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From the Editor

We are pleased to present another issue of De Ethica. The contributions in this issue approach ethics from a range of perspectives, including politics, theology, philosophy, history and more practical as well. Even though they address different problems, the articles share an interest in the conditions that enable people to live, act, and exercise judgment *together*. Themes such as religious plurality in the public sphere, Christian responses to migration, the critical potential of political philosophy, and the ethical demands of educational practice are explored. Across these contributions, questions of difference, equality, freedom, recognition, and responsibility repeatedly emerge. These are inherently important topics and continue to be present in a pressing manner. Together, they provide new insights regarding the shared human condition and the world we live in.

In "Plurality and Religious Diversity: An Arendtian Argument for Religious Co-existence in the Public Sphere," Jan-Olav Henriksen draws on Hannah Arendt to offer a positive account of religious plurality. Rather than treating religion primarily as a set of doctrines or beliefs, the article presents religious traditions as clusters of practices expressed through speech and action—and therefore as forms of participation in a shared world. Henriksen argues that Arendt's conception of plurality shows why religious diversity should be valued in political and social life, not merely tolerated as an unavoidable fact. Plurality is compatible with equality: empirical differences among people coexist with the politically constituted equality of rights. Accordingly, the article stresses the importance of the "right to have rights," especially for those excluded from effective political membership. It also examines how religiously legitimated nationalism can suppress plurality by privileging one group and reducing others to generic categories. In its constructive theological reflections, the article argues that religious identities develop through relationships and that encounters with religious others can shape a tradition's self-understanding. Religious difference must therefore never justify unequal rights. Instead, a viable public sphere must enable distinct religious traditions and individuals to participate through speech and action as equals in a shared political world.

In their article "Christian Ethics and Migration in Germany and the United States: Toward a Comparative Taxonomy," Gary Slater and Marianne Heimbach-Steins put forward a framework for comparing the Christian social-ethical debates on migration in Germany and the United States. Instead of presenting one particular German or American viewpoint, they wish to promote more interaction between two major areas of scholarly work which have hitherto been only weakly connected. Their taxonomy divides these discussions into problems, impulses, and approaches, all of them being based on the fundamental Christian distinction between stranger and neighbor. The problems are the specific injustices or shortcomings that ethical consideration addresses and can vary by national setting. Among the topics they examine are borders, irregular migration, church-state relations, and the special significance of integration in Germany. The impulses indicate the direction of ethical arguments: a harmonizing impulse aims to reform legal

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and political systems in accordance with Christian ethical principles, while a dismantling impulse highlights the gap between Christian solidarity and existing systems of exclusion. The approaches concern the sources and forms of normative reasoning; Slater and Heimbach-Steins distinguish between scriptural-hermeneutical, cosmopolitical, and spatial-phenomenological approaches. Given that it is offered as a first draft and not as a final classification, the taxonomy is intended to make clear both the similarities and the differences between the two scholarly traditions. It gives Christian ethicists a common vocabulary with which to recognize similarities, state their disagreements more accurately, and deal with basic questions concerning belonging, identity, and the relationship between strangers and neighbors.

In his article "Is Hegel's Philosophy an Algebra of Revolution? Rediscovering the Ethical Impulse in Political Philosophy", Eirik Hasvik examines a key paradox concerning G. W. F. Hegel's political legacy: how can a philosopher who is frequently depicted as an advocate of the Prussian state at the same time have inspired radical critics and revolutionaries? To answer this question, Hasvik makes use of Hegel's well-known assertion that the rational is actual and the actual is rational. Rather than viewing this statement as a simple acceptance of present institutions, Hasvik emphasizes the difference between simple reality and actuality. According to Hegel's own usage, something is actual only when its existence matches its rational essence. This distinction creates a critical opportunity for judging whether or not institutions provide freedom, reciprocity, and recognition. The article sets out this argument in the context of Hegel's theory of ethical life and looks at the divisions that subsequently appeared among the right, the center, and the left Hegelians. It also looks at the conservative, progressive, and apparently neutral interpretations of the proposition. Hasvik ultimately endorses the progressive interpretation but does not present Hegel's recommendations on institutions as a political blueprint for today. Hegel's lasting importance, on the other hand, stems from the dynamic and critical nature of his philosophy; its ethical impulse requires that existing social arrangements constantly show that they are rational and promotes reflection on how political reality might become freer and more fully rational.

In his article "Pedagogical Tact as an Ethical Practice", Thomas Senkbeil defines pedagogical tact as practical judgment guided by ethical considerations and applied in situations of uncertainty. Drawing on Theodor W. Adorno's ideas about tact, Senkbeil argues that tact becomes especially significant when social conventions still influence behavior but no longer command unquestioned authority. Teachers are constantly confronted with individual and unpredictable circumstances in which general rules, theoretical knowledge and established methods by themselves are unable to tell them what the correct response should be. Pedagogical tact allows them to deal with this gap without reducing their professional actions to mere intuitive guesses. It involves being sensitive to issues of vulnerability, diversity and recognition, as well as to the changing boundaries between closeness and distance, between support and autonomy, and between individual and collective needs. Using insights from phenomenology, sociology, anthropology and aesthetics, Senkbeil presents tact as a principle of differentiation: educators must be able to perceive differences without putting learners into stigmatizing or exclusivity-based categories. This is especially relevant in the fields of special and inclusive education, where diagnostic and normative distinctions can affect opportunities for participation. The article also looks at how teacher education can help develop tact. Because it cannot be taught as a fixed technique, academic study, practical placements, case-based learning, mentoring, and structured reflection can promote its development. Pedagogical tact therefore connects

theory and practice, enabling educators to respond responsibly to the unique character of each educational situation while at the same time protecting the dignity and integrity of the learners.

Per Sundman has reviewed Rochelle DuFord's book *Solidarity in Conflict: A Democratic Theory*, in which a non-ideal democratic theory concerned with solidarity organizations is presented. The book makes a distinction between democratic, non-pathological solidarity and pathological forms which reproduce domination and exclusion. Sundman welcomes the originality of the account, especially the difference drawn between liberal solidarity with oppressed people and democratic solidarity carried out by oppressed groups themselves. Nevertheless, he is doubtful about whether labeling unjust solidarity as "pathological" hides the normative ground of this distinction and whether the book can consistently steer clear of ideal theory. He also maintains that the account of democracy does not place sufficient emphasis on collective self-government. Although he has these reservations, Sundman regards the study as an important and highly recommendable addition to our understanding of the relationship between solidarity and democratic political activity.

