me on the journey was photographer Michael Rauner. Like me, Michael is a native Californian. He grew up Catholic and was educated by nuns at Our Lady of the Sacred Heart in the polycultural environs of east San Diego. Another teenage seeker, Michael would come

to explore the liminal zone between sacred and profane in his art. When we first met, he showed me two books of photography he had shot and designed, one about the Mission San Diego de Alcalá, and a more ambitious project devoted to California's hidden world of amateur bullfighting—a bloodless ritual with mythic roots. An earlier project, Reliquary DNA, offered a mystical take on genetic research. Michael not only resonated with the vision I was pursuing but also brought a tremendous and sympathetic sensitivity to the task of capturing the unusual character of the state's spiritual landscape.

The Visionary State is not a general overview of religion in California. I have not spent as much time as I would have liked on the Native American and Mexican roots of California, nor with the mainline faiths that shape the lives of millions, from the synagogues of Los Angeles to the evangelical churches of the Central Valley. With some important exceptions, The Visionary State focuses on the restless, heretical edge of the Anglo-American experience as it probes the inside and outside of religious institutions. And even here, The Visionary State only scratches the surface.

What ties together the sites we have chosen is their visionary quality. What do I mean by visionary? It is a singular seeing, rooted in imagination and personal experience. The visionary person sees farther, or sees differently, and then draws others into the dream. Such visions are not inherently sublime—they can be tacky or mad or even terrifying. Disneyland was a vision of sorts, as was Hearst Castle, and McDonald's. What is important in the life of California is the interplay between the visionary imagination and cultural invention, and how this creative fancy introduced an enchanted and sometimes sacred dimension to an often tacky world of cheap thrills, commerce, and trash. As a place that has always been imagined as much as it has been lived, California is, perhaps, inherently visionary. The Gold Rush was a vision, and so was Los Angeles, which bootstrapped itself into being through self-mythology and hype. In this sense, California's colorful and unique spiritual culture is simply one aspect of the creative mania that has made the state the great American exception. But it also reveals something deeper: the continuing call of spirit at the frayed edges of the modern world, a call that demands novelty and reinvention, and the equal invocation of ancient ways.

Welcome, then, to California's theme park of the gods. <>

## WHAT IT'S LIKE TO BE A BIRD: FROM FLYING TO NESTING, EATING TO SINGING--WHAT BIRDS ARE DOING, AND WHY by David Allen Sibley [Sibley Guides, Knopf, 9780307957894]

The bird book for birders and nonbirders alike that will excite and inspire by providing a new and deeper understanding of what common, mostly backyard, birds are doing—and why: "Can birds smell?"; "Is this the same cardinal that was at my feeder last year?"; "Do robins 'hear' worms?"

"The book's beauty mirrors the beauty of birds it describes so marvelously." —NPR

In **WHAT IT'S LIKE TO BE A BIRD**, David Sibley answers the most frequently asked questions about the birds we see most often. This special, large-format volume is geared as much to nonbirders as it is to the out-and-out obsessed, covering more than two hundred species and including more than 330 new illustrations by the author. While its focus is on familiar backyard birds—blue jays, nuthatches, chickadees—it also examines certain species that can be fairly easily observed, such as the seashore-dwelling Atlantic puffin.

David Sibley's exacting artwork and wide-ranging expertise bring observed behaviors vividly to life. (For most species, the primary illustration is reproduced life-sized.) And while the text is aimed at adults—including fascinating new scientific research on the myriad ways birds have adapted to environmental changes—it is nontechnical, making it the perfect occasion for parents and grandparents to share their love of birds with young children, who will delight in the big, full-color illustrations of birds in action.

Unlike any other book he has written, **WHAT IT'S LIKE TO BE A BIRD** is poised to bring a whole new audience to David Sibley's world of birds.

