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Ideas are fragile. They are often challenged, suppressed, and even condemned. Throughout history, the struggle between the oppressed and the oppressor has been intrinsically tied to the suppression of radical thought, new arguments, dangerous beliefs, and paradigm-shifting discoveries. The cycle repeats itself endlessly as forces of control rise against those thinkers who dare to know. Giordano Bruno was one such thinker.

The statue of Bruno, which graces the cover of this edition, stands as a defiant tribute to intellectual courage in the face of oppression. A philosopher, poet, and cosmologist, he sought to intertwine revolutionary conceptions of the cosmos with prevailing doctrines. For this, he was tried before the Roman Inquisition and urged to renounce his views, and when he refused, he was burned at the stake in 1600. His true crime? Unyielding inquisitiveness.

Today, the necessity of intellectual courage is as pressing as ever. The world moves at an unforgiving pace, demanding conformity in subtle and overt ways. To seek knowledge, to truly dare to know, is an act of defiance against stagnation.

This 18th edition of Sapere Aude stands as a testament to that spirit. Over the last two semesters, the journal has expanded, growing in rank. With a record-breaking number of submissions, we have carefully selected the papers that challenge not only our thinking but, we hope, yours as well.

May this volume of the journal provoke thought, inspire inquiry, and embolden all who read them in their relentless pursuit of wisdom.

Dare to know,
Editor-in-Chiefs
Abhishek & Celena

Table of contents

Sexism, Racism, & Speciesism

Sadie Radice is an undergraduate sophomore at Duke University, majoring in Philosophy, minoring in Environmental Policy, and earning a Certificate in Ethics & Society. Radice's primary interest lies in how society perceives nature and how that understanding can be used to foster a future characterized by greater respect for the environment, reflected in social and cultural norms, policy, and business practices. This interest is currently explored through efforts to analyze and interpret human–nature dynamics from a philosophical perspective, as demonstrated in the topic addressed in this paper. Radice plans to pursue a future in sustainability.

Abstract

Aristotle argued that "plants exist for the sake of animals, and brute beasts for the sake of man," which assigns hierarchical roles based on perceived superiority and inferiority (humans at the top). This justifies relationships of dominance. When broken down the foundation of his statement is as follows:

X is superior to Y, therefore X has authority over Y[1]

Does this structure seem familiar? We see it many times throughout the work of Aristotle. "The male is by nature superior, and the female inferior; and the one rules, and the other is ruled."[2] This quote maintains the structure X is superior to Y; therefore, X has authority over Y, but now in the context of sex. This structure is mirrored once again when he addresses how "barbarians" – historically a term used for anyone non-Greek[3]– should be ruled by the Greeks as, "the barbarian and the slave are by nature the same."[4] He continues this thought by expressing, "It is clear, then, that some men are by nature free, and other slaves, and that for this latter slavery is both expedient and right".[5]

All three of these power dynamics (male over female, "civilized" over "barbarian", "man over nature") follow the format of X is superior to Y; therefore, X has authority over Y.[6] But what is it about racism, sexism, and speciesism that create this equation? Racism and sexism are concepts that we as a society are quite familiar with generally perceive to be unjust. However, speciesism is not as familiar in discussion. Philosopher Peter Singer's Animal Liberation (2009) is foundational to the

[1] Note that this is a binary example. While the original quote involves three hierarchical positions I am focusing on direct relations between the positions (e.g., animals control over plants and humans control over animals).
[2] Aristotle, *Politics*, I.5.
[3] "Barbarian | Meaning, Connotations, & Facts," Britannica.
[4] Aristotle, *Politics*, I.2.
[5] Aristotle, *Politics*, I.5.
[6] The term "superior" is used to demonstrate a commonly held belief that certain groups are "inherently superior" – an idea I discuss and counter in the second principles listed below.

discussion of speciesism as he defines speciesism as "a prejudice or attitude of bias in favor of the interests of members of one's own species and against those of members of other species" and our moral considerations should not be based on "species membership", but on an individual's ability to experience suffering. While I have many issues with Singer's argument (including what we know to be sentient and how such discrimination extends beyond suffering), my primary critique is his lack of clarity/oversimplification of sexism and racism and how they structurally resemble speciesism (Singer, 2009).[7] In this paper, I identify four shared principles underlying systems of oppression[8] :

1. Arbitrary distinctions that categorize and assign value
2. Beliefs in inherent superiority
3. Reliance on illogical assumptions about dominant group qualities[9]
4. Reinforcement by broader systems of oppression

I will review how sexism and racism are composed of these four principles, and I will demonstrate how speciesism does as well; this will effectively prove how speciesism mirrors sexism and racism in its structure. In the first section, "Arbitrary distinctions that categorize and assign value", I will identify how our categorization of race, gender, and species are blurred rather than clearly defined. I also demonstrate how these categories are dependent on cultural norms. In the second section, "Beliefs in inherent superiority", I introduce the trend of dominant groups assuming superiority over others in the context of race, gender, and species. In the third section, "Reliance on

[7] Peter Singer, *Animal Liberation: The Definitive Classic of the Animal Movement* (New York: Harper Perennial Modern Classics, 2009).

[8] The equation "X is superior to Y; therefore, X has authority over Y" was meant to introduce the structural similarities between racism, sexism, and speciesism in a way that is familiar to readers; it is a segway into further analyzing their structures. The four principles are the main focus of the paper

[9] Dominant group = group of people who hold most privilege and power in a given environment. Universally, men are the dominant group compared to women. In many societies (specifically the United States for the sake of this paper) White people are the dominant racial group compared to all others. In the context of living things on Earth, humans are the dominant group.

illogical assumptions about dominant group qualities", I elaborate on the previous section by demonstrating why it is illogical for society to normalize the superiority of dominant groups. The fourth section, "Reinforcement by broader systems of oppression" demonstrates how these systemic structures – of race, gender, and species – uphold hierarchies of oppression.

The question that my paper will answer is whether it makes sense to accept species discrimination in the same nature as sexism and racism. I argue that if we accept that sexism and racism are unjust due to one group assuming authority over another, speciesism must also be seen unjust.[10]

Arbitrary Distinctions That Categorize and Assign Value

What is it that divides people into categories, and are those lines drawn by nature or by culture? While sex defines differences in anatomy and hormonal cycles, sexism is a product of gender classification and expectations. When studying non-Western cultures, it becomes evident that gender norms are not universally consistent.[11] For instance, the Fa'afafine is a third gender generally accepted in Samoan culture. They are usually assigned male at birth but take on responsibilities regarding childcare and household chores that are usually assigned to women.[12] Additionally, the discrimination one experiences with sexism is dependent on how society perceives them. If a transgender man appears to be a cisgender man, strangers will likely treat him as they would any other man. However, if his biological sex was apparent, people may assume things about

[10] In this paper I assume sexism and racism are founded upon socially constructed principles of race and gender. Particularly aligned with Ásta's 'conferralist' framework, as well as papers from Sally Haslanger, Judith Butler, and Linda Martín Alcof , I take race and gender to be shaped by social practices and power dynamics (Alcof , 2006; Ásta, 2018; Butler,1990; Haslanger, 2012). I also focus on the United States for the purpose of clarity.

[11] Richard Nisbett, *Intelligence and How to Get It: Why Schools and Cultures Count*, (New York: W. W. Norton & Company, 2009).

[12] Serena Nanda, *Gender Diversity: Crosscultural Variations*, (Ney York: Waveland Press, 2014).

him that they typically would a woman (qualifications at a job interview, wanting to have kids, unsolicited inappropriate behaviors, hyper emotional, etc.). In the context of living things on Earth, humans are the dominant group. While this person was assigned female sex at birth, they do not experience the discrimination a woman does because they do not appear that way.[13]

Race is also not categorized based on biology. Racial categorization has been historically fluid, as seen when Italians weren't considered "White" in the United States until the first half of the 20th Century.[14] Due to slavery, many African Americans do not know where their lineage originates but are categorized as "Black". The discrimination one experiences racially is dependent on physical qualities; the more "white" someone appears, the less discrimination they experience, regardless of their racial identity (also known as colorism). "White passing" individuals are more likely to experience greater socioeconomic advantages compared to darker-skinned individuals.[15] Therefore, while the concept of race is not based on physical appearance, racism can be.

Contrary to the belief that species are clearly and distinctly defined, philosophers like John Dupré assert that "species are not fixed natural kinds but fluid populations with blurry boundaries". While Dupré would disagree with my point that the concept of "species" is a convenient but artificial construct imposed by humans,[16] he would agree that there are many ways to organize and understand the natural world.[17] Not only are the categories themselves blurry, but the value assigned to different species – and the way we treat them because of it – vary between cultures. Dogs, for example, are

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[13] Note: transgender individuals are a great example of how sexism is not confined to biological sex, but for the sake of this paper I will address sexism in a way that fits cisgender models. This is not to exclude the experiences of other gender identities but to highlight the systemic similarities between sexism, racism, and speciesism, which often rely on binary frameworks to categorize and oppress groups.

[14] Fred Gardaphé, "We Weren't Always White", *LIT: Literature Interpretation Theory,* vol. 13, no. 3, July–Sept. 2002, pp. 185–199.

[15] Ellis P. Monk, "The Unceasing Significance of Colorism: Skin Tone Stratification in the United States", *Daedalus*, vol. 150, no. 2, 2021, pp. 76–90

[16] Remember that I assume the social constructionist theory for the purpose of this paper and therefore am building on Dupré's belief in how we can categorize the world in many different ways)

[17] John Dupré, *Humans and Other Animals*, (UK: Clarendon Press, 2002).

considered companions in the US, but can be considered food in other parts of the world. A more perplexing example is how many people eat fish but also have pet fish (that they would not eat due to the emotional value they have placed on their own fish). One must also consider the importance of aesthetics, that causes us to like some animals and dislike others, butterflies and moths for example. This shows that the treatment displayed by speciesism, just as in sexism and racism, is arbitrary. It is dependent on cultural norms rather than being defined by objective criteria.

Beliefs in Inherent Superiority

Superiority, in society, is also sustained and maintained by beliefs and stereotypes. Women are often assumed to be "emotionally unstable" and less intellectually capable than men. For example, pseudoscientific claims indicate that smaller brain sizes in women were indicative of lower intelligence. On the other hand, modern neuroscience has reported no significant differences in cognitive ability between men and women. This would indicate that gender differences in behavior and aptitude are shaped more by socialization than biology.[18] Generally, young girls are socialized to take emotional responsibility for others' emotions and actions, while boys are praised for individual, action-oriented behaviors.[19] Despite being seen traditionally in more leadership positions, Men are associated with increased aggression and competitiveness; leadership and intelligence are skills that require collaboration, empathy, and adaptability — which are skills that women often excel in due to social conditioning.[20] This reflects that it is the social expectation and not any inborn traits that account for this gendered difference in leadership qualities.

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[18] Cordelia Fine, *Delusions of Gender: How Our Minds, Society, and Neurosexism Create Difference,* (New York: W. W. Norton & Company, 2010).

[19] Daniel Goleman, *Emotional Intelligence: Why It Can Matter More Than IQ.* Bantam, 1995.

[20] John Archer, "The Influence of Testosterone on Human Aggression." *Behavioral Science Review*, 2006.

Perhaps the most important argument against my claim is that men are superior simply because they hold the majority of power positions. However, such a fact reflects more on the systemic exclusion of women throughout history than on any natural inferiority or low intellectual capacity. Women who managed to come into leading positions, such as Cleopatra in ancient Egypt or Queen Elizabeth I in England, proved themselves as more than capable in governance and decision-making as their male colleagues, thus refuting the argument of men's superiority.[21]

Many racial groups have been historically oppressed due to assuming inferiority to dominating groups. The indigenous peoples of North America developed systems of government and ecological management but were regarded by colonizers as "savage" because of differences in appearance and cultural practices. Communal land ownership and sustainable ecological relationships were thought of as backwards, rather than a deliberate and efficient construct.[22] This perception is enhanced by religious differences: the colonizers saw indigenous practices, which included sacrificing, as barbaric. The “barbaric” and “savage” perceptions of colonizers were used to justify claims of moral superiority and rulership. A similar argument was provided in the 19th-century pseudoscience of craniology, where scientists equated brain size and shape with intelligence. Scientists like Samuel Morton manipulated evidence to make claims that African Americans indeed had smaller or deformed skulls, which were indicative of intellectual inferiority.[23] These selfsame narratives exist today in expectations of minority inferiority due to differences in test scores and educational attainment. However, these gaps reflect systemic inequalities which result in underfunded schools and implicit biases; not inherent cognitive differences.[24]

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[21] Alice H. Eagly and Linda L. Carli, *Through the Labyrinth: The Truth About How Women Become Leaders,* (Massachusetts: Harvard Business Review Press, 2007).
[22] Charles C Mann, *1491: New Revelations of the Americas Before Columbus,* (New York: Vintage Books, 2005).
[23] Tzvetan Todorov, *The Conquest of America: The Question of the Other,* (New York: Harper & Row, 1984).
[24] Richard Nisbett, *Intelligence and How to Get It: Why Schools and Cultures Count,* (New York: W. W. Norton & Company, 2009).

Addressing the issue of assumed superiority of white men is not an uncommon topic of conversation. However, we rarely discuss how as humans, we assume superiority over other species. The "uniquely human qualities" that are generally thought to set humans apart from animals are reasoning, self-awareness, and language. But in fact, none of these three are exclusive to humans. Many believed that the usage of tools was a "uniquely human quality" until 1960 when Jane Goodall observed chimpanzees using tools to extract termites.[25] In fact, there are many tool-using non-primate species, such as crows in making hooks, and dolphins in using sponges for foraging. Self-medication was discovered in animals such as great apes, birds and insects involving creative medicinal remedies.[26] Yet another ability is architectural intelligence, which has been manifested in beavers, bees, and birds that build rather complex architectures.[27] This pattern also manifests in emotional intelligence: elephants mourn their dead, and dolphins use distinctive whistle signals for names, reflecting self-awareness and social complexity. These were all qualities once thought to be "uniquely human".[28] These examples demonstrate how animals exhibit traits in intelligence, emotional depth, and communication. Here lies the inconsistency of arguments using such qualities to claim human's "inherent superiority".

Illogical Assumptions

At the end of the day, the playing field is uneven; and it remains that way through ignorant assumptions made by dominant groups. In a society that is designed for and run by men, women

[25] Gavin R. Hunt and Russell D. Gray, "The Crafting of Hook Tools by Wild New Caledonian Crows." *Proceedings of the Royal Society B: Biological Sciences*, 2004.
[26] Michael A Huffman, "Self-Medicative Behavior in the African Great Apes: An Evolutionary Perspective into the Origins of Human Traditional Medicine." *Bioscience*, 2001.
[27] Mike Hansell, *Built by Animals: The Natural History of Animal Architecture*. Oxford University Press, 2007.
[28] Rory Collins, "What Does It Mean to be Human, and Not Animal? Examining Montaigne's Literary Persuasiveness in 'Man is No Better Than the Animals'." *Sloth: A Journal of Emerging Voices in Human-Animal Studies* 4 (1).

seldom get the opportunity to prove themselves equally competent and lead prosperous lives. In a society based upon white privilege, people of color are rarely allowed the opportunity to prove equal competence. The rest of nature will continue to suffer in a world where human beings have determined themselves to be superior without considering the consequences. While females intellectually develop quicker than males, they often face the burden of responsibility for the actions and emotions of their male counterparts: for example, being told to dress appropriately in order to avoid assault. Yet paradoxically, the same boys who are excused from self-control are also assumed to be the "best leaders." Social and institutional structures are designed to favor men.