Fredrik Stjernberg examines Linda M. G. Zerilli's *A Democratic Theory of Truth*, a work that addresses post-truth politics and the declining confidence in the difference between truth and falsehood. Drawing primarily on Hannah Arendt, Michel Foucault, and Ludwig Wittgenstein, Zerilli argues that democratic truth should allow space for opinion and disagreement without slipping into relativism. Stjernberg describes the book as well-informed and carefully argued, but he doubts the distinction that Zerilli draws between subjective truth and an excessive emphasis on objective truth. According to him, scientific facts rarely lead to political action on their own; it is only their practical consequences that require judgment and debate. Stjernberg also raises the question of whether the book's advanced philosophical framework properly takes account of the real forces behind current post-truth discourse, although he acknowledges that it contains a good deal of genuine interest.

We hope you find the readings interesting and thought-provoking.

Martin Langby, Executive Editor

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Plurality and religious diversity: An Arendtian argument for religious co-existence in the public sphere

Jan-Olav Henriksen

Developing a philosophical argument for the positive features of religious co-existence is among the crucial tasks in societies increasingly marked by polarization and religious diversity. The present article will argue in favor of a positive approach to religious plurality by presenting Hannah Arendt's view on plurality and considering what it entails for understanding religious co-existence. Addressing religious coexistence and not only interreligious dialogue is due to the increasing realization in the study of religion about the need to overcome a mere cognitive approach to religion and see it as more than belief. Religious traditions are clusters of practices that can be seen in light of Arendt's view about the vita activa. A practice-oriented approach also recognizes that religious traditions may share several common concerns that are not sufficiently taken into account if one only views them from the perspective of doctrinal differences. Although Arendt was not substantially concerned with the role of religion in the public sphere, the following will argue that her position also has something to say about why plurality and co-existence of religious traditions are essential to the quality of a given society.

The Task

Developing a philosophical argument for the positive features of religious co-existence is among the crucial tasks in societies increasingly marked by polarization and religious diversity. The present article will argue in favor of a positive approach to religious plurality by presenting Hannah Arendt's view on plurality and considering what it entails for understanding religious co-existence. Addressing religious coexistence and not only interreligious dialogue is due to the increasing realization in the study of religion about the need to overcome a mere cognitive approach to religion and see it as more than mere belief. Religious traditions are clusters of practices that can be seen in light of Arendt's view about the *vita activa*. A practice-oriented approach also recognizes that religious traditions may share several common concerns that are not sufficiently taken into account if one only views them from the perspective of doctrinal differences. Although Arendt was

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not substantially concerned with the role of religion in the public sphere,[1] the following will argue that her position also has something to say about why plurality and co-existence of religious traditions are essential to the quality of a given society.

Plurality: basic conditions

This section deal with selected elements in Hannah Arendt's view on plurality which serves the overall argument of this article, which is how to understand and deal with plurality as a political challenge. She sees plurality as rooted in empirical conditions, such as ethnicity and gender, political views, social class, geographical origin, religious adherence, and so on. These differences make politics both necessary and essential (*de facto*). She holds that without plurality and difference, politics is not needed. Politics presupposes plurality, and plurality is the ontological fact that must be recognized: It is why we need a politics that can coordinate and handle the different interests and concerns in society.

From the point of view of interreligious co-existence, this principled situating of the need for politics is of utmost importance: it entails a) the recognition of plurality as a given feature of society, and b) the need for a politics that does not overcome but affirms and recognizes plurality. From this follows c) that plurality must be handled by other means than those internal to the religious traditions themselves, namely by a politics aiming at justice and equal recognition. Among my points in the following is that c), although in principle to be distinguished from the resources in the religious traditions, nevertheless, can find acceptance, support, and motivation in these.

How can politics aiming at and securing religious co-existence be developed, then? According to Arendt, the political challenge is to allow the differences that manifest religious plurality to have a standing in terms of *equal rights (de jure*) that can secure equal participation in society.[2]

The insistence on plurality as a condition for human action, co-existence, and politics is found in several places in Arendt's work. It is poignantly expressed in the statement that "men, not Man inhabit the world, which she presents repeatedly."[3] Although Arendt's notion of plurality has many dimensions, it primarily has a phenomenological background.[4] When she writes that "Not Man but men inhabit this planet. Plurality is the law of the earth"[5], this is not only a description of what is the actual

[1] However, there is an exception to this claim in her "Religion and Politics" in Hannah Arendt and Jerome Kohn, *Essays in Understanding, 1930-1954 : Formation, Exile, and Totalitarianism.*

[2] Arendt develops this point in different writings, among which some will be referenced below. For a more recent reception of this point, see Jürgen Habermas, *Die Einbeziehung Des Anderen : Studien Zur Politischen Theorie* (Frankfurt am Main: Suhrkamp, 1996). A criticism of Habermas' transformative misreading of Arendt is offered by Margaret Canovan, "A Case of Distorted Communication: A Note on Habermas and Arendt," *Political Theory* 11, no. 1 (1983).

[3] Cf. Hannah Arendt, *The Human Condition* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1958), 8.Cf. also *The Origins of Totalitarianism* (New York,: Meridian Books, 1958), 476. Margareth Canovan claims that this "is perhaps the single most significant motif of her thought". See Canovan, "A Case of Distorted Communication: A Note on Habermas and Arendt."

[4] To start in the phenomenological to understand other implications of the notion is an approach made by others, as well: „Hannah Arendts vielzitierter Begriff des „Politischen" kann adäquat nur über eine Phänomenologie der Pluralität verständlich gemacht werden." Thus, Sophie Loidolt, "Hannah Arendts Phänomenologie Der Pluralität: Sozialontologische, Politische Und Ethische Aspekte," *HannahArendt.net* 1, no. 9 (2018).

[5] Hannah Arendt, *The Life of the Mind* (New York: Harcourt Brace Jovanovich, 1981), 19.

case – it is also a normative statement with moral and political implications. Plurality must be recognized as a positive contribution to difference and variation. Without it, the dynamics of social life, knowledge development, and general communication cannot occur. Plurality is what makes communication necessary. When plurality is not recognized, the monologue that points towards the totalization of one specific way of thinking and acting is the result. Its normative implication is primarily to be seen in how plurality counteracts totalitarianism.