### Review

"Lingering over every page of **WHAT IT'S LIKE TO BE A BIRD**, this is what can be seen: The book's beauty mirrors the beauty of birds it describes so marvelously." —NPR

"Any new Sibley book is an event . . . A sprightly, information-packed encyclopedia of bird behavior. What lifts it into the realm of art is Sibley's illustrations—330 of them, many life-size. Captured in pencil and gouache, Sibley's birds are as scientifically accurate as Peterson's or Audubon's, but less static, more alive . . . The American robin with a rust-red Dickensian waistcoat; a martial, copper-feathered red-tailed hawk perched watchful along a country road—these and all the birds celebrated in **WHAT IT'S LIKE TO BE A BIRD** seem ready to take flight." —Peter Fish, *San Francisco Chronicle*

"An afternoon with this sprawling volume on my lap was a lovely way to tolerate a day of social distancing . . . **WHAT IT'S LIKE TO BE A BIRD** gives Sibley's artwork ample room to spread its wings . . . In a spring shadowed by the darker mysteries of nature, Sibley's book is a welcome occasion to connect with the more pleasing puzzle of what our feathered friends are up to." —Danny Heitman, *The Christian Science Monitor*

"After years of rushing to his indispensable field guides for sure resolution of any bird or tree ID conundrum, I'm delighted to find David Allen Sibley stretching his considerable artistic and literary wings . . . Having painted them all in every possible plumage permutation, evenly lighted and in profile, Mr. Sibley's joy in creating chiaroscuro tableaux of birds feeding, flying and tending their young is palpable . . . Expect to be surprised at the mental and physical capabilities of birds." —**Julie Zickefoose, *The Wall Street Journal***

"Simply gorgeous . . . Appropriate for general readers as well as bird experts, and it is perfectly suitable for young readers . . . As the world's bird population shrinks, it is helpful and even inspiring to learn as much as possible about the amazing feathered creatures that share our planet. There is no better way than to browse through David Allen Sibley's new book, *What It's Like to Be a Bird*." —**Nancy Gilson, *The Columbus Dispatch***

"You'll want to linger on each page to enjoy Sibley's illustrations . . . If you love birds, you'll love this book." —**Jennifer J. Meyer, *The Backyard Birder***

"Sibley answers all kinds of questions people have about birds . . . [His] exacting artwork and wide-ranging expertise bring observed behaviors vividly to life." —***Birdwatching***

"Gorgeous art and fascinating information come together here. The organization makes it easy to pick up and read whatever strikes your fancy, while the depth of information means that anyone can learn a great deal. And then there's the art—lots and lots of it. All that makes this book attractive to anyone even remotely interested in birds." —***The Birder's Library***

"A fascinating work that fulfills its goal to 'give readers some sense of what it's like to be a bird' . . . [Readers] will emerge with a deeper appreciation of birds, and of what observable behaviors can reveal about animals' lives." —***Publishers Weekly***

## **LIVING AS A BIRD by Vinciane Despret, translated by Helen Morrison [Polity Press, 9781509547265]**

In the first days of spring, birds undergo a spectacular metamorphosis. After a long winter of migration and peaceful coexistence, they suddenly begin to sing with all their might, varying each series of notes as if it were an audiophonic novel. They cannot bear the presence of other birds and begin to threaten and attack them if they cross a border, which might be invisible to human eyes but seems perfectly tangible to birds. Is this display of bird aggression just a pretence, a game that all birds play? Or do birds suddenly become territorial – and, if so, why?

By attending carefully to the ways that birds construct their worlds and ornithologists have tried to understand them, Despret sheds fresh light on the activities of both and, at the same time, enables us to become more aware of the multiple worlds and modes of existence that characterize the planet we share in common with birds and other species.

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‘Without forgetting the dangers of violence and extinction, Despret’s writing always makes the world more generous, open, surprising, and generative. **LIVING AS A BIRD** inquires about and engages with “territory” and “territoriality” in exquisite specificity and concrete detail, exploring these birds, these writers and observers of birds, these sounds and calls, these rituals and affects. In the process, this potent little book describes and proposes a polyphonic score. Readers learn how to pay attention, to attend, to tune the senses and to open the imagination. What emerges are bird-rich, science-rich stories that are less deterministic, less self-satisfied with Explanation, more open to manoeuvre, both for birds and for humans who tune themselves to complex avian performances of their becoming in place.’