For example, work and school schedules reinforce men's 24-hour hormonal cycle in which testosterone peaks in the morning and decreases gradually throughout the day. In contrast, women's bodies undergo a 28-day hormonal cycle through four phases: follicular, or increased energy; ovulation, with peak motivation and productivity; luteal, where energy is lower though intuition heightens; and menstruation, where greater balance occurs in the brain hemispheres.[29] It does not make sense that even after achieving success while working against the very nature of their hormonal clock, women are somehow seen as “inferior” to the men who work in a structure that complements their hormonal clock. It is illogical to consider men “superior” when men and women aren't even playing the same game.

For race as well, the strength and determination of marginalized communities in the face of such continuous hurdles go unseen by the very systems that constrain them. Human genetic diversity is such that two individuals of the same racial group are, on average, as different genetically from each other as they are from individuals in other racial groups.[30] If we do not distinguish intellectual abilities or inherent values based on arbitrary traits like hair color or height, why would we do so

[29] Katie Anderton, “The 24-Hour Day Falls into the Patriarchy's Lap.” Medium, 28 Dec. 2022,
[30] “National Human Genome Research Institute (NHGRI).” National Institutes of Health (NIH)

based on skin color which is simply a matter of melanin quantity?[31] Similar to sexism, the systemically discriminatory white society of America causes differences in opportunity, socio-economic factors, education and health access, and racial bias which impact social mobility. It is illogical to compare the socioeconomic positions of Black and White people when the nation was built in the oppression of Black and Native peoples.[32] They did not start in the same place, so it is unreasonable to expect a continuously oppressed group to be in the same place of those who oppress them. It is an uneven playing field.

Speciesism, as previously stated, is founded upon the assumption that we have "uniquely human qualities". All of these "uniquely human qualities" we have self-designated are continuously disproven and there's a reason for it. We assume that if we cannot understand something it must be below us, as if the tools we created are free of the bias of human perception and knowledge.[33] A great example of this is how English-speaking Americans often assume that people who do not speak English are somehow less intelligent, when in reality English is not superior to any other language.[34] We cannot assume humans are more intelligent than other species if we cannot even quantify our own intelligence (American Psychological Association). In fact, many animals are superior to humans in other ways (dogs, for example, have a better sense of smell).[35] Perhaps there are alternative forms of intelligence we do not possess and therefore cannot detect. Being that our knowledge of nature is constantly evolving, it is illogical to claim to know all there is about nature and the species

[31] Nina Jablonski, *Living Color: The Biological and Social Meaning of Skin Color.* (California: University of California Press, 2012).
[32] Eduardo Bonilla-Silva, *Racism Without Racists: Color-Blind Racism and the Persistence of Racial Inequality in America*. Rowman & Littlefield, 2017.
[33] Richard Nisbett, *Intelligence and How to Get It: Why Schools and Cultures Count*, (New York: W. W. Norton & Company, 2009).
[34] M.N. Abu Guba, S. Daoud, and S. Jarbou. "Foreign Accented-Speech and Perceptions of Confidence and Intelligence." *Journal of Psycholinguistic Research,* vol. 52, 2023, pp. 1093–1113
[35] Alexandra Horowitz, *Inside of a Dog: What Dogs See, Smell, and Know,* Scribner, 2009.

that encompass it (including ourselves). One is forced to consider too how we are the only species that was able to destroy the balance of maintaining a healthy planet. Why would we then not assume that we are the unintelligent ones? That we are the invasive species of the planet? Because we do not treat other species with the same kind of respect as we do for other humans, there is no way to discover their level of intelligence.

Reinforcement by Broader Systems of Oppression

If we can recognize these unreasonable categorizations and social hierarchies, why do they still exist? Being that we as a society have become aware of sexism for quite some time, one would expect the issue to be solved by now. And yet, the patriarchy remains intact. Women are underrepresented in leadership roles (only 8.8% of Fortune 500 CEOs during 2022 were women according to Catalyst Global Statistics) and continue to be hypersexualized in films which reinforce stereotypes of objectification and emotional irrationality.[36] The patriarchal norms which validate such objectification and perpetuate narratives of victim blaming and gender norms continue to be taught in homes, demonstrated in schools, and enforced in society.[37]

Colonialism and slavery worked together to institutionalize racial hierarchies and normalize discrimination and exploitation (United Nations Office of the High Commissioner for Human Rights). Systemic biases reinforce such ever-present racist structures. Unequal funding for Education in minority neighborhoods, limited healthcare accessibility, and a systematically biased criminal justice system are all examples of systemic racism persisting today.

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[36] Stacy L. Smith et al. "Inequality in 1,200 Popular Films: Examining Portrayals of Gender, Race, and LGBTQ+." *USC Annenberg Inclusion Initiative*, 2019.

[37] Anita Hill and Emma Coleman Jordan, *Race, Gender, and Power in America: The Legacy of the Hill-Thomas Hearings*, Oxford University Press, 1995.

While not discussed as often, the movement for natural rights of the environment (not just animals) has gained momentum in recent years in an attempt to broaden perspectives on what defines inherent value and who possesses it. We see it within factory farming – an institution resulting from industrialization and mass production – where the animals are fed improperly and kept in confined spaces in large quantities.[38] Our laws prioritize human interests over animal welfare, allowing such practices like factory farming and animal testing to continue despite evidence of animal suffering and environmental harm.[39] Fast food, fast fashion, and mass media further perpetuate this idea that we can damage the environment and other species for our pleasure. On a more systemic view of speciesism, Anthropocentrism itself places a human being at the top of the "hierarchy of beings" and perpetuates the belief that nature is to be exploited by human needs (Stanford Encyclopedia, 2002).[40] This form of thought has helped to justify environmental destruction, the use of animals for whatever purposes imagined.

Conclusion

In this paper, I demonstrated how sexism, racism, and speciesism each rely on four of the same principles: arbitrary distinctions that categorize and assign value, beliefs in inherent superiority, reliance on illogical assumptions about dominant group qualities, and reinforcement by broader systems of oppression. These systems depend on constructed hierarchies, illegitimate both biologically and morally, but maintained through cultural norms, economic structures, and institutionalized biases.

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[38] Melanie Joy, *Why We Love Dogs, Eat Pigs, and Wear Cows: An Introduction to Carnism* (California: Conari Press, 2010).

[39] Peter Singer, *Animal Liberation: The Definitive Classic of the Animal Movement* (New York: Harper Perennial Modern Classics, 2009).

[40] Andrew Brennan, "Environmental Ethics." *Stanford Encyclopedia of Philosophy* (California: 3 June 2002)

Society holds expectations from women that are premised on a severely outdated essentialism of biology, while the systemic racism of white supremacy against racial minorities perpetuates inequalities in education, health care, and criminal justice. These structures are repeated in speciesism, where humans would impose arbitrary sets of distinctions upon other species, labeling them as inferior because of their intelligence or perceived utility. All three - sexism, racism, and speciesism - fall short of providing undeniably clear evidence to justify themselves as valid/logical social structures

I have explained using several historical and modern examples how sexism, racism, and speciesism fit into the equation of "X is superior to Y; therefore, X has authority over Y". Sexism assumes men are superior to women; therefore, men have authority over women. Racism assumes White people are superior to non-White people; therefore, White people have authority over non-White people. Speciesism assumes humans are superior to all other species; therefore, humans have authority over all other species. Given that rational people understand the equation – in the context of sexism and racism – to be morally wrong, it is their identical structure with speciesism which allows me to argue my position that we should view speciesism as an equal theoretical framework as sexism and racism, and therefore equal weight in their injustice and moral considerations.

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Foucauldian Power for the Ethics of Knowing

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Abstract

In this paper I identify a misunderstanding of Foucauldian theory in Miranda Fricker's work on epistemic justice and suggest a recontextualization of Foucault that strengthens Fricker's analysis of epistemic injustice. I first reject Fricker's claim that postmodernist theoretical space does not serve much purpose in contemporary social activism. Then, I examine the notion of capacity in the writing of both Fricker and Foucault to ultimately conclude that Fricker's definition of power is too narrow in scope to accommodate for power in all its complexity and different forms. I lastly use both Fricker as well as Foucault to analyze multiple different examples from courtrooms to determine how exactly Foucault provides a tangible and accessible route to resistance that can support Fricker's work.

Epistemic Injustice and Foucault: Introduction

Since Miranda Fricker's 2007 book *Epistemic Injustice: Power and the Ethics of Knowing,* there has been much research into this blossoming and valuable field of epistemology. It is becoming widely recognized that we must identify what epistemic resources are and how they should be distributed, with special attention given to those who have historically been disenfranchised and disconnected from such resources. Because Fricker's work is foundational and of great importance to this field, I wish to bring light to an area of her analysis that could be strengthened in favor of her overall aim. In what follows, I focus on the notion of social power that informs Fricker's work. In particular, I am interested in this power's conceptual origin in Foucauldian theory. The main worry is that Fricker's explanation of social power does not consider its inherent and elusive complexity, which can best be seen by recontextualizing it in Foucault's work. Here I offer this recontextualization, and I also explore why this shift is helpful in theorizing about epistemic injustice.

Miranda Fricker introduces the distinctly epistemic concept of injustices, which harm one in one's capacity as a knower.[1] Fricker primarily focuses on two forms of epistemic injustice, namely *testimonial injustice* and *hermeneutical injustice*.[2] According to Fricker, the central case[3] of testimonial injustice occurs when "prejudice causes a hearer to give a deflated level of credibility to a speaker's word."[4] Hermeneutical injustice takes place when one is unable to properly interpret their social experience due to a gap in their culture's collective knowledge.[5] Fricker also utilizes the notion of 'social power' throughout her work, which she defines as "a socially situated capacity to control others' actions."[6] While Fricker's main focus is to describe and diagnose the problem of epistemic injustice, her solutions focus on the development of virtues.[7]

Fricker begins her work by creating a definition for her term "social power," which will prove vital to her later discussions of injustice as this is the collective commodity that she will claim is being unfairly distributed. Fricker claims social power "is a capacity we have as social agents to influence how things go in the social world."[8] This power, according to Fricker, can operate actively or passively. In her example of a traffic warden, Fricker claims that her power is operating actively when she imposes a fine, but it also operates passively when her capacity to impose a fine influences a citizen's parking behavior.[9] The fact that the citizens are aware of the officer's capacity to give out a fine influence their behavior, without the officer having to actually act. Fricker crucially posits that

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[1] Miranda Fricker, *Epistemic Injustice: Power and the Ethics of Knowing* (NY: Oxford University Press, 2007), 1.
[2] Fricker, *Epistemic Injustice,* 1.
[3] Fricker has been critiqued elsewhere for the embedded claim in her definition that testimonial injustice is a result of a credibility deficit but not excess (Fricker, *Epistemic Injustice*, 18), notably by Emmalon Davis in "Typecasts, tokens, and spokespersons: A case for credibility excess as testimonial injustice." Hypatia 31, no. 3 (2016): 485-501. While I agree with Davis' argument, the aim of my paper does not rely on the exact definition of testimonial injustice, and I Awill continue to use Fricker's original definition hereafter.
[4] Fricker, *Epistemic Injustice,* 1.
[5] Fricker, *Epistemic Injustice,* 1.
[6] Fricker, *Epistemic Injustice,* 4.
[7] Fricker, *Epistemic Injustice,* 1.
[8] Fricker, *Epistemic Injustice,* 9.
[9] Fricker, *Epistemic Injustice,* 9.

"since power is a capacity . . . , power exists even while it is not being realized in action."[10] We will revisit this notion of capacity in a later section, but it is important to note now that Fricker analyzes power as a socially situated capacity to control others' actions.[11]

What exactly does Fricker mean by a *socially situated capacity*? Fricker first uses an example of a police officer who is giving out parking tickets. This officer has power over ordinary citizens as a result of her social situatedness. Because she works in the government and has passed through certain training, courses, etc., she is allotted a kind of capacity (to give or not give a ticket) that other citizens do not possess. Socially situated capacity is also granted through other, sometimes immutable, characteristics, such as race, class, gender, sexuality, etc. For example, a white man might have more social power than a Black woman.

In the above definitions, Fricker is deliberate in her use of the term 'social power,' but then continues to just use the general term 'power' in the same breath. For instance, after defining 'social power,' she then remarks that "a first point to make is that power can operate *actively* or *passively.*"[12] Because Fricker seems to use the terms 'social power' and 'power' as synonyms, it is difficult to determine if there are meaningful differences between these two notions. While we cannot conclude that Fricker is intending to make broad statements about every form of power through her proposed definition, she does make several claims in response to Foucault that directly counter several key tenets of his theory (specifically the characteristic of capacity and how exactly power can be observed) which suggests that we may be discussing the analysis of power in its broader form. Before investigating her specific rejection of certain Foucauldian claims, I will first reject a preliminary claim she posits in the introduction in order to justify my defense of Foucauldian theory in the first place.

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[10] Fricker, *Epistemic Injustice,* 10.
[11] Fricker, *Epistemic Injustice,* 4.
[12] Fricker, *Epistemic Injustice,* 9.

A "Vain Hope?"