Even though humans share a common world, the participants in this world have different locations, and "the location of one can no more coincide with the location of another than the location of two objects. Being seen and being heard by others derive their significance from the fact that everybody sees and hears from a different position. This is the meaning of public life," Arendt writes.[6]

Arendt's view on the political realm may also shed light on religion as more than belief. She sees the common sphere of politics as one in which plurality makes itself known through action and speech. About action and speech, she writes, "Their reality depends entirely upon human plurality, upon the constant presence of others who can see and hear and therefore testify to their existence."[7] In other words, the public realm is where one gets to know the other as someone who manifests themselves by what they say and what they do. The flipside of this inside is that when someone is precluded from participating in the public realm through speech and action, we do not get the chance to know them, and their contribution to a shared society is diminished. Applying this point to religious traditions implies that recognizing religious beliefs and practices cannot be done unless one also sees them as justified in having public manifestations. However, everyone must have the right to manifest oneself in this manner.

In Arendt's way of thinking, plurality has the twofold character of equality and distinction.

> If men were not equal, they could neither understand each other and those who came before them nor plan for the future and foresee the needs of those who will come after them. If men were not distinct, each human being distinguished from any other who is, was, or will ever be, they would need neither speech nor action to make themselves understood. Signs and sounds to communicate immediate, identical needs and wants would be enough.[8]

The above has one important implication: Plurality does not stand in opposition to equality. But for Arendt, the recognition of equality is linked to a political decision, not an empirical fact. This distinction between the empirical and the political is crucial for the following considerations.

Arendt holds that to make oneself distinct from others is not identical to being completely other. Although otherness is an essential aspect of plurality, and that by which we distinguish something from something else, Arendt uses plurality as a concept to capture how only humans

> can express this distinction and distinguish himself, and only he can communicate himself and not merely something – thirst or hunger, affection or hostility or fear. In man, otherness, which he shares with everything that is, and distinctness, which he

[6] *The Human Condition*, 57.
[7] Ibid., 95.
[8] Ibid., 175–76.

> shares with everything alive, become uniqueness, and human plurality is the paradoxical plurality of unique beings.[9]

Against this backdrop, it is possible to say that, according to Arendt, equality and plurality should work together in the political realm. Thus,

> equality and diversity must mutually limit each other in the proper political arrangement: diversity, in the form of free association, limits equality to political equality; equality, in the form of equal access to the public world and the right to have rights, limits diversity through common citizenship and restrictions on the scope of political power. As political values, plurality and equality therefore have equal worth.[10]

The relevance of this point in this connection is already mentioned: speech and action reveal the unique distinctness of humans. These are the capacities through which humans *distinguish* themselves instead of merely being distinct. Speech and action make it possible for humans to appear to each other *as humans*. This appearance is more than mere bodily existence and rests "an initiative from which no human being can refrain and still be human."[11] Read against the backdrop of religious plurality, this point takes on a very obvious significance, as religion is not only about personal belief, but manifests itself specifically in speech and action, which must be seen as practices that support the understanding and articulation of religious concerns.

The relevance of religion to the public sphere does not entail that this is the only sphere in which it plays a role. The encompassing character of religious topics covers also the other spheres that Arendt identifies in addition to the political, and especially issues related to the social and private.

In other words, allowing religious differences to be expressed in the public sphere through speech and action is a way of securing the chance for humans to be recognized as humans. When someone is precluded from it, this restricts their freedom. Action and speech correspond "to the fact of distinctness and is the actualization of the human condition of plurality, that is, of living as a distinct and unique being among equals."[12] Hence, to be unique and distinct, and thereby manifest plurality, does not exclude the possibility of being among equals. On the other hand, it is this participation in a world with others that also makes the establishment of human identity possible. The disclosure of who somebody is, is implicit in both words and deeds, and without the chance of manifesting oneself against others, identity would not be possible.[13]

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[9] Ibid., 176.

[10] James Bohman, "The Moral Costs of Political Pluralism: The Dilemmas of Difference and Equality in Arendt's "Reflections on Little Rock"," in *Hannah Arendt Twenty Years Later*, ed. L. May and J. Kohn (Cambridge, Mass; London, : The MIT Press, 1996), 75.

[11] Arendt, *The Human Condition*, 176.

[12] Ibid., 178.

[13] Cf. Ibid., 201., and the following: "Personal identity is an achievement accomplished only by setting forth into the web of human relationships. One is a distinct someone by engaging in actions with others and accepting courageously as one's identity the inexchangeable and irreversible course of events stimulated by one's deeds. One's identity is not mediated just by one's words and intentions, but by the form one's story takes by "rubbing against" and being rubbed by the stories of other actors. Uniqueness depends upon performance in the public realm withdrawal from this realm deprives one's identity of the depth and articulation it receives from its steady appearance in a course of events and from the acknowledgement of other actors and spectators. One can be someone only by acting." Timothy Roach, "Enspirited Words and Deeds: Christian Metaphors in Arendt's Concept of Personal

Arendt's notion of plurality is a warning against any organizing of the political realm that absolutizes one perspective and employs one generic concept of humans. Her claim that "a plurality of men, not Man, inhabit the earth and must communicate with one another"[14] aims at breaking down a generic notion of humanity that glosses over variation and difference. Because we are different, we need to communicate with others. In that sense, her notion of plurality has political implications insofar as it entails a rejection of any *Gleichschaltung* in which the dominion of one perspective rules. In passing we can note that this also represents a challenge to theologies that operate with a generic notion of the human.

The analysis of plurality shows that living beings are not mere appearances. As we have seen, life manifests in the urge to self-display in speech and action. We consistently appear in a specific form and fashion, which means that the world and others "seem to me" in a particular way, just as I do to them. This is perhaps the only possible mode in which an appearing world is acknowledged and perceived, as there can be no God's eye view:

> To appear always means to seem to others, and this seeming varies according to the standpoint and the perspective of the spectators. In other words, every appearing thing acquires, by virtue of its appearingness, a kind of disguise that may indeed – but does not have to – bide or disfigure it. Seeming corresponds to the fact that every appearance, its identity notwithstanding, is perceived by a plurality of spectators.[15]

Accordingly, plurality entails the recognition of otherness and difference, determined by the beholder's perspective. But this appearance of another might also hide something or entail something that is not apparent. Thus, to be open to the fact that there can be a surplus entailed in the appearance of the other means that one also must recognize the limitations of one's perception. In other words, recognizing plurality means more than simply ascertaining diversity.