**Donna Haraway, Professor Emerita at the University of California, Santa Cruz**

## Counterpoint

There are more things between heaven and earth (the realm of birds) than our philosophy can easily explain. — Etienne Souriau

It all began with a blackbird. My bedroom window had remained open for the first time for many months, a symbol of victory over the winter. The blackbird's song woke me at dawn. He was singing with all his heart, with all his strength, with all his blackbird talent. From a little further away, probably from a nearby chimney, another bird replied. I could not get back to sleep. This blackbird was singing, as the philosopher Etienne Souriau would say, with all the enthusiasm of his body, as animals do when they are utterly absorbed in their play and in the simulation of whatever it is they are acting out. Yet it was not this enthusiasm that kept me awake, nor what an ill-humoured biologist might have called a noisy demonstration of evolutionary success. It was the sustained determination of this blackbird to vary each series of notes. From the second or third call, I was spellbound by what was transforming into an audiophonic novel, each episode of which I greeted with an unspoken 'and what next?' Each sequence differed from the preceding one; each was reinvented as a new and original counterpoint.

From that day on, my window remained open every night. With each successive sleepless episode like the one I experienced that first morning, I rediscovered the same surprise, the same sense of anticipation which prevented me from going back to sleep (or even wishing to do so). The bird sang.

But never before had song seemed so close to speech. These were phrases. Recognizable as such. They caught my ear in exactly the same way as words themselves would do. And yet, in that sustained effort imposed by the urge to avoid repetition, never had song seemed further removed from language. This was speech, but taut with beauty and where every single word mattered. The silence held its breath and I felt it tremble in tune with the song. I had the most clear and intense feeling that, at that moment, the fate of the entire world, or perhaps the existence of beauty itself, rested on the shoulders of this blackbird.

Etienne Souriau referred to the enthusiasm of the body. The composer Bernard Fort told me that certain ornithologists use the word 'exaltation' with reference to skylarks. For this blackbird, the word 'importance' imposed itself above all else. Something mattered, more than anything else, and nothing else mattered except the act of singing. And whatever it was that mattered was invented in a blackbird's song, suffusing it completely, transporting it, carrying it onwards, to others, to the other blackbird nearby, to my body straining to hear it, to the furthest limits to which its strength could convey it. Perhaps that feeling I had of a total silence, clearly impossible given the urban environment beyond my window, was evidence that this sense of importance had seized me so powerfully that everything outside that song had ceased to exist. The song had brought me silence. The sense of importance had imposed itself on me.

Perhaps also the song affected me so powerfully because I had recently read *The Companion Species Manifesto* by Donna Haraway. In this extremely beautiful book, the philosopher describes the relationship that she has forged with her dog, Cayenne. She explains how this relationship has had a profound effect on the way she relates to other beings, or, more precisely, to 'relations of significant otherness, how it has taught her to become more aware of the world around her, more closely attuned to it, more curious, and how she hopes that the experiences she has shared with Cayenne will stimulate an appetite for new forms of commitment with other beings who will one day matter in the same way. What Haraway's book does, and I was struck by this in the context of my own experience, is to stimulate, encourage and bring into existence, to render attractive, other modes of attention? And to focus attention on these forms of attentiveness. It is a matter not of becoming more sensitive (a rather too convenient hotchpotch of a notion which could just as easily lead to allergies) but of learning how to pay attention and becoming capable of doing so. Paying attention here with an added sense of being attuned, of 'giving your attention' to other beings and at the same time acknowledging the way other beings are themselves attentive. It is another way of acknowledging importance.

The ethnologist Daniel Fabre would often describe his profession as one which focused attention on whatever prevented people from sleeping. The anthropologist Eduardo Viveiros de Castro came up with a very similar definition of anthropology, describing it as the study of variations of importance. He writes moreover that, 'if there is something that de jure belongs to anthropology, it is not the task of explaining the world of the other but that of multiplying our world.'<sup>6</sup> I believe that many of the ethologists who observe and study animals, following in the footsteps of the naturalists who preceded them and who took this task so much to heart, invite us to follow a similar path: that of becoming aware of, of multiplying 'modes of existence' - in other words, 'ways of experiencing, of feeling, of making sense, and of granting importance to things'? When the ethologist Marc Bekoff says that each animal is a way of knowing the world, he is saying the same thing. Scientists cannot, of course, dispense with explanations altogether, but explaining can take many very diverse forms. It can, for example, be a way of reconfiguring complicated stories as the vagaries of life which stubbornly insists on trying out every possible variation, or it can mean trying to seek answers for puzzling problems, the solutions to which have already been invented by this or that animal, but it can also reflect a determination to find a general all-purpose theory to which everything would

conform. Put another way, there are explanations which end up multiplying worlds and celebrating the emergence of an infinite number of modes of existence and others which seek to impose order, bringing them back to a few basic principles.