I begin by exploring Fricker's dismissal of postmodernist conceptions of power, specifically that of Michel Foucault, as well as her claim that contemporary feminist theorists are disillusioned with postmodernist theory. In the introduction to *Epistemic Justice*, Fricker directly acknowledges that there was a postmodernist theoretical space in which one might investigate the notion of power that was appealing to many feminist philosophers.[13] However, she also claimed that this space "turned out to be largely a vain hope, for the extremist bent in so much postmodernist writing led too often to reductionism."[14] She goes on to speak of the "postmodernist buzz" in strictly the past tense, suggesting that feminist theorists have, on the whole, moved on from these reductionist methodologies.[15] I reject Fricker's claim that postmodernist theoretical space turned out to be "largely a vain hope" for feminist philosophers. I focus specifically on Fricker's analysis of Foucault's writings on power. While Fricker uses the term postmodernism in a very broad strokes manner, I will be focusing specifically on her interpretation of Foucault.[16]

While this paper aims to support the use of Foucauldian analysis in Fricker's broader theory of epistemic injustice, I will use Jose Medina and Amy Allen to introduce some of the controversy surrounding the deployment of Foucauldian analytics in such endeavors. José Medina, a writer also interested in epistemic injustice and oppression, employs Foucault throughout his work. He comments that "it is surprising that Foucault is not widely cited and discussed in the epistemologies of ignorance developed in Feminist Standpoint Theory and Critical Race Theory."[17] Amy Allen, a

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[13] Fricker, *Epistemic Injustice,* 2.
[14] Fricker, *Epistemic Injustice,* 2.
[15] Fricker, *Epistemic Injustice*, 3.
[16] Fricker makes a more fleshed out case against postmodernism in *The Cambridge Companion to Feminism in Philosophy*, eds. Fricker and Hornsby (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2000). I focus on her rejection of Foucault strictly in *Epistemic Justice* because I find the premises of her dismissal inadequate, and I argue that Foucault assists with the aim she hopes to accomplish with this work specifically.
[17] José Medina, *The Epistemology of Resistance: Gender and Racial Oppression, Epistemic Injustice, and Resistant Imaginations* (Oxford University Press, 2012), 293.

feminist philosopher herself, sets out to advocate for use of Foucauldian theory and defends its use by other feminist philosophers. In doing so, she remarks that,

> Many of these [feminist] criticisms rest on misunderstandings of Foucault's work, and, thus, fall wide of their mark. Moreover, the criticisms that do hit their mark do not warrant a wholesale dismissal of Foucault's analysis of power but, instead, indicate the necessity of supplementing and extending some of Foucault's insights in order to incorporate them into a feminist conception of power.[18]

I do not believe that Fricker intended to claim that no one currently uses postmodernist literature, or that it does not have applicable uses. However, for her to remark that this space presented "largely a vain hope" and then to immediately present Foucauldian theory to supplement her definition of social power appears incongruent. It is unlikely that feminist social theorists entered postmodernist theoretical spaces in the hopes that the dynamics of power and the route to gender equality were fully mapped out, but they rather expected to be able to use parts of theory that proved most useful the feminist aim after thorough analysis.

In this section I aimed to prove that despite Fricker's claim in her introduction, postmodernist theoretical space still applies to contemporary feminist philosophy, with enticing potential to be expanded upon and modified as needed. Next, I will analyze the notion of capacity as a characteristic of power in Fricker and Foucault's work to determine where they differ and ultimately argue that Fricker's definition is unsatisfactorily narrow.

Capacity and the Domains of Power

As a reminder, Fricker defines social power as "a capacity we have as social agents to influence how things go in the social world."[19] Firstly, we should note that capacity must be conceptualized in relation *to* something. One does not simply have capacity; one has capacity *to* do,

[18] Amy Allen, *The Power of Feminist Theory* (Routledge, 1999), 32.
[19] Fricker, *Epistemic Injustice,* 9.

say, think, act, etc. Because Fricker defines social power as the "capacity *to* influence how things go in the social world" (emphasis added), she argues that power can exist even "when it is not being realized in action."[20] She then references Foucault's claim that "power exists only when it is put into action."[21] Her argument goes roughly as follows: if capacity implies a dormant state of power, Foucault's claim should be rejected since "it is incompatible with power's being a capacity."[22] If Foucault believed that power was strictly a matter of capacity, then Fricker's claim would have more weight; however, Foucault's notion of power is more nuanced. I will first explain Foucault's concept of the domains of power and then relate them to Fricker's own previously mentioned example of a traffic warden, ultimately showing that the notion of capacity does not contradict or discredit Foucault's analysis of power.

Foucault acknowledges that power can be understood as a capacity but emphasizes that it must also be acknowledged in relation to the nearby concepts of power relations and relationships of communication.[23] In his discussion concerning the question of how power is exercised, and more specifically exerted over others, Foucault says:

> It is first necessary to distinguish that [power] which is exerted over things and gives the ability to modify, use, consume, or destroy them–a power that stems from aptitudes directly inherent in the body or relayed by external instruments. Let us say that here it is a question of "capacity."[24]

Notice here that Foucault appears to conceptualize capacity as *a form* of power, whereas Fricker considers capacity to be *the* form of power (with the added condition of social situatedness).[25] In the above quote, Foucault is discerning the power of capacity from a possible alternative form. As we

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[20] Fricker, *Epistemic Injustice,* 10.
[21] Fricker, *Epistemic Injustice,* 10.
[22] Fricker, *Epistemic Injustice,* 10.
[23] Michel Foucault, "The Subject and Power," in *Michel Foucault: Power,* ed. J.D. Faubion (NY: The New Press, 2000), 337.
[24] Foucault, "Subject and Power," 337.
[25] Fricker, *Epistemic Injustice,* 4.

will see, careful discriminations such as these allow Foucault to analyze how power might take multiple different forms simultaneously, while Fricker's definition restricts the domains of power to the realms of capacity and social situatedness.

In addition to the "question of capacity," Foucault posits that power is also exercised through the domains of power relations and relationships of communication.[26] Power relations characterize relations between individuals, where the term 'power' designates a relationship between partners.[27] Relationships of communication "transmit information by means of a language, a system of signs, or any other symbolic medium."[28] Importantly, "communicating is always a certain way of acting upon another person or persons,"[29] placing the effects of communication in the realm of power as well. These are the domains (objective capacity, power relations and relationships of communication) that Foucault considers power to operate within when we are looking at *how* it is exercised. Foucault emphasizes that these three concepts should not be confused with one another:

> this is not to say that there is a question of three separate domains...it is a question of three types of relationships that in fact always overlap one another, support one another reciprocally, and use each other mutually as means to an end.[30]

As an example, take the police officer that Fricker uses to illustrate her notion of active and passive power. Foucault would disagree that, as Fricker argues, when a police officer's capacity to impose a fine influences a citizen's behavior, this is a form of power operating passively.[31] It is, in fact, power in an incredibly active form. When a citizen sees an officer parked near a "no parking" zone, power is active in all three domains: The (1) objective capacity of this officer to impose a fine, the (2) power relation of the officer and the citizen, as well as the (3) relationship of communication between the

[26] Foucault, "Subject and Power," 337.
[27] Foucault, "Subject and Power," 337.
[28] Foucault, "Subject and Power," 337.
[29] Foucault, "Subject and Power," 337.
[30] Foucault, "Subject and Power," 338.
[31] Fricker, *Epistemic Injustice,* 10.

officer and the citizen (the symbols on the officer's car that distinguish it and make this power relation clear, the parking sign, etc.) all combine to paint an image of power that is by no means passive. There is a string of actions built on actions; the citizen must look at and interpret the symbols on the officer's car, her surroundings, the parking zone, etc., which, once understood, communicate a power relation characterized by a certain capacity the officer possesses.

Fricker contends, in response to Foucault's aforementioned claim that "power exists . . . only when it is put into action,"[32] that "the idea that power is not a capacity but rather pops in and out of existence as and when it is actually operative lacks motivation."[33] It should be evident by now that Foucault did not argue that power is *not* a capacity, but that power should not *strictly* be considered as a capacity.[34] To consider power only as a socially situated capacity is to define it only in terms of the directly observable domains in which it operates. To say that the vessel through which power acts (objective capacity, relationships of communication, power relations) is itself power is like defining wind as the movement of trees. The definition only concerns itself with the *effects* of the object of analysis, the salient and most visible characteristics of the thing itself. Foucault claims that "power is tolerable only on condition that it mask a substantial part of itself. Its success is proportional to an ability to hide its own mechanisms."[35] If we are to assume that the more obvious manifestations of power are representative of power itself, we run the risk of severely underestimating its insidious nature and the methods by which the structures we occupy can be shifted to empower those who may otherwise continue to entertain the entirely repressive, top-down, capacity-motivated notion of power, collected in the hands of a privileged few that leaves the general masses

[32] Foucault, "Subject and Power," 340.
[33] Fricker, *Epistemic Injustice,* 10.
[34] Foucault, "Subject and Power," 337.
[35] Michel Foucault, *The History of Sexuality: An Introduction, Volume 1,* trans. Robert Hurley (Random House, 1990), 86.

disenfranchised. One advantage of the Foucauldian analysis of power is that it does not underestimate or dilute power. As I will demonstrate later, when power is respected as being omnipresent and complex, routes toward empowerment become more visible.

Purely Structural Power

Fricker reasoned that since (as she claims) Foucault's theory of power was purely structural, meaning that "there is no particular agent exercising it,"[36] it is not useful when evaluating how we might conceptualize power to empower marginalized groups on a local level using agential power, where power is exercised by an agent. Through Fricker's own definitions of agential and purely structural power, the claim that Foucault is investigating purely structural power is demonstrably false, as I will illustrate.

If power is a capacity that an agent possesses, how is it that power can operate in an agentless way, as she claims occurs in the purely structural form of power?[37] Is it possible for a structure to possess the capacity that Fricker references? Let us analyze how Foucault reconciles his analysis of power structures with the way it is exercised:

> Power exists only as exercised by some on others, only when it is put into action, even though, of course, it is inscribed in a field of sparse available possibilities underpinned by permanent structures...It operates on the field of possibilities in which the behavior of active subjects is able to inscribe itself. It is a set of actions on possible actions...it is always a way of acting upon one or more acting subjects by virtue of their acting or being capable of action.[38]

While Foucault entertains the notion of a structure that exists external to the agent, it is only through the "behavior of active subjects" that power exists and is exercised.[39] Think again of Fricker's police officer. An officer parks her car in view of a no parking zone (action 1). A citizen passes the no

[36] Fricker, *Epistemic Injustice,* 10.
[37] Fricker, *Epistemic Injustice,* 10.
[38] Foucault, "Subject and Power," 341.
[39] Foucault, "Subject and Power," 341.

parking zone (action 2) and registers the officer's presence (action 3). The citizen decides to not risk it and finds a different spot (action 4). In every one of these actions, power exists through being exercised in this "field of sparse available opportunities underpinned by permanent structures."[40] The officer provides herself with an objective capacity to view the parking zone, the citizen becomes cognizant of a power relation dictated by said capacity through symbols of communication, etc.

The Courtroom as a Site of Oppression and Resistance

Now that I have shown Fricker's interpretation of Foucault's analysis of power to be lacking, in this section, I will argue that Fricker's objective, to "bring to light certain ethical aspects of . . . our most everyday epistemic practices"[41] and ultimately provide a route towards empowerment, could be aided by Foucault's analysis of how power both represses and beneficially produces for the marginalized. Because his analysis of power is far from straightforward, misinterpretation can lead to Foucauldian theory being ejected from contemporary discussions regarding social activism. Allen justifies the use of his theory when she remarks that "Foucault's contention that power is at work not just in the state or official economy, but in all arenas of modern social life, echoes feminists' attempts to redefine the scope and bounds of the political."[42] Foucault positioned much of his work to challenge the pervasive notion of top-down, repressive forms of power concentrated in the hands of a few. By recognizing the much more expansive domains of power and how it is made available to us through local institutions, like the family structure, for example, power becomes more easily recognized and therefore approachable.

[40] Foucault, "Subject and Power," 341.
[41] Fricker, *Epistemic Injustice,* 1.
[42] Allen, *The Power of Feminist Theory,* 48.

To illustrate how her analysis of epistemic injustice would benefit from Foucault's analysis of power, let's use her example of testimonial injustice. You may recall that testimonial injustice occurs when a hearer gives a deflated level of credibility to a speaker as a result of prejudice.[43] This is a way in which power acts in a *repressive* form (as Foucault would remark), a form of power that censors, prohibits, restricts, and constrains. However, if we recall Foucault's notion of power as "a set of actions upon other actions,"[44] even this form of power is fundamentally *productive,* in the sense that it produces discourse and action, and "empowers individuals by positioning them as subjects who are endowed with the capacity to act."[45]

Fricker uses the courtroom scene in Harper Lee's *To Kill a Mockingbird* to demonstrate how testimonial injustice occurs.[46] Due to ample racial prejudice present in the courtroom, the Black male defendant, Tom Robinson, experiences a credibility deficit. His testimony is refuted and mocked by the prosecution and the white onlookers. Fricker analyzes this scene and uses her terminology (social power, testimonial injustice, etc.) to illustrate how Tom Robinson is harmed as a knower, using terms and ideas that were not accessible to him or the Black onlookers at the time. Fricker is using an example of repressive power as a site for her productive discourse, in Foucauldian terms.[47] Her use of what Foucault would consider the purely *repressive* form of power serves to reinforce her notion of capacity, as the white members of the court possess the capacity to deflate the credibility of Tom Robinson's testimony.[48] To Fricker, this use of power to deflate his credibility is reprehensible, and it becomes the responsibility of those *with* power to adjust how it is being used (although, of course, the marginalized voices should have influence as to how the use of power is

[43] Fricker, *Epistemic Injustice,* 1.
[44] Foucault, "Subject and Power," 341.
[45] Allen, *The Power of Feminist Theory,* 51.
[46] Fricker, *Epistemic Injustice,* 23.
[47] Fricker, 23.
[48] Fricker, 25.

being modified). Ultimately, Fricker's analysis presents us with a clear case of testimonial injustice as the result of an unfair deployment of social power.[49]

Foucault and Fricker would diverge on where the analysis, specifically of the power at play in the courtroom, ends. Foucault would also analyze the ways in which the power relations, relations of communication, and objective capacity all work to serve the interests of the predominantly racist courtroom, and how these three domains also produce a site of productive discourse *for those who were the subjects being acted upon.* Through a Foucauldian analysis, prejudice and the presence of power may become more obvious when looking at how slurs were thrown around the courtroom, the power relations between Tom, Atticus, and the prosecutors reveal an unfair disadvantage, and the objective capacity of the court to imprison or hang Tom held threatens his ability to defend himself honestly. In these examples, all three domains of power can be observed in the way Fricker imagines power operating; as a repressive, unjust ability that the privileged few have, and the oppressed others do not. Were the analysis to only yield this result, the solution would require *those with power* to distribute it more fairly.

It could be argued that the use of *To Kill a Mockingbird* is less helpful in practice, as it is easy to perceive racism and power imbalance in a fictional courtroom, but possibly more difficult to detect epistemic injustices in today's world. Randall Kennedy, a contemporary legal scholar, documented the ways in which a white person's use of the N-word can be used to prove, or at the very least urge us to examine, the racial prejudices of defendants or plaintiffs.[50] For instance, if a Black worker files for discrimination in the workplace because a white supervisor harasses him, the case becomes incredibly more clear if there is undeniable evidence that the supervisor referred to the employee as the N-word, either in front of him or in private. The communication reveals the

[49] Fricker, 28.
[50] Randall Kennedy, *Nigger: The Strange Career of a Troublesome Word* (NY: Pantheon Books, 2022).

supervisor's attitude toward his power relation between himself and the worker, and how power is being abused becomes more apparent. The slur, though it is an act and manifestation of oppression, becomes a tool of empowerment for the worker to prove his supervisor's prejudice. This analysis of power and of how relationships of communication interact with objective capacity and power relations, proves more useful to the worker than the simple acknowledgement that the supervisor has a socially situated capacity and the worker does not. This is not to say that Fricker would necessarily miss this piece altogether; the N-word used in a derogatory sense is rather potent. However, her notion of power is too myopic to accommodate the ways in which the N-word acts as an element of power itself, not just an effect of it. When Foucault's different domains of power are analyzed together, the route towards resistance is revealed as being embedded in the forms through which power is deployed. The unfair power relations demand equilibrium, the language used should not reinforce or hint at such unjust relations, minority defendants should have more objective capacity to defend themselves, etc.