Plurality is one of the basic existential conditions of human life on Earth. As long as we communicate with others, we are alive. And even when we are alone, plurality presents the condition for our thinking in solitude. The life of the mind, writes Arendt, presupposes plurality:

> The mind can be said to have a life of its own only to the extent that it actualizes this intercourse in which, existentially speaking, plurality is reduced to the duality already implied in the fact and the word consciousness, or *syneidenai* – to know with myself"[16]

In other words, thinking is spurred by others representing plurality, even when their contributions are reduced to what appears in my thinking as the content of consciousness.

Plurality and equality in the context of religious totalitarianism

On the contemporary scene, the emergence of what I suggest we call religious totalitarianism is increasingly more visible. We see it not only in the Middle East, but also in countries where political arguments is based on the supremacy of one specific religion

Action," in *Amor Mundi. Explorations in the Faith and Thought of Hannah Arendt*, ed. James W. Bernauer (Boston; Dodrecht; Lancaster: Martinus Nijhoff Publishers, 1987), 66.

[14] Hannah Arendt, *Men in Dark Times*, (New York,: Harcourt, 1968), 133.

[15] *The Life of the Mind*, 21.

[16] Ibid., 74.

that is supposed to serve as a basis for society in general. Against this backdrop, it is interesting to look at the section of her work *The Origins of Totalitarianism* where Arendt describes the rise of nationalist movements that claimed religious legitimacy for their privileged position. Her analysis has more than historical interest; it can also shed light on various versions of (Christian) nationalism in the contemporary world. She points to how the emergence of the Pan-movements in Eastern and Southern Europe transformed the Jewish-Christian faith in the divine origin of Man (note the generic use here) by preaching about how this divine origin had to be understood as given only indirectly, through membership in a people.[17]

The chances for perceiving the individual in their difference from others, as this was enabled by linking the understanding of them as having a direct relationship with God, were exchanged for a position in which they had "divine value only as long as he belongs to the people singled out for divine origin. He forfeits this whenever he decides to change his nationality, in which case he severs all bonds through which he was endowed with divine origin and falls, as it were, into metaphysical homelessness."[18] By linking identity not to the relationship with God but with the people, nationality was made "a permanent quality which no longer could be touched by history, no matter what happened to a given people – emigration, conquest, dispersion".[19]

The establishment of belonging to a people as the sign of having a divine origin is identified by Arendt as having one more immediate consequence: It establishes the "absolute contrast between the divine origin of one's own people and all other nondivine peoples" with the effect that "all differences between the individual members of the people disappeared, whether social or economic or psychological."[20] Hence, the claim about a common divine origin of the selected people secured the option of making them into a uniform chosen mass. This uniformity excluded plurality.

In pointing out the problems of this position, Arendt recurs to a combination of secular and theological language, thereby demonstrating how uniformity is handled in different ways empirically and theologically: Arguing that the theory about a common divine origin in a people is conspicuously untrue, she nevertheless recognizes how it was politically useful – although for morally corrupt purposes. Empirically and from a secular point of view, it is impossible to say that God created men and peoples, as their origin is in procreation. Peoples (*Folk*) came into being due to human organization.[21] Moreover, "Men are unequal according to their natural origin, their different organization, and fate

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[17] Arendt, *The Origins of Totalitarianism*, 233–34.

[18] Ibid., 234.

[19] Ibid. Hence, nationalism and racism emerge as a consequence. Nationalism entails the concept of a national mission which "perverted the national concept of mankind as a family of nations into a hierarchical structure where differences of history and organization were misinterpreted as differences between men, residing in natural origin. Racism, which denied the common origin of man and repudiated the common purpose of establishing humanity, introduced the concept of the divine origin of one people as contrasted with all others, thereby covering the temporary and changeable product of human endeavor with a pseudo-mystical cloud of divine eternity and finality." (Ibid.)

[20] Ibid.

[21] Ibid. As is obvious, Arendt does not shy away from making theological statements to interpret the same topic: "Politics is based on the fact of human plurality. God created *man*, but men are a human, earthly product the product of human nature." Here quoted from Rafael Zawisza, "Between Adamite Dreams and Original Sin: Hannah Arendt's Cryptic Heterodoxy?," in *"Faith in the World" : Post-Secular Readings of Hannah Arendt*, ed. Rafael Zawisza and Ludger Hagedorn (Frankfurt: Campus Verlag, 2021), 88.

in history."[22] Contrary to this, in an alternative mode of argumentation that employs theological language, it can be argued that for humans,

> Their equality is an equality of rights only, that is, an equality of human purpose; yet behind this equality of human purpose lies, according to Jewish- Christian tradition, another equality, expressed in the concept of one common origin beyond human history, human nature, and human purpose – the common origin in the mythical, unidentifiable Man who alone is God's creation. This divine origin is the metaphysical concept on which the political equality of purpose may be based, the purpose of establishing mankind on Earth.[23]

Accordingly, the equality of humans cannot be demonstrated empirically. Arendt also rejects "the religious cliché that everyone is equal before God because that endangers the 'worldly significance' of the other in her uniqueness."[24] Hence, if such equality should be claimed theologically, it must be rooted in a common origin in God's creative activity and in a way that affirms individuality and uniqueness. But, according to Arendt, the purpose for which humans were created is only possible to spell out in generic terms, namely, to establish humankind on Earth. This generic purpose is insufficient to promote a kind of uniformity of all humans within one conception. Hence, the understanding of human equality in origin allows for plurality while simultaneously allowing for assessing them as equal from a political point of view. The outcome of this line of reasoning is that for Arendt, equality among humans is an equality of rights, which depends neither on metaphysics nor empirical evidence.

Considering Arendt's fundamental position here in light of the rise of Christian nationalism, its contemporary relevance becomes clear. Not only has this movement been linked to prejudice towards minority groups, but Christian nationalism has been defined as a belief that "celebrate[s] and privilege[s] the sacred history, liberty, and rightful rule of white conservatives."[25] By prioritizing ethno-cultural, ethno-religious, and ethno-nationalist framing around fear of "the other" - those being immigrants, racial, and sexual minorities, - Arendt's identification of how ethnicity and othering is the constitutive factor for such nationalism is confirmed. Linked to this, and showing the neglect of equal rights for all, is how Christian nationalism can be associated with xenophobia, homophobia, misogyny, political tolerance of racists, opposition to interracial unions, and restricting the civil rights of those who fail to conform to traditional ideals of whiteness, citizenship, and certain forms of Protestantism. It also involves beliefs in patriarchy, white supremacy, and heteronormativity.