The blackbird had begun to sing. Something mattered to him, and at that moment nothing else existed except the overriding obligation to allow something to be heard. Was he hailing the end of the winter? Was he singing about the sheer joy of existing, the sense of feeling himself alive once again? Was he offering up praise to the cosmos? Scientists would probably steer clear of such language. But they could nevertheless assert that all the cosmic forces of an emerging spring had converged to provide the blackbird with the preliminary conditions for his metamorphosis. For this is indeed a metamorphosis. This blackbird, who had probably lived through a relatively peaceful winter, albeit a challenging one, punctuated from time to time by a few unconvincing moments of indignation towards his fellow creatures, intent on maintaining a low profile and living a quiet life, is now singing his heart out, perched on the highest and most visible spot he could find. And everything that the blackbird had experienced and felt over the last few months, everything which had, until that moment, given meaning to things and to other creatures, now becomes part of a new importance, one which is urgent and insistent and which will totally modify his manner of being. He has become territorial.

### A Poetic of Attention

'Slow down: work in progress'

Vinciane Despret listens to the blackbird singing and to ornithologists thinking.

Countering the trend of a science in a hurry to promulgate great universal laws, as in physics or chemistry, and to jump, far too quickly, to the conclusion that nature is simply a jungle where the notion of the survival of the fittest holds sway, Vinciane advances tentatively, one step at a time. She observes the ideas of ornithologists in the same way that these observe birds. She calls for researchers who are ready to observe tirelessly, who are not afraid to hesitate or to suspend judgement, and who take the time to allow the smallest differences to emerge, the most modest particularities to become apparent. Taking infinite care, Vinciane explores the labyrinth of their theories. She is on the lookout for ideas, hunting them down, and, as she writes, we see them appear, evolve, disappear, and sometimes reappear once again. There is a kind of ecology of ideas at work here. Vinciane pays attention to whatever attracts the attention of these scientists: a supercharged attention which enables the subtle diversity of things, of beings and of ideas to express itself.

The most interesting biology of our time is one which politely focuses on the smallest details, the most minuscule particularities. Differences are no longer wiped out by statistics but, on the contrary, are invited to speak for themselves. The living world is full of exceptions to the rule; life evolves only by diverging from a central equilibrium. Sensors with previously unknown levels of precision, new techniques of identification and long-distance tracking allow us to analyse statistically an extraordinary body of observations previously relegated to the ranks of mere anecdote. Today biology is capable of revealing individuals and, even better, personalities, life histories, genealogies, complex social relationships, learning processes and the transmission of experience and of cultures.

Biologists are turning into biographers and biology is becoming a literary undertaking.

### In praise of slowing down

By teaching us patiently to observe all the living creatures around us, those naturalists summoned by Vinciane open doors for us, expanding our imaginations, multiplying perspectives and the

opportunities to enrich the world. Biology is a slow science. There is a genuine grace in advancing slowly in this way, on tiptoe, taking small steps to avoid trampling on things and on creatures. It is a science focused on individual variations which enchants the world by delicately and elegantly unfolding for us other ways of living and new ways of thinking. And, as a result, the world becomes more complex, more difficult to grasp, certainly, but infinitely richer and more fascinating

But this poetic of attention is also a matter of politics, for if this biology is indeed a science of wonder, it is also a lesson in how to live. Through it we can glimpse hitherto unimagined ways of living together, of cohabiting, of spending time with each other and of sharing spaces and stories with neither exclusion nor conflict. In short, it invites us to imagine new perspectives which will enable us to envisage a new form of alliance with the natural world.

And the starting point for all of that might mean agreeing to be awoken at dawn by a blackbird's song ... perhaps even looking forward to it, hoping to hear it and being grateful for it ... — Stephane Durand <>

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