Ultimately, Fricker's rejection of Foucault's analysis of power results in a kind of power which is diluted and somewhat stale. It is difficult to move forward when there is only the simple issue of some people having power and some people not. The value in Foucault's understanding of power is that the subjects being unfairly acted upon ultimately end up with opportunities to observe and modify the surrounding power structure. An act of oppression beckons an act of resistance; "actions upon other actions."[51]

As we conclude, it is important to keep in mind the scope within which we are operating. This paper only seeks to justify the use of Foucauldian theory for Fricker's analysis of epistemic

[51] Foucault, "Subject and Power,"341.

injustice. It is not necessary that every feminist project adopt such an analysis, but it happens to be the case that Fricker would benefit greatly from it. I echo Allen's claim:

> [Feminists] do not 'need' Foucault...many feminists have done and continue to do this kind of analysis just fine without him. However...most feminists have thus far shied away from producing the kind of full-fledged analysis of the concept of power that Foucault presents. My point is that Foucault's theoretical conception of power matches up nicely with the ways in which many feminists have investigated the workings of male power; as a result, his analysis seems useful.[52]

Foucauldian theory presents itself as a useful tool for the feminist project, but the decision to use it and how it should be used is left at the discretion of the thinkers and writers within the movement. It is simply the case that Foucault has provided modern activists with a thorough analysis of power in its many forms, and the strength of his work should not be disregarded on the grounds of misinterpretation.

If we are to build from the ideas of those that came before us in order to most effectively empower those in need, careful analysis should supplement hasty rejection so that contemporary activism can become progressive instead of regressive. Through my clarification of Foucault's theory and my demonstration of how it can work to reveal areas of empowerment available to those who are often epistemically slighted. Through an expansion of our understanding of the domains of power, I have illustrated how modern-day application of Foucault's theory can serve to benefit the goals shared by Fricker and feminist thinkers alike. I hope that analyses such as this will serve to inform our perception of power in such a way that it might illuminate a myriad of sites for empowerment, and in effect contribute toward increased epistemic justice.

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[52] Allen, *The Power of Feminist Theory,* 48-49.

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Binary Representations

12" x 16"

Oil on Canvas

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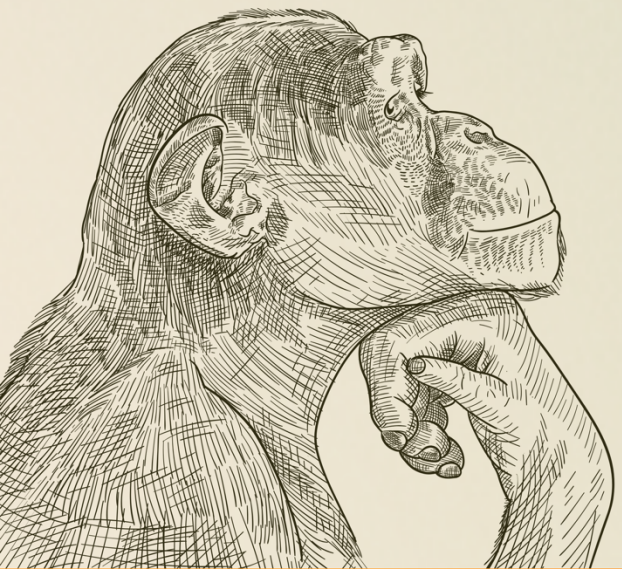
Think Piece: Binary Representations

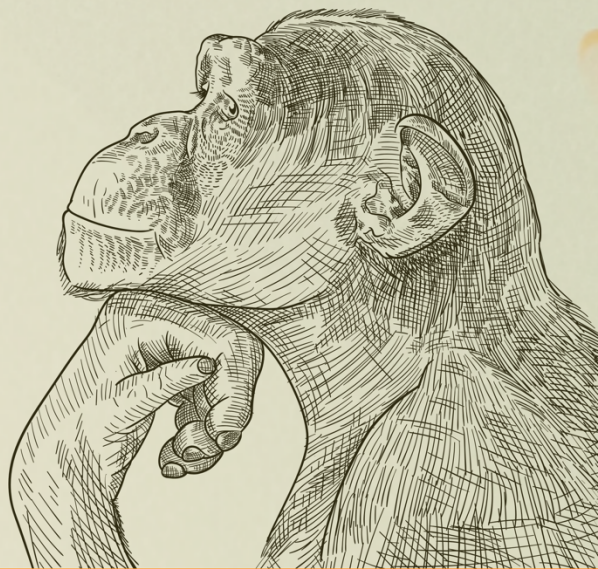
This piece confronts the obfuscating and reductive nature of representation. Fluid and colorful symbols make up the background of the painting, representing a reality before categorization. The possibilities of nature have not been impacted by our interpretation or representations of experience. In contrast, the clean geometric white line creates two distinct squares. This act mirrors our process of representing reality, where we must simplify our experience into clear communicable categories and consequently must erase some of the complexity within our experience. The title, "Binary Representations," further explores this point by referencing a specific representational framework: the binary. Binaries are extremely salient in language and thought. Things are present or absent, Items are hot or cold, People are good or bad, Man or Woman, etc. These oppositions have clear importance within language; however, because of their simplicity, they can serve to obscure reality to the greatest degree. For example, we often represent gender as a binary distinction between man and woman. This binary has little biological basis and serves to simplify

gender and human existence into two very limited social categories. Furthermore, the continual application and assumption of this binary within society leads to implicit assumptions and categorizations that often serve to regenerate hierarchical systems and force individuals to act within their assigned binary category. As a result, our interpretation and representations of reality impact our assumptions, desires, and actions, thereby changing our reality and experience. Representation is a very important aspect of how we interact with reality and having inaccurate or harmful representations can have severe consequences on society.

Tacit Assumptions & Methodologies in Animal Cognition Studies

Ammar Raslan is an undergraduate student from Egypt and a senior at Kenyon College, double majoring in Biology and Philosophy. Raslan is interested in animal cognition, cognitive philosophy, and ethology, and plans to pursue a graduate degree in animal studies and cognition. In their free time, Raslan enjoys spending time outdoors with friends, rewatching movies, and reading magical realism novels.





Abstract

Animal cognition research has gone through significant developments over recent years, the biggest of which is adopting biocentric methods for evaluating cognitive traits. Certain tacit philosophic assumptions have affected research methods in behavioral animal cognition studies and inhibited progress in the field. I argue that a major tacit assumption is that cognitive traits are clustered while they are in fact discordant. Such an assumption has led to humans and nonhuman animals being put on different grounds for research, leading to an unproductive conversation on the nature of cognition and cognitive traits. Instead, I argue to "de-anthropomorphize" humans by prioritizing the environmental niche as the ground upon which conclusions should be derived. This paper is in line with Darwinian thinking and borrows major ideas from Brauer, Prat, and Millikan.

The Animal/Human Distinction[1]

The difference between humans and the rest of the animal kingdom (non-human animals) has been a matter of enduring debate in scientific fields from epistemology to contemporary behavioral science. The biological community at large has historically denied a qualitative distinction between humans and animals at least since Darwin. However, I argue that some assumptions on qualitative distinctions between animals and humans in terms of cognition persist in actual research. One such tacit assumption, the animal/human discontinuity, hinders research on animal minds. Progress continues to be made by many contemporary scientists, addressing this issue by analyzing

[1] In this paper, I will be referring to human animals as "humans" and non-human animals as "animals" for readability.

the effects of the assumptions found within research questions regarding animal minds and how these questions are answered.[2][3][4] This paper attempts to add to that progress.

The battlegrounds for cognition discontinuity are many. They are most intense in discussions on language, tool use, theory of mind, etc. The definition of "cognition" is not important for the purposes of this paper. For this project, our everyday conception of "cognition" will do. In fact, it is important to keep "cognition" undefined if openness to empirical discovery continues to be our goal. Here, we are attempting to discover what "cognition" is, rather than postulating it *a priori*. A philosophical precept's main utility lies in guiding the questions asked and methodologies followed by researchers.[5] I maintain that any categorical definition of a concept based on a philosophical precept is rendered hollow by scientific findings. I will follow Collin Allen's (2017) treatment of "cognition." He writes, "Philosophers seeking a unique 'mark of the cognitive' or less onerous but nevertheless categorical characterizations of cognition are working at a level of analysis upon which hangs nothing that either cognitive scientists or philosophers of cognitive science should care about."[6] That is to say, our current understanding of "cognition" is vague, so it is important to define our treatment of the concept of cognition.

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[2] Brauer, Hanus, Pika, Gray, and Uomini. "Old And New Approaches to Animal Cognition: There Is Not 'One Cognition.'" *Journal of Intelligence* 8, no. 3 (July 2, 2020).

[3] Hauser, Marc D., Chomsky, and Fitch. "The Faculty of Language: What Is It, Who Has It, and How Did It Evolve?" In Cambridge University Press eBooks, 14–42, 2010.

[4] Fedorenko and Varley. "Language and Thought Are Not the Same Thing: Evidence From Neuroimaging and Neurological Patients." *Annals of the New York Academy of Sciences* 1369, no. 1 (April 1, 2016): 132–53.

[5] Colin, "On (Not) Defining Cognition," *Synthese* 194, no. 11 (June 3, 2017): 4233–49.

[6] Collin, "On (Not) Defining Cognition," 4233.

We are not trying to postulate what cognition is but instead trying to discover its nature and properties. This is a mistake often made in the subject; when treating cognition as a science, we are to define it rather than as a science we are trying to discover. Instead, we should emphasize the expansion of our prior understanding of cognition from what we discover. Collin explains that the boundaries between "higher" and "lower" cognition are too vague to be used for a productive and inclusive treatment, further supporting the theory that our treatment of cognition as it stands has too many holes to correctly map out onto the animal kingdom, i.e. to have ecological validity. That is to say that cognition has the same structure as the animal/human continuity long held in biology since Darwin. I argue, however, that this seemingly obvious thesis is not reflected in actual research on non-human animal cognition.

Assumptions of Animal/Human Discontinuity Persist

Some studies of animal cognition with imprecise assumptions have risked adopting a methodology that is contrary to the comparative approach itself. The biological community at large agrees that the difference in all traits between humans and animals is that of *degree* (quantitative) and not of *kind* (qualitative). I will refer to the qualitative thesis as the "animal-human discontinuity thesis." However, recent literature on animal cognition has shown that many of the studies conducted–for instance, on intelligence–assume qualitative traits that are unique to humans and rely

on the animal-human discontinuity thesis.[7][8][9] For instance, in comparative studies of animal language, Prat writes, "It is certainly plausible that some of these elements [e.g. vocal production learning, hierarchical syntax, and semantics] are unique to human language, and I do not intend to contradict this possibility here. However, I do claim that despite the common belief and the widespread assumption of 'human' uniqueness, the scientific evidence supporting these uniqueness assertions is far from being sound (and indeed hardly exists)."[10] Prat's conclusion is that the literature on animal language has not treated animals and humans *with the same standards*. The literature relies on the animal-human discontinuity thesis. The lack of the same standards is the key issue. It ends up nullifying the standards of the comparative approach. A comparative model will define a trait and set a normalcy standard in order to see how it differs across populations. This kind of treatment has been neglected in contemporary science.

The animal-human discontinuity thesis relies on a circularity in the interpretation of the research. The conclusion of animal-human discontinuity functions as a premise in the methodology supposed to demonstrate the thesis. Strictly speaking, the thesis of animal-human discontinuity is not a conclusion; it is the very basis of how research is often done. It is a set of assumptions guiding

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[7] Yosef Prat. "Animals Have No Language, and Humans Are Animals Too." *Perspectives on Psychological Science* 14, no. 5 (August 9, 2019): 885–93.

[8] Charles T. Snowdon. "Language Capacities of Nonhuman Animals." *American Journal of Physical Anthropology* 33, no. S11 (January 1, 1990): 215–43.

[9] Yosef Prat, Lindsay Azoulay, Roi Dor, and Yossi Yovel. "Crowd Vocal Learning Induces Vocal Dialects in Bats: Playback of Conspecifics Shapes Fundamental Frequency Usage by Pups." *PLoS Biology* 15, no. 10 (October 31, 2017).

[10] Prat, "Animals Have No Language, and Humans Are Animals Too," 886.

the research. Prat argues that one of these assumptions is that humans have certain *unique traits* that separate them from animals. He argues that this assumption stands on false grounds.[11] Such an assumption results in the conclusion that language is, in one way or another, unique to humans. The evidence for cognition is extracted from humans and nonhumans in two different ways. So, any study that we conduct with that assumption will always result in the conclusion that animals and humans are different, thus reinforcing the original tacit assumption. The point here is not that humans lack unique qualitative traits that separate them from the rest of the animal kingdom. The point is that the way that we study these traits, though empirical, is tautological; the conclusion of uniqueness is itself within a premise of the argument.

So, how do we modify our methodology to avoid that assumption completely? An easy solution to this problem would be to put humans and animals on the same grounds. But what are those grounds? Can the comparative approach accommodate such a change without losing its informative nature? While chimpanzees have been regarded as unable to produce human-like speech, elephants have been celebrated as able to do that on multiple occasions. Elephants have been recorded imitating their trainer's voice and truck sounds from more than 3 kilometers away. These findings are usually used to point out that the subject species can process and produce sophisticated sounds.

The issue in these findings is that if we were to treat such a finding as a comparative one and put both animals and humans on the same grounds, we would be led to the interpretation that elephants are much more capable than humans at speech since humans cannot imitate elephant sounds in a way that elephants can understand. Even if we were to test it and humans were found to

[11] Prat, "Animals Have No Language, and Humans Are Animals Too," 890.

be capable of being trained to imitate animal sounds to the point of communicating with animals (like some trained African Grey parrots can with humans), such a finding would likely be trivially interpreted as a function of plasticity or physiology rather than cognition. These findings are likely to be interpreted as cases of imitation or human-style cognition as opposed to species-specific cognition. All these behavioral studies can be very useful. However, their utility is not robust in helping us understand the animal's own cognition according to the general standard of ethological practices.

While it is widely accepted that there are human-animal continuities and that humans do not have a monopoly on cognitive skills, we are still operating in the old paradigm. For instance, if we understand cognition to be whatever is closest to humans (as human categories of cognition), then humans are always going to be more cognitively competent. This is an important point made earlier on the effect of false or misplaced tacit assumptions on building hypotheses and following them with appropriate experimental design. These assumptions are not stated but instead shown and seen through the methodology followed. The crucial issue in this assumption is that it is simply circular. But where does it come from? I argue that it comes from another assumption.

The target assumption that is hindering scientific progress in animal studies is the assumption that cognition is *a cluster of skills that all develop and evolve together.* It is often taken for granted that cognition is a set of deeply connected skills. In a recent paper titled "Old and New Approaches to Animal Cognition: There is Not 'One Cognition,'" Brauer et al. (2020) criticize the assumption that cognition is more unified than it really is. Such studies assume that the traits forming animal intelligence develop and evolve together. Brauer cites abundant contemporary evidence showing that cognitive traits are both (1) discordant and (2) determined by the environmental pressures of an animal's niche. The standard approach for animal studies has been the comparative approach,

comparing two or more species. Brauer argues for a biocentric approach in cognitive animal studies, which studies animal traits in terms of the animal's problems.