Thus, Arendt helps us see that a religiously legitimized position that entails the reduction of rights for others than the privileged group runs contrary to fundamental and universal theological convictions. It means a disregard for the actual plurality that makes politics necessary. Theological ethics needs to affirm the right of everyone to have equal rights, which can be secured only if such convictions lead to political decisions that do not privilege belonging to a specific group of people as a presupposition for such rights. Therefore, Arendt also points indirectly to the problem with human rights in general: that

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[22] Arendt, *The Origins of Totalitarianism*, 234.
[23] Ibid.
[24] Zawisza, "Between Adamite Dreams and Original Sin: Hannah Arendt's Cryptic Heterodoxy?," 105.
[25] Ruiqian Li and Paul Froese, "The Duality of American Christian Nationalism: Religious Traditionalism Versus Christian Statism," *Journal for the Scientific Study of Religion* 62, no. 4 (2023).

having them depends on existing in a political context. Concomitantly, "Human rights lose all their signification as soon as an individual loses her political context."[26]

Arendt thus grounds the right to have rights in a conviction based on political decisions, not empirical observations. The fact that equality cannot be demonstrated empirically resulted from nineteenth-century positivism and progressivism. These efforts "set out to demonstrate what cannot be demonstrated, namely, that men are equal by nature and different only by history and circumstances, so that they can be equalized not by rights, but by circumstances and education."[27] The futility of this effort meant that attention was given to empirical conditions instead of recognizing the fact that equality of rights relies on a political decision only. It is important to note that this secures the affirmation of plurality without seeing it as an obstacle to equality on political terms.

Equality does not rule out plurality, but equal rights secure plurality

According to the above, it becomes possible to see that plurality and equality emerge from two different spheres of human life: plurality originates in the private sphere, whereas equality is secured in the public sphere. The affirmation of the equality of rights as dependent on human decision is the basis for Arendt's view that plurality is "the disturbing miracle contained in the fact that each of us is made as he is – single, unique, unchangeable"[28] – i.e., with difference and under very variable conditions. Thus, plurality originates in the private sphere, as the sphere of the merely given. Contrary to this sphere is the public sphere, which is determined by human action. This plurality originating in private life is "a permanent threat to the public sphere because the public sphere is as consistently based on the law of equality as the private sphere is based on the law of universal difference and differentiation."[29] Consequently,

> Equality, in contrast to all that is involved in mere existence, is not given us, but is the result of human organization insofar as it is guided by the principle of justice. We are not born equal; we become equal as members of a group on the strength of our decision to guarantee ourselves mutually equal rights. Our political life rests on the assumption that we can produce equality through organization, because man can act in and change and build a common world, together with his equals and only with his equals.[30]

The fact that a shared world is a world of equals reflects Arendt's perspective on the political sphere as a manifestation of freedom. As indicated above, equality and freedom belong together.

The political challenge connected to plurality and difference – including religious diversity, is that they represent factors that cannot be brought under complete human control. Plurality and difference represent a threat to politics, because it is only possible to maintain control if there is a certain degree of sameness or equality among citizens. But this also entails that individuality and plurality contribute to constituting the view of someone– or something – as alien. The alien points towards "those realms in which man cannot change and cannot act and in which, therefore, he has a distinct tendency to

[26] Thus Leila Faghfouri Azar, "Key Concepts: Hannah Arendt: The Right to Have Rights," *Critical Legal Thinking* (2019).
[27] Arendt, *The Origins of Totalitarianism*, 234.
[28] Ibid., 301.
[29] Ibid.
[30] Ibid.

destroy."[31] Against this backdrop, Arendt contrasts the individual differences that necessitate plurality and the equality that must be secured by political recognition.

Accordingly, plurality and difference can be safeguarded and maintained in the political realm only if they are combined with rights. Suppose someone is recognized for their mere otherness without also recognizing their rights. In that case, he becomes a representative of a class, group, or general concept and is not seen as an individual. Arendt uses racism as an example of this, but it could just as well be pointed out that it applies to adherents to religious traditions, as well. Therefore, we can adapt her point about racism and make it relevant to a religious tradition: When someone is considered only as a representative of their religion and nothing else, they lose along with their right to equality that freedom of action which is specifically human; all their deeds are now explained as 'necessary' consequences of some 'religious' qualities, and they thereby are only considered as a specimen of what Arendt calls "an animal species, called man."[32] Their distinctive and individual character is eradicated.

Consequently, plurality is lost when we consider someone merely from a generic point of view. This relates to the religious other, as well. When we relate to others without recognizing their specific standing and their rights, they become human beings and nothing else. Hence, equality that does not acknowledge plurality becomes deeply problematic:

> Wherever public life and its law of equality are completely victorious, wherever a civilization succeeds in eliminating or reducing to a minimum the dark background of difference, it will end in complete petrifaction and be punished, so to speak, for having forgotten that man is only the master, not the creator of the world.[33]

We are created with differences, and when we foster the sameness that ignores this, we are missing the fundamental and given condition of plurality that is also the basis for ascribing rights to others than those who can be identified as identical with us.

Arendt did not develop a comprehensive theory about human rights in general, and scholars have viewed this as a regrettable omission in her *oeuvre*.[34] However, as Lene Auestad has argued, "Arendt's concept of plurality can significantly contribute to our understanding of the idea of human dignity."[35] Such dignity depends on establishing a common world that ascribes equal rights to everyone, and there cannot be any shared world unless this is done. Hence, when people are forced to live outside the common world in which equal rights are recognized, in the midst of civilization, they are thrown back on their natural givenness and mere differentiation from others.[36] Presently, this fact is very obvious in the case of Palestinians in Gaza, who are subjected to military attacks and lack