Cognitive Traits are Discordant

For this section, I review Brauer's thesis that cognitive traits are discordant and that viewing them as unified has affected the way that we study cognition in animals. I will argue that the notion of cognition used by researchers is based on human cognition and negates the animal's ethological experience. Contemporary research tends to couple various strands of intelligence into a single unified phenomenon, but this practice is contrary to much of the available evidence. I intend to demonstrate that current evidence supports the discordant thesis. It is widely assumed that cognitive traits come in a cluster of skills that develop and evolve together, such as tool use and language.[12] The view that cognitive traits are linked originates from "general intelligence" hypotheses, such as the Social Intelligence Hypothesis [13] or the Domestication Hypothesis. [14] General intelligence

[12] Pérez-Barbería, F. Javier, Susanne Shultz, and Robin I. M. Dunbar. "EVIDENCE FOR COEVOLUTION OF SOCIALITY AND RELATIVE BRAIN SIZE IN THREE ORDERS OF MAMMALS." *Evolution* 61, no. 12 (October 3, 2007): 2811–21.

[13] "The Social Intelligence Hypothesis—also termed the Machiavellian Intelligence Hypothesis or Social Brain Hypothesis (Dunbar and Shultz 2007; Humphrey 1976; Jolly 1966; Byrne and Whiten 1988)—seeks to explain the origins of primate intelligence in their sociality. It predicts that natural selection favored those individuals living in complex social environments, such as fission–fusion societies, for their ability to deal with the frequent unpredictable situations that occur in social interactions in such societies. Thus, intelligence is triggered by the demands and complexity of sociality"(Brauer, 2020).

[14] "The Domestication Hypothesis (Hare and Tomasello 2005; Hare et al. 2012) proposes that selection for reduced aggression in some species, such as in domesticated species like dogs, but also in wild bonobos (Pan paniscus), caused

hypotheses are non-exclusive and inexhaustive, but they all make the following assumption: in humans, social intelligence, problem-solving skills, memory, wisdom, empathy, etc. are *a priori-linked,* therefore, they must evolve together. This view of cognition contradicts abundant contemporary evidence that shows that cognitive traits (e.g. spatial and symbolic intelligence) are, in fact, discordant.

Brauer's central thesis is supported by examples of animals excelling (and often outperforming humans) in certain cognitive traits but performing poorly in others, showing the discordant nature of cognitive traits. For example, crows were shown to perform poorly in problem-solving and connectivity perception tasks compared to other animals with less advanced tool-making skills. Pigeons and rats have been studied to perform better at rule-based and information integration category-learning tasks than humans, such as the Monty Hall problem. Squirrels and some bird species are also well-studied for their highly advanced memory which cannot be matched by humans. Moreover, chimpanzees were shown to acquire cognitive abilities previously thought to be unique to humans, such as understanding false beliefs, high-level object permanence, etc. Some of these traits were found to be shared by elephants, and some others were observed in dolphins.

Discrete vs. Generalized Traits

The controversy of whether cognition is unified or discordant is over the relationship between traits. Another point in need of discussion is what defines a trait. This question defines what we mean by "cluster of skills" and "cognitive traits." We postulate that there are *discrete* and

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a set of cognitive changes, including increases in levels of social tolerance, sensitivity to social cues, cooperation, risk aversion, occurrence of juvenile behaviors, and reduction of spatial memory"(Brauer, 2020).

compound traits. Discrete traits are those we can easily test for comparatively by defining them in a standardized way. Certain efforts have been made to combine different animal traits into an ontology to allow for better comparison, analysis, etc.[15] [16] For example, visual acuity is measurable by a number of physiological markers, and it can be tested comparatively by (1) defining concretely and (2) comparing across species based on the definition. However, if we look more closely, we find that some traits are made up of *compound* concepts. *Compound* traits are made up of clusters of different traits and concepts that make up a facet of behavior. For example, the trait of tool use is a combination of visual processing, working memory, problem-solving (itself a compound cluster of traits), cognitive plasticity, and relevant physiological traits such as thumbs. Each trait has its own legitimate role that fills a niche in the environment. Compound traits are useful for research because they allow us to make specific claims about an animal's behavioral capabilities based on their genetic makeup. Likewise, discrete traits are a legitimate and convenient way of talking about and sorting evidence. It is easy to define discrete traits as they lend themselves to cross-species comparisons. Compound traits are much harder to deal with in that regard. These two concepts can be easily conflated if we are not careful. For the purposes of this paper, we postulate that intelligence is a *compound* cluster of many traits. We still use the word "intelligence" because it is still useful, but we need to recognize that it is made up of different *discrete* traits. Concepts such as this one are useful

[15] L. M. Hughes,, J. Bao, Z-L. Hu, V. Honavar, and J. M. Reecy, "Animal trait ontology: The importance and usefulness of a unified trait vocabulary for animal species," *Journal of Animal Science* 86, no. 6 (2008): 1485-1491.

[16] Thiago Gonçalves-Souza, Beatriz Milz, Nathan J. Sanders, Peter B. Reich, Brian Maitner, Leonardo S. Chaves, Gabriel X. Boldorini et al, "ZooTraits: An R shiny app for exploring animal trait data for ecological and evolutionary research," *Ecology and Evolution* 14, no. 5 (2024).

but can be misleading. They are misleading because *we* create these compound concepts. These compound concepts arise from our (human) experience.

Discrete traits are easily identifiable in a comparative analysis. Compound traits require a higher order of classifications and risks human categorization.

Discrete traits are not controversial in comparative studies. For a compound trait found in humans (such as the use of symbolic language), we find it difficult to test it comparatively in animals because we define the compound trait by using humans as the assumed model. Analogous compound traits might not have the same properties, especially as they relate to the organism's environment. We run into the problems of circularity mentioned above. For a compound trait in animals and not in humans, we run into the issue of translatability of evidence. What we refer to here are those traits that define a species' realm of function based on their general physiological abilities and the requirements of their niche. In this, we find that there is a very real difference between a comparative and a biocentric approach in conducting a study.[17]

If animal skills are composed of discordant traits as the evidence indicates, this is how it would look. If we look at a list of traits and regard their prevalence in animal species, we find that humans have a certain combination of them. Let us call these traits 1, 2, 3, and 4. These are *discrete* traits defined and easily comparable across species. Let us say that the literature finds evidence that chimpanzees have at least 1, 2, and 3. This shows that humans have a trait that chimpanzees do not have, namely 4. However, if we regard the literature on naked mole rats, for example, we might find

[17] Here, I assume that a comparative and a biocentric approach are mutually exclusive. This is an inaccurate assumption, but the point I am trying to make is that we can abandon the comparative approach in lieu of a solely biocentric one.

that they have traits 1 and 4. While they do not have 2 or 3, they have a trait that is unique to humans in comparison to chimpanzees. We can multiply the number of traits by thousands. Many discrete traits have analogs in many animal species, but a species is roughly defined by the unique combination of traits that the highest portion of the population shares. This combination of traits largely evolved through the trait/niche relationship. This is in line with Darwinian thinking. In fact, this is not a controversial claim, since we define *discrete* traits as placed on a spectrum of traits across evolutionary history and discovered in terms of their utility to the individual i.e., the trait's relationship to the environment. For example, the octopus' ability to camouflage can hardly be explained without describing the environment which allows and requires the phenotype first. A camouflaging behavior seen in a vacuum has very little meaning to a researcher as they would have the regard the niche in their analysis.

With discrete cognitive traits that we define as unique to humans, we often find that uniqueness does not apply to the entire species, but rather only to some humans. It is important to note that the traits I use for this example are *discrete* traits put under the same standard with the underlying assumption that they are highly comparable. If someone believes in human-animal continuity, then they must believe in some form of trait continuity. These don't have to be high-level traits, like navigating streaming websites, but can be lower-level traits such as identifying an object, which navigating streaming websites consists of. Biologists accept this premise, but they often fail to distinguish between discrete and compound traits. This is especially true for cognitive traits. But how do cognitive traits fit in the picture of discrete versus compound traits?

Cognitive Traits May Be Incommensurable

Some animal traits cannot be compared with human traits in a way that preserves the animal's inner life. Humans do not have a variation of all animal traits, therefore humans are not sufficient to be the standard off of which comparative research is conducted.[18] Some traits can be productively defined on the same grounds and thus are comparable. For instance, some physical traits lie on the same spectrum, such as visual acuity and wavelength discrimination. There are bees that detect ultraviolet light and snakes that detect infrared light. These traits are measurable and commensurable. But we cannot assume that all traits are commensurable. This is especially true for cognition. Cognition is not as precisely preserved in those parameters. Instead, it is composed of concepts and categories that can rightly be described as "human." It's widely understood that the categories of memory and intelligence include widely disparate cases in humans but are often standardized into very narrow terms in animal research. Categories such as memory and intelligence are useful at a certain level but falter when applied to the inner lives of nonhuman animals. While discrete traits have clear physical parameters, cognition (which is composed of compound traits) does not yet have such easily definable traits. In short, when we compare the memory of a squirrel and that of a human, it's not clear we are talking about the same thing at all.

If we go back to our analogy, we assume that cognitive trait 1 – existent in both humans and chimpanzees – is comparable across the two species. Let's assume that trait 1 is Piaget's stage 5 object permanence. We have found that chimpanzees can pass stage 5 of object permanence as well as humans aged five or older. This is a discrete and isolated cognitive trait that is comparable across both species and therefore testable; some animal species do not have such a trait. However, it is not

[18] Thomas Nagel. "What Is It Like to Be a Bat?" *The Philosophical Review* 83, no. 4 (October 1, 1974): 435.

controversial to say that there are some traits that certain animal species do not share with humans. We introduce trait 5 which is prevalent in whales but not in humans, e.g. sonar.[19] Since this trait is unique to one species but not the other, it is *incommensurable,*[20] meaning that we find ourselves unable to *productively* compare the two species in terms of the trait's acuity or internal properties. The comparative method here is only productive in that it shows one species has it and the other does not. To examine this trait more closely, we must look at the relationship between the animal and its environment. This is the biocentric ecological approach. This model works for physiological traits. I argue that the application of the biocentric approach is especially important for cognitive traits. That is because, for most cognitive traits, we apply physiological traits to the animal's niche, likely running into an incommensurable trait that we cannot discuss without having a human concept of the trait. Object permanence works for comparison, but memory between humans and squirrels likely does not. There are some cognitive traits that are *discrete* and *comparable*, such as object permanence, but many cognitive traits are not *discrete*, but so far *compound* and rely on human concepts. While we can show that squirrels have a "better" memory than humans when it comes to collecting food; the fact that humans are so much better at recognizing symbols suggests that there is more to it than what the comparative approach can tell us. Our questions thus become how is it that dolphins are able to incorporate syntax within their communications and how does it arise? What

[19] While humans do have sonar machines, it is different from whale sonar in that in the case of whale, they can see inside the objects. Their perception can see inside of objects[]. Their experience is thus very different from that of humans. That is precisely what I mean by incommensurable. It's a modally different sensory experience. This reiterates on a point mentioned in the previous page, namely that abstract concepts are only useful on a certain level.

[20] There is an argument here to be made on whether we can speak on the cognitive faculties that arise from this discrete physiological trait, but the point still stands that it is a trait that paints the cognitive world of the species in a completely different light.

are the limitations of that? What do those limitations tell us about the way in which dolphins develop syntax? If we find some form of answers to those questions, they will likely be removed enough from human language that the comparison is rendered obsolete.

This leads us to a different but highly related point and that is the translatability of evidence. Is it translatable at all? In the metaphysical sense, no. But that does not matter since the same point applies to humans, making the distinction uninformative. The assumption that evidence can at least sometimes be translatable may be metaphysically unsupported, but its utility can be seen in the roots of all humanities and psychological sciences. The problem with the translatability of evidence is simple: humans can talk, and nonhuman animals cannot. Humans have ready access to each other's inner life through symbolic language.[21] Therefore, we can neither have a clear understanding of their inner representations nor have clearly comparable evidence between animal traits and human traits.[22] This limits our body of evidence of cognitive abilities to an animal's behavior towards its environment. For example, while we can easily ask a human if they have a metamemory, we have had to construct elaborate and often convoluted experiments to test for in animals. The biocentric approach does away with the translatability issue by regarding an animal's environment as the main anchor, but it has its own setbacks, namely being less divisive and harder to derive precise and strong conclusions - too inclusive and thus inconclusive.

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[21] This claim is debatable among many philosophers, but for this instance I assume that we have *some* form understanding of what's going on in other people's heads by speaking with them.

[22] Lawrence Weiskrantz, "Roots of blindsight," *Progress in brain research* 144 (2004): 227-241.

Biocentrism, Anthropomorphism, and the Comparative Approach

In prior work on animal cognition, there are the comparative and the biocentric approaches. By definition, the comparative approach cannot but set humans as the anchor. The biocentric approach sets the niche as the anchor.

The comparative approach can pinpoint similarities and differences between human and nonhuman animals, and from there draw inferences about the evolution of human behavior and cognition. Our categories of intelligence have been to compare humans with nonhuman animals, two categories as such.[23] This is the foundation behind an important tacit assumption that underlies some comparative literature comparing human and nonhuman animal intelligence. What these studies are actually doing is studying animal cognition based on its human categories in a controlled human environment. This necessarily results in evidence for animals being less competent in that human environment. But again, the source of such a methodology is the tacit assumption that traits are clustered, which informs a hypothesis that is actually anthropomorphic; a study that applies animal faculties to human categories. With the evidence that cognitive traits are discordant, that framework changes from comparing humans and nonhuman animals as two categories to having humans inhabit one point on a vast spectrum on which species exists. There is enough variation between animal species that the original categorization framework cannot hold.[24]

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[23] This too is rooted in the assumption that cognitive traits are clustered together.

[24] Perhaps controversially, one can see the similarity between this line of thought and race and gender theory: the definition of "animal" functions to affirm the concept "human" by othering it. The rest is just a symptom of this underlying belief that tends to reinforce itself whenever it is tested. Seeing this analogy on such a well-studied and mature topic appeal to the behaviorist and the dualist; let's assume there is no actual difference between humans and

The implicit assumption that cognitive traits are non-discordant is really an example of the persisting anthropomorphism in animal studies. A commonly acknowledged error is for an animal researcher to anthropomorphize their model organism i.e., assigning human emotion and desire to animals when there is no evidence of such traits. If there is no evidence for a trait, one should not assume the existence of that trait. However, we often use general human categories to describe animal faculties, and that is unavoidable. The error arises when we use these categories to derive specific claims on animals' inner lives. The implicit assumption that traits are discordant leads to an assumption that animals are fundamentally incapable of thought, which in turn springs the (albeit valid) "rule" that one should not anthropomorphize animals. This is a rule for scientific methodology that springs from a simple deduction from Morgan's Canon. However, considering there is such a gap in what we can know about the mental life of animals compared to humans on account of language, I argue that this rule does not hold. I argue that one should "deanthropomophize" humans. That is, one should identify the obvious limitations in the methodology of animal cognition. For example, one should regard the fact that if we are to set out studying humans in the habitat of alpaca and ignore any sign of symbolic language they might use, we would be just as inept in extracting any form of mental representations out of them as their nonhuman counterparts. Thus, to assume that animals do not have mental representations due to lack of evidence of such representations is to contradict the principles of the scientific method, not the other way around.

There is confusion about the continuity, or common origin, between animals and humans. Historically, pre-Darwin, the emphasis was on the *dis*continuity between animals and humans. Post-

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animals, without bringing humans down to animal conception, and see how the conversation goes from there. This is not necessarily an argument for abolishing meat eating, let's try to focus on theory of mind for this one.

Darwin the emphasis shifted to continuity between animals and humans. But that continuity came in a certain form, and that is we projected human traits on animals. The correction is not to be human-centered. Each species has its own problems and therefore has its own standard. Though humans and animals share a continuum or common origin, it does not follow that human categories are appropriate for all animals. A more revealing model would be to take any species, e.g. elephants, and imagine elephant biologists constructing an elephant account of all biology. That model can be multiplied across the animal world, giving us a more biocentric and less anthropocentric account. Our original assumptions simply lead to a narrow and unproductive methodology that stands to only affirm themselves by leading to an anthropocentric methodology.

Anthropocentrism as an approach tends to study how a nonhuman animal performs in cognitive tasks while ignoring the biological context of the behaviors. Instead, experiments are conducted in a "synthetic" environment where an animal is tested for a cognitive trait in a human environment with a human conception of the trait.[25] Such experiments risk serving to only support the prior hypothesis that humans are more intelligent than animals. If the definition of intelligence is anthropocentric, then any study of intelligence will be only reinforcing itself, concluding that nonhuman animals are less intelligent than humans since their capacities and capabilities have evolved to serve their own respective niches rather than those of humans.

In the already cited paper, Brauer *et al.* (2020) propose a biocentric approach to understanding animal cognition through its own environment. In this approach, animals are studied based on their own perceptual modalities and niches. The biocentric approach in comparative research can be a more productive approach as it can more accurately identify the cognitive abilities

[25] E.g., if I test a squirrel's memory by seeing how many sets of numbers it can recognize on a screen.

in non-human animals, how they arise, and their function in the animals' respective environments. This approach would be able to draw a more accurate depiction of non-human animal cognition since it studies each cognitive ability separately and in its relation to the evolutionary history of the individual animal.

Conclusion

It's widely accepted that we shouldn't anthropomorphize. We divide the world into animals and humans, but if cognition is discordant, then this is the wrong way of looking at it. In spite of the main scientific community criticizing anthropomorphism, it is still in practice. It is very hard to actually get rid of these ideas, they are tacit assumptions on which our hypotheses are found. If we assume cognition is not discordant, it's easy to assume that there are animals and humans, but now we can say that it's different. Animals are complex in their own ways and cognition is complicated in their own environment.

My claims are in line with traditional Darwinian thinking but can be expanded upon to include a theory of the potential mental life of non-human animals. Such a theory is in line with Ruth Millikan's research, especially with her definition of proper functions and the way biological history can construct the affordant world of an animal. Allen is calling for a new theory of behavior that can include all the discrepancies in cognitive traits across the animal kingdoms and the holes in the very definition. And finally, Merleau-Ponty introduced a theory of subjective reality centered around the world, identifying a person as a thing in the world. This theory is in line with all my claims and further introduces a very good way to lead a productive conversation into what consciousness means and what considers having consciousness, a conversation based on biology and contemporary science.

Animal experimentalists and theorists alike have struggled to find a way to unite human cognition and animal cognition under one theory of mind consistent with the Darwinian trait continuity hypothesis. Although scholars have come a long way to understand the underlying mechanisms of animal behavior in terms of their own cognition, and human behavior in terms of our own minds, the two have struggled to find a bridge that can explain humans as animals and vice versa. Is that because animals and humans are essentially different? Is it because humans are too "smart" to be compared to animals? How does the way we conduct our study of cognition influence our understanding of it?

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Plato, by Ptolemais of Cyrene

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This piece was selected for this editorial feature solely by Editors-in-Chief, Celena McCabe and Abhishek Manhas. Without Son's vision, dedication, and leadership, the revival and success of the journal would not have been possible. Both in his philosophical pursuits and in his personal character, Son exemplifies excellence. He will be deeply missed, and we are proud to honor and represent his work.

I mounted the steps leading up to the Academy as the evening was falling, having it in mind to seek an audience with Plato, the scholarch, who was said by some to have taken ill the day before. On my way to the door, I was greeted by the sight of a large crowd of youths, unusual indeed for the lateness of the hour, who was taking temporary refuge in the courtyard, some looking anxious to distract each other with minute conversations, others pacing about uncomfortably. Eventually, noticing the direction towards which I was heading, one of them approached me and, pointing at a man of great stature who was standing solemnly beside the door to the Academy, informed me that Speusippus, son of Eurymedon, had been refusing them entry on account of his uncle's request for silence, but had not elaborated on the state of the latter's health, which they had journeyed there most keenly to find out. I realized then that I might have arrived too late. As I was debating with myself about whether to make my approach anyway in light of the long and arduous journey that I had undertaken, however, another youth, this time coming from within the Academy, greeted Speusippus and whispered something into his ear as the latter's eyes, alert suddenly by what was told, travelled indiscriminately across the low murmurs of the crowd and the fragrances in the air until they landed finally on the flute that I was carrying with me for the purpose of my visit. Speusippus headed in my direction with a stern but curious look on his face.

SPEUSIPPUS — Are you the slave from Thrace?

PTOLEMAIS — I beg you to repeat.

SPEUSIPPUS — I asked if you were the Thracian slave from Demosthenes' household who was supposed to be coming this evening to perform for the gathering, but I see now that the ears of you musicians, too ready to be moved by the gods, are not especially receptive to the speech of us mortals. Hasten inside—they are expecting you.

Having said this, Speusippus signaled for the geese standing guard to clear the way as I followed the youth inside, passing by the gymnasium and the peristyle, until we both reached the garden where stood the shrine of the Muses. Amid the rising breezes of the fast approaching night, two figures sat beside the fountain in the center of the garden, the younger of whom was holding an oil lamp whose motions he seemed to be examining with great interest, while the older man was hunching forward, eyes fixed to the ground, hands resting firmly on his cane. The youth who was accompanying me begged that I continue on my own, as he had to go back and fetch wine for the gathering. Thus, guided by the light of the dimly lit lamp and the scent of iris along the path which were carrying me towards the fountain, I ventured to introduce myself to the shared silence in which they sat. Noticing me nearing, the younger man stood up and introduced himself as Pyrrho of Elis, while the older man remained quiet, eyes closed, brows furrowed. Pyrrho told me that the man, who was none other than Plato, had been keeping to himself, rarely acknowledging anyone else except for the occasional requests for wine and companions ever since he had suddenly taken ill, delirious with fever, the night before while staying at his brother's residence in Collytus. Pyrrho further told me that the morning after Plato had woken *up* from that long night, it was alleged that he got out of bed with his strength and clarity of mind given back to him as if nothing had happened, and yet from the heaviness with which he carried himself and the sudden refusal to resume his usual business at the Academy, it was evident that something had changed.

Pyrrho then allowed himself to pause, as if expecting a response, and his inquisitive glance further deepened the state of bewilderment in which I had already found myself in. Not knowing what to say, I did what I thought best able to do in that situation. I raised my flute and played the melody which I had composed not long ago, incidentally the very music which I had come to Athens seeking to play in Plato's presence, for reasons that would become clear later on. As I was playing my piece,

I noticed the old man's gaze gradually lifting off the ground. With his eyes still closed and brows still furrowed, I felt his weary attention placed upon the world to which the three of us were increasingly bound, one instant after the next—the world which I was meticulously building, brick by brick, by the air that was flowing ever intensely through my flute. Suddenly he opened his eyes; and in place of the softness that I was expecting from the gaze of someone tamed by the sensitive motions of music, he looked as if his soul had just been kidnapped by Hades.

PLATO — By the gods, who taught you to play music like that?

PTOLEMAIS — Nobody that you might be acquainted with, Plato.

PLATO — Why, of that I am rather certain. For the long duration of a life has not given the pleasure of knowing a man who walks with an uneven cadence, who has it in mind to do one thing and ends up doing another, who appears to make noises which do not amount to words—and yet it seems to me that if one were to become an instructor in the art that you have just demonstrated to us, this is what one would have to become, and more.

PYRRHO — It was not so bad, Plato.

PLATO — I envy youths like you, Pyrrho, whose inexperience with higher beauty allows you to take pleasure in such unmoderated displays of the passions, and whose untamed curiosity for the novel and the exciting overwhelms your desire to root yourself in the path of nature and the pursuit of truth, deceiving you into thinking that it is possible for one to be content while abandoning oneself to the sensuousness of the world flow. Once you get to my age, Pyrrho—mark my words well—you will, given regular training in wrestling and in music, find yourself transported ever further on the one hand by the grace and restraint of an expression which seeks, as precisely as possible, to assimilate itself into nature by obeying her ways, and revolted on the

other hand by one which, inattentive to the integrity by which she rules over us, seeks in vain to assert itself outside of her laws.

PTOLEMAIS — I am but a simple musician, Plato, who is not wise enough to grasp that which you seem to be asserting so eloquently. Did you not find my piece to your liking?

PLATO — It is not about my liking, flute bearer, nor even is it about the pleasure that it may give. For as we have seen with Pyrrho here, that someone more youthful in years, more ready to throw themselves to the passions, may find pleasure in novel rhythms and be drawn to strange melodies, and this speaks but of the inexperience on the listener's part and their lack of intimacy as regards the way nature herself moves. A better question, if I may put it to you, would be about that which you intend by the letting go of such a melody despite the fact that, unable to coalesce at the last moment with the whole of nature, it would eventually disperse into the wind and be carried by the latter into oblivion. And all this, I put to you, having been told by Demosthenes that you were an extraordinary musician who once performed with Agathon, putting to motion his wondrous poems across Athens.

PTOLEMAIS — I fear that I am not the musician of whom you speak, Plato. For I come rather from Cyrene, on the other side of the sea, and the music that I played was made in the image of Cyrenians and of our way of walking and talking, which, easygoing, adventurous, and true to our liking for festivities and the simpler pleasures of the moment, might have found your Athenian ears, which are made rather for politics and fine speeches, in disagreement.

At this point Plato's eyes lit up, his frown replaced by an expression of joy.

PLATO — So it is true, the gods be good, that you have come, and that I may learn from you.

PTOLEMAIS — What do you mean, Plato?

PYRRHO — May we first be acquainted with your name, fair flute bearer of Cyrene?

PTOLEMAIS — I am Ptolemais, daughter of Poseidonius.

PLATO — This is what I mean, dear Ptolemais. One evening—it must have been many days ago—while I was enjoying the company of solitude and the taste of fresh goat cheese by the steps of the Academy, it occurred to me with the suddenness with which summer ends that the life to which I have dedicated myself, the life of the vessel, has, for a long time now, been devoid of motion. And I mean that, when you will have lived for as long as I have lived, and will have professed the many arts and sciences that I do for as long as I have been doing, there comes a point, and you will not have noticed it, where conversations with one's peers and the youths under one's care, instructive as they may be to them, stop being instructive to oneself, whether that be due to the steadfastness with which one has planted one's feet in the earth, or the numbness and apathy that slowly cultivate within one, despite oneself, from the repetitive nature of the questions and problems that one encounters in life that, once exciting and captivating in youth, lose their force from those countless times which one has put oneself laboriously to solving, and from which one has emerged, in the end, without an answer.

This is how I realized that the vessel that I am has not been any closer to the promised shore than it was a great many years ago; but everyone knows that the shore, from which we came in birth and to which we will return in death, can only be reached in this life by means of philosophy and by the silence and solace that it provides. This realization had tormented me with great anguish, Ptolemais, until it happened that yesterday, as the height of my nostalgia became too much to bear and as its heat hitherto suppressed ruptured and encompassed my body, I came down with an illness so beautiful that I thought myself ready to let go, that I may once again be one with nature. But as I was delirious and barely conscious in fever, in my waking dream that

voice from another time came back to me, the voice of my teacher, Socrates, who told me that all this would pass, and that in the morning when I woke, I were to pick myself up one last time, despite the great suffering in which I would find myself, and to dignify when the moment would arrive the presence of a great teacher, who would come to inspire within me once again the joy of wisdom. And this teacher, I believe, is none other than you, noble Ptolemais from Cyrene, who will, with your strange rhythms and turns of mind and before the final hour, show this dying man a glimpse of the truth which he has been pursuing.

PTOLEMAIS — All this is very fascinating, Plato, but I am not certain to possess the kind of wisdom of which you speak. Indeed, it is in search of wisdom that I have journeyed—initially across the treacherous sea that stands between Cyrene and Delphi, where I was told that Appollo would keep his silence against me, and then from Delphi to Athens in the company of a travelling merchant—to seek an audience with you and to consult you on the meaning of the piece of music which I had composed. You see, I did not tell you the whole truth when I said that the strangeness of my music was due to the differences in worldly practices between the Cyrenians and the Athenians, although this was in practice at least partially the truth.

Indeed, there was also an aspect that is, to my mind, otherworldly, that aspect in which the melody originated. I speak here of something with which all musicians are acquainted, something akin to a waking dream—to a nest, if you will, where all great melodies, incubated in the silence that stands between the barrenness of reality and the wonderful worlds of our imagination, are thus released. The thing with this melody that I am bringing you today, however, is the intensity of the silence which surrounded its conception, and which has troubled me since.

PLATO — What do you mean by silence, Ptolemais? Do you mean the absence of sound?

PTOLEMAIS — Not at all; for the coming to know of such a silence would be an impossibility, unless the wheels of the world were to halt and rebegin. Rather, what I mean is this. Usually for us musicians, it is the case that, starting with something such as a proposed theme, an idea in our head, or indeed a certain way that we feel, compelled by the divine quality of the moment, we seize upon these beginnings and animate their lives in time and space as if we were completely in control, completely responsible for that which we were creating. It may be said, in these instances, that we are engaging in the creation of something from something. On the other hand, it is reported to have happened to some—and, as I believe, was what happened to me in the deliberation which gave rise to this piece—that every once in a while, a musician who either by chance or by training was able to find, if only for a brief and ecstatic moment, a refuge in the inner silence of their soul that pits itself impossibly against the ever flowing currents of the world, would also be able to find there the sweetest and purest music of all; and if they have the intention and talent to put this inexplicable motion to sound, then perhaps we can say of them that they have created something out of nothing.