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[31] Ibid.
[32] Cf. Ibid.
[33] Ibid., 302.
[34] Cf. Francis X. Winters, "The Banality of Evil. Reflections on Hannah Arendt's Reinterpretation of Political Ethics," in *Amor Mundi. Explorations in the Faith and Thought of Hannah Arendt*, ed. James W. Bernauer (Boston; Dodrecht; Lancaster: Martinus Nijhoff Publishers, 1987), 206–09. Winters also claims that this lack is due to the *content* of other elements in Arendt's work. He holds that her doctrine on judgment "which eschews both cognitive content and practical effect, whatever its perhaps considerable intellectual merits, is manifestly incompatible with any doctrine of human rights." His criticism off Arendt here is related to the emphasis on the political utility of such rights: A right is precisely the capacity to *act in the present*, with moral immunity on the grounds of a rational claim that such action is inextricably linked to authentic human development." Ibid, 209.
[35] Lene Auestad, "Plurality and Human Dignity," *Nordic Journal of Human Rights* 23, no. 3 (2006).
[36] Arendt, *The Origins of Totalitarianism*, 302.

of access to water, nourishment, and medical help in a way similar to other citizens in Palestine-Israel. They are considered based solely on their membership in a group distinct from others, which affords them certain privileges and rights. Equality is absent. In light of this situation, the contemporary relevance of Arendt becomes obvious when she writes that,

> They lack that tremendous equalizing of differences which comes from being citizens of some commonwealth and yet, since they are no longer allowed to partake in the human artifice, they begin to belong to the human race in much the same way as animals belong to a specific animal species. The paradox involved in the loss of human rights is that such loss coincides with the instant when a person becomes a human being in general – without a profession, without a citizenship, without an opinion, without a deed by which to identify and specify himself – *and* different in general, representing nothing but his own absolutely unique individuality which, deprived of expression within and action upon a common world, loses all significance.[37]

Arendt writes from a perspective that differs from what is often taken for granted in the modern Western world: the idea that belonging to humanity and having human rights are intrinsically related. That is not the case when humans are deprived of what makes them unique, and where individuality or plurality no longer ensures equal protection under the law. The strength of a possible contemporary theological approach to plurality will lie in its ability to recognize equal rights, despite plurality, including the plurality of religious affiliations. The empirical differences between people cannot be an argument for depriving someone of their rights to equal recognition and treatment – a point that is necessary to underscore in light of the rising movement of Christian nationalism or any other form of nationalism.

The relevance of Arendt's analysis is thus apparent in the dangers she identifies when people are kept outside the common realm, and this is a point that currently applies not only to the Palestinian people but to every case in which the political opposition is repressed and those protesting are deprived of their rights. She holds that

> "the emergence of totalitarian governments is a phenomenon within, not outside, our civilization. The danger is that a global, universally interrelated civilization may produce barbarians from its own midst by forcing millions of people into conditions which, despite all appearances, are the conditions of savages."[38]

Her words are no less essential to observe today.

The right to have rights

Although Arendt's view about human rights is widely discussed, the origin of her famous statement about the right to have rights is obvious: it must be understood against the backdrop of how entire populations of human beings were deprived of their fundamental rights before and during World War II. This practice also seems to continue today in some places in the world, where some tribes or populations are granted privilege at the cost of others who have lost it.

Arendt goes to the core of the problem with human rights in general in her claim that the basic right is the right to have rights. This is the precise problem in the modern

[37] Ibid.
[38] Ibid.

understanding of human rights, which essentially regulates the relationship between the individual and the government within a nation-state and attributes rights to its members. It constitutes a fundamental problem for stateless refugees.

As observed by others, Arendt's criticism of the declarations of human rights in their various forms was based on the understanding of human beings due to their shared "nature". But in light of their concrete plurality, this shared nature not only appears as an abstraction, but it also makes it possible to ignore those who are defined as not having a share in it, as Others. She criticized this attribution of rights, however, because it ended up in "overriding the plurality found in the togetherness of people by transforming the individual subject of these rights to a member of a nation-state, whereby the 'will' of the people substituted the plural relations instituted by human action."[39]

Arendt's insistence on rights as belonging to the political sphere builds on the premise that rights only have meaning in an actual community with others. The exclusion from such communities makes it possible to lose the recognition of having such rights. As long as equal rights are based on belonging to the nation-state or are restricted by a notion of "humanity" that excludes those defined as sub-human, the community on which her understanding of the condition for rights is based is under pressure or volatile. The fundamental right to have rights irrespective of belonging is what prevents dehumanization – also for those who lack belonging to a nation-state or are no longer recognized as truly human.

The lack of recognition of the right to have rights dissolves the possibility of manifesting plurality in speech and action in the public sphere. It takes away the fundamental means of protection. In totalitarian regimes, this entails a domination that makes apparent the "nakedness of the human being" in several respects. It means "'to kill the juridical person in man,' that is, to strip people off of their political rights by which they are understood to be equal to one another;" but also eliminating humans as moral persons by making human solidarity impossible by erasing human dignity; and to obliterate plurality by making it impossible to appear meaningfully in the presence of others.[40] As Sari points out, this "process coincides with that of the human being's denial of a *place* in the world: (1) 'the loss of home' along with the 'impossibility of finding a new one,' and (2) the 'loss of government protection,' so that (3) these people became 'superfluous.'"[41]

Arendt's insights into plurality and equal rights as conditions for freedom are relevant in any society willing to face the political challenge of religious plurality. To secure every member of society the right to action and speech is not only a task for securing them freedom, however: it is also a precondition by which religious diversity and plurality are considered as providing resources for building a society that becomes more able to handle differences and challenges in a world where the temptation for conformity and sameness represents a constant pressure. Accordingly, the politically constituted right to have rights, which recognizes equality in spite of plurality, works against the drive to absolutize one religious tradition and secures that different ideas about what it is to be human and what life should be about. In this sense, and by insisting on freedom as manifest in speech and

[39] Yasemin Sari, "The Right to Have Rights," in *The Bloomsbury Companion to Arendt*, ed. Peter Gratton and Yasemin Sari (London, UK: Bloomsbury Academic, 2021), 359.
[40] Cf. Ibid., 361., in a summary of Arendt, *The Origins of Totalitarianism*.
[41] Sari, "The Right to Have Rights."

action, Arendt also tacitly argues against an understanding of freedom as merely freedom of thought[42] or of individual and privatized belief.