The difficulty for such a musician, however, as I see it, and as I have come to you for help, you whose intimacy with the gods are alleged to rival that of the Pythia of Delphi, is this. In the execution of a piece of art which does not have a beginning, the musician is themselves left in the dark as regards the beauty of their creation. Unlike a beautiful melody about spring that is to be judged against its semblables, and a melody composed in honor of Dionysus that is to earn its merit by how close it comes to capturing his legend and spirit, one which lacks a beginning lacks a way to be judged. There is, as you well know, little difference in appearance between the madness that creates and the madness that destroys, one that is given to us by the gods and the other that moves us away from them, and a musician who is wanting in courage, uncertain of

themselves and of the way of truth, is left in suspension from possibilities to possibilities, unable to tell if their creation is a product of divine inspiration or of imbalances in the head; and thus they seek in vain to find confirmation in the judgment of the crowd, who, unacquainted with the secret and divine silence of their soul, cannot but criticize them for pointlessness, unconventionality, or, in extreme cases, for the danger that they pose to the moral and sentimental education of the youths.

PLATO — Indeed, Ptolemais, I will not lie to you in saying that these were not thoughts that I had while listening to your piece. On the other hand, I find in your incredibly inspired speech something which resembles the demise of Socrates, which, though for the most part was about the charge of corrupting the youths, was also due to his tendency to tell people about the voice that he, and he alone, could hear, offending others by, among other things, the injustice in the idea of a deity that is not accessible to all. But do go on, and tell us more about your inquietude.

PTOLEMAIS — Let me confess to you then, Plato, that I am no different from such a musician who could not rely on their own judgment, but who would feel the need to share their creation with the world in order to find there affirmation for the beauty of their work. I roamed from Euesperides to Apollonia, and from there to Barce, and everywhere in Cyrene where I would go and play my music, both in the streets and in private residences, people would think me insane. Musicians with whom I had played, and with whom for the most part I shared a common way of life, would try to persuade me to abandon the idea. And so for a while I was afflicted with this uneasiness of being able so distinctly to feel the beauty of something that, at the same time, was rejected by others. This is no small torment for musicians, Plato, for indeed our ability to create and willingness to rejoice in the fruit of our imagination are both due to the trustworthiness of the standards that we have for ourselves.

PLATO — I applaud you for your courage, Ptolemais, though I admit to being unable to understand your pain, since unlike you, I have not sufficiently familiarized myself with the elevated way the Muses speak—that which you have just emulated with talent befitting Orpheus. I see now, however, that we are perfectly suited to teach each other; for it is also this secret and singular experience with which you are acquainted whose nature I ache to know more about, having taken refuge all my life in the certainty of an eternal uniformness of the universe, and by contrast it is precisely this certainty that you seem to me to be seeking.

PTOLEMAIS — Indeed.

PLATO — Let us begin with something you said, namely that the differences in our worldly ways of life are, if not wholly, then at least partially responsible for whether we would consider something strange. Or is this not what you said?

PTOLEMAIS — That is what I said, Plato.

PLATO — And this goes not only for strangeness, but also for beauty and ugliness?

PTOLEMAIS — Indeed.

PLATO — Does all this imply, then, that when we say of something that it is beautiful, or ugly, or strange, or captivating, we are not saying anything about the thing itself, but rather about us, and our ways of living?

PTOLEMAIS — It does not imply that, no.

PLATO — So in these cases, we are saying something about the thing itself?

PTOLEMAIS — That appears more sensible to my mind.

PLATO — But surely something cannot be both strange and not strange at the same time.

PTOLEMAIS — It cannot.

PLATO — How do you explain, then, dear Ptolemais, that something such as your flute can be beautiful to one and not beautiful to another, and your music strange to one and not strange to another, when these differences are to be found within the thing itself, as opposed to outside of it, for example, in the way in which we interact with it?

PTOLEMAIS — Well, Plato, if a beautiful flute and an ugly flute are two distinct things, then it seems that words are indeed playing tricks on our mind, when we find ourselves saying things such as there being a single flute which appears to one to be beautiful and to another ugly.

PLATO — What do you mean?

PTOLEMAIS — I mean, Plato, that we simply cannot consider these vastly different experiences to be of the same thing. The feeling one has when confronted with beauty can hardly be mistaken with that with which we greet ugliness.

PLATO — So when two people, casting their eyes in the same direction, one saying of what they see that it is beautiful, and another saying of what they see that it is not, they are, according to you, talking about two different things altogether?

PTOLEMAIS — It appears so, Plato. But it is important nonetheless to state that this is the case only when both of them are sincere in what they are saying, that is, when each believes what they are saying to be true and can explain to themselves why they believe it.

PLATO — My dear Ptolemais, what a wonderful world in which your elevated soul dwells. A world that, it seems to me, would have no war, no conflict, no disagreement of any kind, where

everyone lives in harmony. It would also be a world where no moral or sentimental progress is possible, for no one would deign to admit to others that they are wrong. But these do not strike me to be features of our world, in any case.

PTOLEMAIS — Not necessarily so, Plato. What I have just said does not render impossible disagreement. Seeing something a certain way, one is not thereby prevented from seeing something else in another way; and it is ultimately in the claim that this something should be identical to that something else that lies disagreement. My disagreement with you about whether, for example, the flute is beautiful or ugly, is in a stricter sense a disagreement about whether the beautiful flute that I see is the ugly flute that you see, given that I can be made to understand the latter. So long as both of us have a way to explain to ourselves how our respective claim is true, there is always the possibility that, in the end, given willingness, the two of us may settle our disagreement by acknowledging the being of both a certain beautiful flute and a certain ugly flute. And so, I say, "I see now why you might think that it is ugly," without the success of this effort to understand undermining my conviction in the truth of my original saying.

PLATO — Very eloquently put. But indulge me in being clearer about why you speak of being.

PTOLEMAIS — I mean simply that to say that the flute is beautiful is to say that there is a beautiful flute, and to say that the flute is ugly is to say that there is an ugly flute.

PLATO — Well then, what if the disagreement is not over whether there is a beautiful flute or an ugly flute, or whether there is a black flute or a grey flute, but is rather over whether there is a flute?

PTOLEMAIS — Why would anyone disagree about that, Plato? Is it not plain for all to see?

PLATO — I am not so certain. Once when I went fishing in Kalaureia, I was careless and lost both of my sandals to the depth of the sea. Not wanting to take the journey back to Athens barefoot, I visited the agora on the island looking for footwear, and this is when I was introduced to the horrendous local display of handicraft. There was indeed nothing among what the local artisan had made and put up for sale that I would call sandals. The position of the straps, the thickness of the leather, none of the usual qualities of sandals was present. Would you not say that in such a case, there is disagreement over whether there are sandals?

PTOLEMAIS — I see now what you mean. In that case, yes, there is a disagreement over whether there are sandals.

PLATO — Furthermore, disagreement over whether there are sandals seems to be different altogether from disagreement over whether there are beautiful sandals?

PTOLEMAIS — Enlighten me.

PLATO — What I mean is this. When I disagree with someone else about whether there is some specific pair of sandals in a specific place, the disagreement seems to be about the way that we use the name, "sandals," and this seems to proceed according to plainly communicable principles. Thus, I can communicate not only to myself that this is or is not a pair of sandals, but also to others. Eventually, it is the latter sort of communication that is decisive, since the way that everything which we use the name "sandals" for all have something in common is because they all share in one thing, and this is the form of sandals. So, there is a fact of the matter about whether there is a pair of sandals. On the other hand, when I disagree with someone else about whether there is some specific pair of beautiful sandals in a specific place, provided that

sandalhood is not in question, then the disagreement is chiefly over whether one can communicate to oneself why the pair is beautiful.

PTOLEMAIS — Yes, there seems indeed to be such a difference.

PLATO — Back to our original question. Which kind of disagreement, then, do you consider to be due to differences in ways of living? Would not the one more in touch with the rules of naming and the way in which the many comes together into one in the activity of naming be more detached from differences in ways of living, whereas the one whose explanation is more personal and lends itself less readily to universals would be less so?

PTOLEMAIS — I do not see that following immediately from what you have just said. For though it is the case that there are differences in judgment that are based on the rules according to which we interact with the world while there are others that are not, there are surely also things we say of beautiful things which are far from arbitrary or dependent on how we are taught to live and to think, but seem to be common to all humans insofar as they are humans, as these judgments are more rooted, I believe, in something which is altogether different from the roots by which we cling to the world. And I do not mean, note well, that it is expected that people agree on a certain set of things as beautiful, for again, beauty does play a role in the identification of these things rather than being clothed onto them as an afterthought. What I mean is that, despite all these wonderful differences between you and me, beauty affects and transports us in the very same manner, akin to the way that, being given squares of different lengths and widths and asked to draw within each square a circle such that the squares would coincide with the circles at exactly four points, we would, though starting from vastly different squares and arriving at vastly different circles, carry out the very same rule. This is what it means for beauty to be both universal and personal. In other words, beauty is universal despite our finding different things to

be beautiful, because “beauty,” insofar as it is found to be such in the person who speaks, is a rule of speech that is not any different from “sandals.”

PLATO — Quite so.

PYRRHO — But what are these roots of which you speak, Ptolemais, and why is that in which beauty is rooted altogether unique and different from the rest?

PTOLEMAIS — It is so because I feel it to be so, Pyrrho! I must once again expose myself as nothing but a simple musician, unfamiliar with the way in which words move. My sand goes only as far as my eyes can see and my art is to walk along the shore and lose myself in the propping up of figures and edifices, until the water would come, and it always comes, to wash everything back to nothingness. Beauty is fair but fickle, and we are all afflicted with it insofar as we draw breath, as we dine and drink and sleep and love. In any case, I suspect that the answer to your question about beauty must do, indeed, with that other one about silence and the singular nature of creative expression, which I do not believe we are in a position to solve.

As regards ordinary things, let me tell you about a comforting dream that would come to me every now and then, usually unannounced, and seldom when I was asleep. In this dream, this fountain and its water, that shrine, the flame that you are holding, the shade of the evening and the scents in the air, these are all identified and understood by names, occasioned by specific rules. And since names are understood through each other, a fact plain to everyone who used to be a child and who is still learning new names for things every day due to their knowledge of other names, things are in like manner and in consequence also understood through each other. Now, in dialogues with others and with ourselves in which we seek to learn more about things around us, it is evident that whatever we can learn and understand about that which we have

designated by these names—which need not be fixed—are framed by these names and their rules. As is also the case, our activity of learning about the world and of our place within it is not done in one fishing net [amphiblestron] of names and ideas, but indeed of many. Thus, there is one fishing net, that which the musician casts before him, in which we speak of the world as an endless melody, and there is another, that of the poet, in which the world is a stage, and there is yet another, that of the philosopher, in which the world lies waiting for the sun. And when questions arise such as "but in the end, what is?," or "which net is in the end most fitting for us to cast over the truth?," we seem almost compelled to laugh at its absurdity. For the answer is simply that everything is; some are in this way, and others are in that way, but no single way of being is more fundamental or more real than others.

Taking notes of these ways of being, we can say that there is a togetherness in the being of certain things; and taking note of this coherence between them, we can indeed speak no longer of a single environment in which things flourish—of a single cosmos—but must rather abandon ourselves to the multiplicity of worlds, containing equally real beings, with equally just claims to the truth. These worlds, dear Pyrrho, are what I referred to earlier as roots; for it is truly by the necessity of explaining our experiences to ourselves that we have come to create them and to ensure their coherence, such that, conversely, it is by making worlds [cosmos] and inventing these stories [historia] that we may get to know our experiences of the truth [aletheia, "reality"] and to root ourselves, like a young tree reaching down underneath the earth which nourishes it to find there the source that will quench its thirst, steadfastly in the truth.

PLATO — How marvelous you have spoken, Ptolemais, and how divinely inspired your dream is, that one can hardly believe that you have not up to now been acquainted in the way of philosophy! But talk to me—for your dream captivates me so and I wish not to stand content in

its beautiful mist, but to greet it in the intimacy of clarity—and tell me about beginnings. How does the dream begin?

PTOLEMAIS — You have asked the hardest question, Plato, for often when one falls asleep, one is not able to distinguish between the last moment of waking life and the first moment of the dream. The case is infinitely more complicated with a waking dream. I fear that I can only tell you one way in which the dream begins, and as regards the other way, the only thing I can do is to suggest it. Does this sound good to you, and which one do you wish to discuss first?

PLATO — Let us start with that one which is easier to see.

PTOLEMAIS — Very well. The beginning which I now relate will be that of things. According to the way in which things begin, my dream has its beginning in the following principle: that what is, is, if and only if it is regarded as an individual in our experience. Now all things which have ever been and which we have wanted to learn more about, it seems to me, are things which have first appeared in our experience. Or is this not so?

PLATO — The reasons for believing this are good; and yet as a first principle of a story, it does worry me somewhat, dear Ptolemais.

Does it mean then that the activity of making things out to be individuals in our experience is not only necessary for the being of these things, that is, without this activity there would not be things, but it is also sufficient for their being, that is, this activity alone guarantees their being?

PTOLEMAIS — Quite so.

PLATO — But surely what is must also have being before it is individuated, for otherwise how do we individuate it, and it specifically, if it only comes into being after our activity?

PTOLEMAIS — Those seem to be two different worries, Plato, and both irrelevant in their own way to the principle of which I spoke. The fact that something is individuated as you experience it at a certain time and place does not mean that it did not have being prior to this. Indeed, there must be a variety of things flying around in the air that you and I are breathing in right now that we do not yet possess the tool to individuate, and yet, when the time comes when our children, skilled and learned, are better able to study such airborne beings, they will be able to say of us now, "Plato, Ptolemais, and Pyrrho, in the garden of the Muses, without them knowing it, were inhaling fire dust." But what is fire dust, Plato?

PLATO — I am ashamed not to have heard of it before.

PTOLEMAIS — And yet our children will have heard of it; and they will hear of it precisely because they are better able to explain to themselves their experiences, and there will be to them a world full of fire dust that moves Magnesian stones and pulls things down to the ground. But not yet to us. In this sense, fire dust does not exist until we have a theoretical need for it to explain something. Then, and only then, is it said to have being. Your second worry, I sense, is not about being, but rather about the nature of the understanding. For you are asking if there is a way to say that the product of our activity of individuation is adequate to that which we seek to individuate, and you have predicted that the answer is no: that there is no such way, since the thing that we seek to individuate did not yet have presence in our understanding prior to the labor that we would eventually undertake. And all this is well and good, Plato, and resembles the axioms in mathematics and the definitions in philosophy, which are mere stipulations that find their truth not in their correspondence to something else, but in the coherence of the whole to which they collectively give birth.

PLATO — But what are we to say then about the activity of individuation itself? Does this activity have being? And if it does have being, does it have being before, during, or after we individuate it, that is, individuate this activity of individuation?

PTOLEMAIS — Philosophers of great age and experience like you have a way with words, Plato, and words are like wings that take you up to the abode of the gods, where temporarily you sit in their eternal banquet halls and drink wines that have aged since the beginning of the world. But once again, you see that words also transport you far away from the moment, whereas the moment is indeed the mark of the world flux. It is across moments, is it not, that there is motion?

PLATO — Certainly.