Some theological inferences[43]

What does the above analysis mean for a political theology that explicitly wants to deal with religious plurality? For such a theology, which aims at a constructive approach to plurality, the above requires that one must engage in philosophical considerations such as Arendt's on plurality and rights, and consider what religions are from a more external and non-confessional point of view. It means to have a stronger focus on what religions do and how they contribute to society.[44] If we see religions as symbolically mediated clusters of practices that provide means for orientation, transformation, and reflection,[45] such practices articulate different dimensions of what is not easily exchangeable. They are not only something that people participate in: they also shape people's mode of being in the world. You do not change your religion as you change your shirt, and when you convert to another religion (or to none), it has a profound impact on how you see and relate to others and yourself. Therefore, the pragmatic aspect of religious plurality needs to be addressed as not only a theological or doctrinal issue but also as one that has implications for a person's way of living.[46] Arendt's insistence on seeing plurality as manifest in speech and action is a reminder that underscores this point.

However, Arendt's insistence on plurality also entails that a Christian understanding of God cannot be developed from a contemporary perspective unless one

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[42] "Thus, political freedom is distinct from philosophic freedom in being clearly a quality of the I-can and not of the I-will. Since it is possessed by the citizen rather than by man in general, it can manifest itself only in communities, where the many who live together have their intercourse both in word and in deed regulated by a great number of rapports-laws, customs, habits, and the like. In other words, political freedom is possible only in the sphere of human plurality, and on the premise that this sphere is not simply an extension of the dual I-and-myself to a plural We. Action, in which a We is always engaged in changing our common world, stands in the sharpest possible opposition to the solitary business of thought, which operates in a dialogue between me and myself." Arendt, *The Life of the Mind*, 200.

[43] Some of the points that follows are more extensively developed in Jan-Olav Henriksen, *Religious Plurality and Pragmatist Theology Openness and Resistance*, Currents of Encounter (Leiden Boston: Brill Rodopi, 2019).

[44] I admit that this approach seems to be somewhat contrary to how Arendt sees theology in both OT, 468f., and in "Religion and Politics" in Arendt and Kohn, *Essays in Understanding, 1930-1954 : Formation, Exile, and Totalitarianism*. She has a more substantial approach to religion and theology in these texts, whereas my argument here focuses on more pragmatic and functional elements.

[45] A more extensive argument for this theoretical approach to religion as practice is presented in Jan-Olav Henriksen, *Religion as Orientation and Transformation : A Maximalist Theory*, Religion in Philosophy and Theology (Tübingen: Mohr Siebeck, 2017). Cf. also the definition given by C. Smith: "Religion is a complex of culturally prescribed practices, based on premises about the existence and nature of superhuman powers, whether personal or impersonal, which seek to help practitioners gain access to and communicate or align themselves with these powers, in hopes of realizing human goods and avoiding things bad." Christian Smith, *Religion : What It Is, How It Works, and Why It Is Still Important* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2017). 22.

[46] In contemporary philosophy of religion, this way of thinking about religion as a mode of being in the world, of a "life-form", has by most been developed in the wake of Wittgenstein and his reflections in *Culture and Value*. Much of what I do in the following could have been elaborated further by references to that 'tradition', but space does not permit. See Ludwig Wittgenstein et al., *Culture and Value* (Oxford: Blackwell, 1980), 64., and more extensively with reference to religion D. Z. Phillips, *Belief, Change and Forms of Life* (Basingstoke: Macmillan, 1986); D. Z. Phillips and Mario Von der Ruhr, *Religion and Wittgenstein's Legacy* (Aldershot: Ashgate, 2005).

takes into consideration the multi-religious context. This situation requires some fundamental philosophical consideration that aims at a fundamental ethics. Such ethics is part of what constitutes a theology that acknowledges religious otherness as irrelevant for ascribing or rejecting peoples' right to have rights. In her elaborations on the problems with defining religious identity, Jeanine Hill Fletcher refers to Iris Marion Young who describes the problems with defining an identity. Identity, as

> a closed totality, always depends on excluding some elements, separating the pure from the impure. Bringing particular things under a universal essence, for example, depends on determining some attribute of particulars as accidental, lying outside the essence. Any definition or category creates an inside/outside distinction, and the logic of identity seeks to keep those borders firmly drawn.[47]

Moreover, Fletcher points out that the problem with identity is not only constituted by how Christians relate to others. She writes:

> When Christian theologians argue for a similarity among Christians that distinguishes them from non-Christians, it is at the expense of the diversity one might find within Christianity itself. This erasure of particularity within the collective is the first outcome of employing a logic of identity. A second and simultaneous outcome is the distancing of otherness. By creating a collective identity to be shared by those within the category in distinction to those outside the category, the logic of identity forges intra-religious solidarity through the very process of distancing otherness.[48]

Since a statement like "I am Christian" means different things to different people, it is more important to state precisely why *and how* you are a Christian – and not something else. What are your commitments, and how do they shape your points of orientation and contribute to visions of transformation? Only against the backdrop of answering such questions does it make sense to develop a clear identity in relation to the religious other that is not too abstract, generic, or reified, thereby allowing for an understanding of them in their actual and dynamic mode of being. Given the dynamic and contextual character of Christianity, one needs to decide what type of Christianity to develop in reference to the religious other – what commonalities and what differences can be recognized.

We can understand religious traditions in analogy with how we understand the development of human identity: as a relational process where the Other is of vital significance for what I become, and for the resources available for my being in the world.[49] This approach follows from the relational character of human existence. Understanding the development of a specific religion's identity also requires profound insight into others. That requires plurality. Moreover, when religious traditions develop, they do so because of, and concerning, specific experiences and challenges with which they need to come to terms, and among these are also the presence of other religious traditions.

All religious traditions are engaged in identity work. This work is not possible to undertake unless you have a relationship with someone else. Levinas is perhaps the

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[47] Jeannine Hill Fletcher, *Monopoly on Salvation? : A Feminist Approach to Religious Pluralism* (New York ; London: Continuum, 2005), 84. The quote from Young can be found in Iris Young, "The Ideal of Community and the Politics of Difference," *Social Theory and Practice* 12, no. 1 (1986).

[48] Hill Fletcher, *Monopoly on Salvation? : A Feminist Approach to Religious Pluralism*. 84–85. This point is recently taken up extensively in Tim Crane, *The Meaning of Belief : Religion from an Atheist's Point of View* (Cambridge, Massachusetts: Harvard University Press, 2017).