PTOLEMAIS — And learning is a kind of motion, that is, from ignorance to knowledge?

PLATO — That is agreeable.

PTOLEMAIS — And forgetting is a kind of motion from knowledge to ignorance?

PLATO — By Zeus, it is so.

PTOLEMAIS — And individuation is a kind of motion from nothing to something?

PLATO — Quite right.

PTOLEMAIS — Then it appears, Plato, that words are playing tricks on you again, for to say that the individuation needs individuating for it to have being is akin to saying that the motion of the chariot needs moving for the chariot to move. But the motion of the chariot does not need moving, Plato—the chariot does. And when the chariot needs moving and is moved, it is in motion, and whether this motion is then moved, whatever changes that may make to the original

motion, does not add anything more to the mere fact of its original motion, and the latter is all that is needed to say that it moves.

PLATO — Interesting argument, Ptolemais, but tell me: would you give the same defense for the being of humans? For it is one thing that individuation is already a kind of individuating and thus has being concurrent to and by virtue of individuating, but is the being of humans not supposed to be a precondition for individuating and thus must indubitably have being before individuation?

PYRRHO — Can I attempt this question?

PLATO — Yes, Pyrrho! Spring forth with your wisdom.

PYRRHO — I imagine that Ptolemais would say the following: that the being of humans are not strictly speaking a temporally anterior event to the being of the activity of individuation, but can simply also be concurrent to it. For the major difference between the difficulty with the being of individuation and that with the being of humans is that the latter is diverse and seems to need the kind of distinctions which can only be provided by individuation, which makes it even more difficult to hold that humans do not have being prior to the thinking activity in which they engage. To this, we can simply state, in plain Platonic fashion, I believe, that the various humans are but aspects of the one, human, whose universal consciousness, there is no problem to say, is concurrent with the activity of individuation.

PLATO — That is a possible response, Pyrrho, and you are correct to note that I would probably respond in such a manner. However, I do not imagine this to be Ptolemais' response, since, if we recall well, she wishes to say that differences in the circumstance-specific cultivation of ourselves as individuals, rooted in certain ways of living and certain surroundings, play a role in

potential differences in our individuating of things. In any case, I had my mind towards another difficulty which did not necessarily have to do with the diverse being of humans, but with the necessity that there be humans at all. If worlds are created in the understanding of the human, and in worlds dwell things, then can things not just dwell in worlds without any involvement from the human? Are world-accounts not already enough for the being of things, or do we really need, in addition to these, someone who tell these accounts?

PTOLEMAIS — I applaud your courage, Pyrrho, but fear that in this Plato is right. For actually this is not hard to see, that different people from different lands have radically different ways of approaching the same "something," which we leave ineffable before the individuation act, and admit to be varied after the individuation act. On the other hand, Plato, befitting your legends, you were quite sensitive to the idea of the rootedness of culture, or what is the same thing, of cultivation, after only hearing it once. Indeed, the response that I will give is in that direction: in harkening back to my point about the multiplicity of worlds, I will say that different people from different cultures are inhabitants of different sets of worlds; they root themselves, in other words, in certain ways of being-among-things but not others, and in this fact resides the meaning of their difference. For someone who traverses a certain set of worlds, equipped with certain ways of living which are not acting in separation but are fused together harmoniously in practice, will arrive at different ways of individuating than someone else. So, in a sense, the difference between the various facets of being in humans only has being, itself, after the first world has been born.

On the other hand, as is the case with beauty, which we have discussed, a limited number of things are universal to all humans insofar as they are humans, and this is, namely, our shared ability to recognize the faces of the good, the beautiful, and the true, such that, despite us opting in the end to think of different things as good, as beautiful, and as true, the feeling that they give

us does not vary across people. When we think of something as beautiful, for example, there is a certain elevated feeling that one gets in contemplating the beautiful thing, a certain respect that one has for its dignity, and so on. Now this is, no doubt, an all too general response to give, especially when it concerns feelings, which vary considerably between us, but it is also clear that these feelings do not come about arbitrarily but are a feature of the uniqueness of these qualities as torches which guide us in our journey towards the truth [aletheia].

As regards the question of whether the being of humans is strictly necessary for the being of things, or if stories are already enough without the need for people to tell them, I think the focus on storytellers in this specific instance is impressing more force upon us than it turns out to have and preventing us from seeing the simple response. Indeed, it is rather the story hearers which we must focus on. Stories are conceived due to the necessity of explaining a certain experience to someone qua hearer, and usually done by themselves qua teller. Thought of this way, and minding the usual metaphor of storytelling, though we can say that the teller is not strictly necessary for the being of a story, it is significantly more doubtful if there can be said to be any story at all without the hearer. For to explain something is not merely to describe. The explanatory account, to be considered as such, must succeed in inspiring the true notion in the mind of the hearer.

PLATO — Marvelous answers, Ptolemais. And what, finally, do we say of the truth? I am curious to know this, because I have a nagging suspicion that it is eventually here that we will find the answer to our original question about silence, which has since taken us far, far away on its wings, and we must now find our way back.

PTOLEMAIS — What do we say of aletheia, Plato? And what can we say of it? Well, for one, perhaps the tension that you wish to raise in asking this question is between these two ideas: that

on the one hand, aletheia seems to be said to be beyond all worlds, since it is, in the dream which I have intimated, that which is the original inspiration and beginning of our storytelling activity. In a sense, we may even understand this to be the only being that is, since it has being absolutely and by necessity, untethered to human activity. On the other hand, aletheia is, within my story, itself a term of the story, and it is by virtue of this story that one might explain aletheia to oneself, and by virtue of this story that it has being. But these, as you may have noticed, look to be two radically different ways in which something can be said to have being.

I can try to give you the answer, Plato, but I am certain that it will not satisfy you, nor does the answer that I am about to give you satisfy myself. My answer is this. Aletheia is always there, implied by all instances of individuation. By this I mean that, whenever we individuate in our experience a bird, we get, in effect, two things: the bird, and aletheia in the background. Thought of in this way, it looks to be improbable that aletheia should have a sense, and that it should be readily understandable to us, since even if we, hypothetically, were to individuate non-aletheia, we would also get aletheia, and this would be absurd. But this hypothesis is not something with which we need to concern ourselves, for it is, to begin with, an impossibility. For there is nothing which we can say about non-aletheia that may be true, as this very truth would make the idea, indeed, a part of aletheia.

PLATO — Very good. You are speaking of an idea which used to be given voice to by Parmenides, and which I find sensible.

PTOLEMAIS — And so since aletheia is at the same that which is the All and that which must be accorded a sense, we must treat it as a special case: not as an exception to the individuation criterion, but as something which must be understood to have more being than the word is able to give it. This, Plato, I think, is only fitting, given that it is both the birth and the life of our

individuating activity. I think now is the right moment to talk to you about the second kind of beginning, one which does not begin with things, but with aletheia itself. For though aletheia is the All, to us, it is more appropriately regarded as nothingness, since it is that about which we can say nothing, and so we must keep silent. And yet it always troubles me greatly, Plato, that this whole elaborate dream should turn out to be just another illusion if this one specific point in the story does not hold: that it is possible, in the first place, to get something from nothing: to pit ourselves against the nothingness that is the world in the first moment and to suddenly get trees, and marketplaces, and fishermen, and the sea, and suddenly to hear the beating of its waves, to feel the resistance of its wind and to recognize the glimmering of the sun afar. How do we get all this, Plato? I fear that this kind of beginning does not make itself known merely as a fairy tale, but rather as an absolute necessity if my dream is to prove true. And so it is to this one encounter with the divine in the singular expression of music that I have clung to like a newborn the umbilical cord that is to separate it from its source, fearing that she will lose it forever.

PLATO — Once again, you have spoken with the cadence of Orpheus and the wisdom of Socrates. I am ashamed, dear Ptolemais, that I do not have the wisdom to cure your terrible malady, but I can give you some counsels as to the way of the world, that tomorrow you may return to the road, as you always do, and let yourself be one with its sensuous flux once again as your unsettled soul resumes its voyage. I will say, first, that there is indeed something in this act of creation with which musicians are well acquainted that resembles the inventive act of contemplation, since both take hold of the All and, by giving something truly novel to it, seek with the most sublime pretension to renew it. You are also right in saying that this resembles a motion from nothing to something. But here is what I will say, Ptolemais, and what the wisdom of my age allows me to confirm to be true: that the world itself has a soul, indeed a very old soul,

> older, perhaps, than the first human. And this soul moves ever slowly, imperceptible to us humans, our entire lives being but mere instants compared to it, and once in a while the times change, and they always change because of an ecstatic expression—an expression that is conceived outside of the day proper, and indeed it must be outside of the day in order, eventually, to topple the certainty and arrogance with which we have built the day and announce a new age. And the ecstatic expression in this instance is, in my lifetime, unfailingly an expression of the strange, for indeed it is the strange that may truly challenge the day without being assimilated back into it. And so Ptolemais, I will say what no philosopher should say, and in the presence only of Pyrrho, who will not speak of this to anyone, and of you: embrace irrationality and strangeness; do not reject the discomfort of solitude that comes naturally with embracing them; and finally, ignore the confusions of the crowd. For you have taught us this and are right to do so: that the silence with which one comes to know the divine in this life is profoundly personal and ineffable, and one can only find justification for this within oneself. And you were also right to teach us that it is in silence that the knowledge of all things past comes back to us once again and soothes our nostalgia, if only ever as a reminder for the weary philosopher of the beauty of their striving, and as a temporary refuge where they may rest before taking to the road once more, journeying towards the truth.

I exchanged my gratitude for the advice. In grace was the day drawing to an end, and Plato excused himself, wishing to return to his residence in Collytus, seeking rest. Pyrrho invited me to dine with his family and to spend the night in the guest chamber before I departed Athens. In the early hours of the morning, the youth whom I had met at the Academy came to inform us that Plato had passed, and that he had passed in peace, without struggle or sign of regret that might betray the weariness of his old soul.

Philosophy, Liberation, Social Justice, and Marx: A Conversation with Vanessa Wills

Transcribed by: William Leo Edmonds-Doberenz

GABE: Well, thank you for doing this interview. It's always really fun. For my senior thesis, I tried to connect some of the more abstract components of philosophy, like McDowell's meta-ethics, to lived experience. I know that practical application is important in your work. How do you go about doing that?

VANESSA: I try as much as possible to use a philosophical method that reflects what Marx and Engels emphasized—that theory should start with actual human beings, attempting to satisfy their needs, interacting with the world, and with one another.

I'm always looking at what's happening in terms of liberation struggles. I assume that those who are oppressed and fighting for their freedom are likely at the forefront of human understanding about morality. They don't have the luxury of abstract speculation—they are actively shaping the meaning of justice through their struggles.

So, my question is- What are people struggling for? How are they struggling? What would need to happen for them to be liberated? That's what drives my philosophical inquiry. More moral philosophers should start there, with lived experience, rather than imposing abstract moral principles onto movements. Philosophy must take its lead from real struggles, not the other way around.

GABE: So, religion in a capitalistic society largely serves as a provisional measure until real salvation comes in the form of communism. When religion is understood in this way, what then is the relationship between communism and religion?

VANESSA: Great question. I would push back on the idea that religion is just a temporary measure until communism arrives. Yes, it's true that religion often takes our aspirations for a better world and

projects them onto a miraculous future—a future that isn't on Earth. In that sense, it can play a reactionary role, sustaining passivity rather than action.

But the relationship isn't that simple. Some of the most important liberation struggles today, like that of Palestinians fighting for survival, show that faith plays a critical role in sustaining movements. Many people in Gaza are simply trying to live, not necessarily shaping revolutionary theory. Their faith sustains them. So, it would be a mistake to say that religion is always reactionary.

Take liberation theology in Latin America—Catholic activists who say, "My faith leads me to social justice." Or Jewish Voices for Peace, who argue that their Judaism compels them to fight for human rights. These perspectives show that religion and social justice can intersect rather than oppose each other.

Now, can you fully adhere to Marx's materialist perspective and still be religious? No, I don't think so. Marx's materialism requires rejecting supernatural explanations. But can religious people still participate in struggles for freedom and equality? Absolutely. That's where solidarity exists between Marxists and religious communities fighting for justice.

Anna steps in, intrigued.

ANNA: I'm going off-script a little bit. But to follow up: Is there an argument for a fully realized communism that could coexist with religion? Is that something Marx could argue for or would argue for?

VANESSA: No, he wouldn't have argued for that. But there's a distinction between what Marx personally believed and what his theory actually commits him to. Marx was in conversation with atheist thinkers like Feuerbach and Bauer, who were obsessed with proving that God wasn't real.

Marx thought that was a waste of time. Instead, he argued that religion is a reflection of suffering—as long as we have inhumane conditions, we'll have theories that mirror those conditions.

Marx believed that changing material conditions—uplifting human dignity—was the only way to disrupt religious worldviews. He also argued that even atheists could be religious without realizing it. Liberalism, for example, projects ideas of freedom into abstract ideals rather than real material conditions. You might believe you're free as a citizen, but in reality, your actual lived conditions are constrained by capitalism. That's a kind of religious thinking—an illusion about freedom.

ANNA: Thank you.

BROOKE: As a philosopher deeply involved with both race and class, what do you see as some of the philosophical benefits of intersectionality?

VANESSA: One benefit is that intersectionality forces us to center lived experiences of oppression rather than assuming a detached, so-called "objective" view. Another benefit is recognizing that oppression functions differently across identities—race impacts someone's experience differently if they're a woman, queer, or poor. We need to ask those questions.

That said, I don't fully align with intersectionality theory because it often denies that any one category plays a larger role than another. Many Marxists, including myself, argue that economic class is structurally more foundational than identity categories.

This doesn't mean gender, race, or sexuality aren't crucial—it means that class structures shape and sustain oppression in a way that must be analyzed deeply.

CELENA: Do you have any questions for us? Anything you'd like to hear from our perspective?

VANESSA: I'd love to hear what led you all to be interested in Marx, intersectionality, or philosophy related to social justice.

CELENA: I hadn't read any Marx until this week, but now I feel like I need to. You've convinced me—it's worth exploring.

VANESSA: That's amazing. Many philosophers across the country have never actually read Marx.

GABE: Wow.

VANESSA: The most common response I hear from philosophers is either that they never read Marx, or they read him in a dismissive way, taught that labor was an outdated concept, replaced entirely by supply and demand.

It wasn't until I met activists and socialists that I understood how radical and necessary Marx's ideas are. I remember thinking: "Are you kidding me? This is brilliant!" So, my advice? Don't brush Marx off. There's something valuable here."

Celena glances at her phone, informing every one of their schedules. The conversation isn't truly ending—only pausing, leaving room for new questions to emerge in the days to come.

Sapere Aude is the undergraduate philosophy journal of The College of Wooster. Founded in 2007, it continues to showcase original philosophical work by students from institutions around the world. The successful production of this journal is made possible by the support of Dr. Karen Haely, the Philosophy Department at The College of Wooster, and our dedicated readership. We extend our sincere gratitude to all the undergraduates who submit their work. Your contributions are vital to the success of this publication.