[49] I have developed this point with reference to the role of religious symbols in human development in Jan-Olav Henriksen, *Relating God and the Self : Dynamic Interplay* (Farnham: Ashgate, 2013).

philosopher who has most profoundly explored the difficulties, challenges, and possibilities of relating to the Other. His main concern is to maintain an understanding of the Other as different in such a way that the difference is not eliminated, as it would easily lead to the Other becoming aligned to a preexisting sameness of the self who relates to him/her, just like Arendt also underscores. Like her, he claims that seeing the Other as a representation is problematic because the "other would therein dissolve into the same."[50]

Plurality is a precondition for the need to recognize, also theologically – the need for a politics that safeguards this plurality, as well as the equal right of every religious tradition to have rights to manifest themselves in speech and action. Plurality plays an undeniable role in the constitution of religious identity and selfhood. The Christian traditions are no exception in that regard. Thus, to ignore the constitutive role of the Other in the constitution of religious traditions is not only a mistake, but it means that one restricts oneself from two important features: First, one restricts oneself from the potential enrichment and expansion of one's own world that a meeting with the religious other may mean. Second, it means you cannot come to terms with how the deeply relational character of identities has contributed to developing your own tradition and identity. The elements that shape religious identity on an individual, private, or group level contribute to plurality, but this is no reason for using such identity as an argument against equal rights.

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[50] Emmanuel Levinas, *Totality and Infinity : An Essay on Exteriority* (Pittsburgh: Duquesne University Press, 1969). 38.

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Christian Ethics and Migration in Germany and the United States: Toward a Comparative Taxonomy

Gary Slater & Marianne Heimbach-Steins

Germany and the United States are the world's second and first-place destinations for migrants, respectively, and Christian ethicists in both countries have generated robust and growing literatures addressing the issue of migration. Engagement between the German and US-based communities, however, has been comparably meager. This article bridges the two literatures through a set of comparative categories for Christian-ethical projects on migration. These categories take the form of a threefold taxonomy of problems (flaws in the world that require reflection on how best to respond), approaches (ways of generating normative claims), and impulses (direction in which claims tend to move) as anchored in a Christian social-ethical distinction of stranger and neighbor. These categories are divisible into sub-categories: Approaches are divisible into scriptural-hermeneutical, cosmopolitical, and spatial-phenomenological sub-categories, and impulses are divisible into harmonizing and dismantling sub-categories. Presently only a sketch, this taxonomy encompasses German and US-based discourses while revealing characteristics unique to each discourse, thus helping to map points of connection across the German and US-based scholarly communities as a basis for an expanded scholarly exchange.

Introduction

Germany and the United States are the world's second and first-place destinations for international migrants, respectively.[1] Both countries' histories are shaped significantly by migration, even if this has been the case in each country in a distinct way. In Germany, which has a long history of emigration, a national self-conception of the country as a major migration destination has emerged comparatively recently—even if large-scale immigration has characterized the Federal Republic across the entirety of its history.[2] In

[1] Hein De Haas, Stephen Castles, and Mark J. Miller, *The Age of Migration: International Population Movements in the Modern World,* 6th edition (New York: Guilford Press, 2020), p. 39.
[2] Following the end of the Second World War, refugees and displaced persons with German origins came from regions that had become parts of Poland as borders were redrawn at the end of the war. From the late 1950s onwards, during the "Wirtschaftswunder" period, large-scale labor immigration, mostly from Southern European countries and Turkey, was initiated by the government of the Federal

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the United States, by contrast, narratives of the country as a destination for migration have been a much more fundamental and longstanding part of the national self-conception. These narratives have often been idealistic. However, darker variants have also been present, and these have increased dramatically in public prominence and become more apocalyptic since Donald Trump's first presidential campaign launched in 2015. Historical differences aside, migration is a major topic of political debate within both countries, as well as a profound moral challenge. In light of the politicization, ideologization, and securitization of migration that has characterized not just Germany and the US, but many other countries, as well, it is unsurprising that the topic has captured the attention of ethicists, including scholars of Christian social ethics.[3] Nevertheless, with a few exceptions, specific bilateral exchange between the two countries in terms of migration ethics has been minimal.[4] The goal of the present article is to point toward a framework for such an exchange.

In spite of its relevance, this undertaking bears qualifying in three ways. First, there are no singular or stable "American" and "German" perspectives on migration, nor, obviously, does the simple fact of writing in either English or German confer a distinct perspective. Second, there is an asymmetrical relationship between the two countries and their respective languages because of the role of English as the international language and the US as a global hegemon. Third, as both a necessary limitation in scope and a reflection of the authors' disciplinary commitments, the present analysis focuses primarily on Christian social-ethical commentaries on migration, instead of either empirical research on migration in Germany or the United States or the liberal philosophical commentaries that are sometimes represented as the ethics of migration.[5] By articulating a set of comparative categories, we seek to initiate and structure a growing exchange between Christian social

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Republic of Germany in order to strengthen the German industrial workforce. In the German Democratic Republic, an international workforce was hired mostly from Vietnam and Mozambique, but only temporarily and with less readiness to integrate the workers into the society than it was the case in the Western German state, in which many of the foreign workers who did not return to their countries of origin brought their families. During the late 1980s and 1990s, another wave of immigrants with German (often originally Jewish) roots immigrated to Germany from the former Soviet republics. During the Balkan wars that followed the break-up of Yugoslavia in the early 1990s, civil-war refugees and asylum seekers also migrated to Germany. All of this occurred during a period in which Germany was being represented by politicians as not a migration country. For more details, see Bade, Klaus J./Oltmer, Jochen, Deutschland, in: Bade, Klaus J. (Hg.), Enzyklopädie Migration in Europa. Vom 17. Jahrhundert bis zur Gegenwart, [3]2010, Paderborn-München, 141-170; Birsl, Ursula: Deutschland, in: Gieler, Wolfgang/Fricke, Dietmar (Hg.): Handbuch Europäischer Migrationspolitiken. Die EU-Länder und ihre Beitrittskandidaten, Münster 2004, 31-50.

[3] Cf. Michelle Becka, 'Migration', in *Christliche Sozialethik. Grundlagen – Kontexte – Themen. Ein Lehr- und Studienbuch*, edited by Marianne Heimbach-Steins, Michelle Becka, Johannes J. Frühbauer and Gerhard Kruip (Regensburg: Pustet, 2022), pp 429-443.

[4] Exceptions include: Ruth Rubio-Marín, *Immigration as a Democratic Challenge: Citizenship and Inclusion in Germany and the United States* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2000); William Barbieri, *Ethics of Citizenship: Immigration and Group Rights in Germany* (Durham, NC: Duke University Press, 1998). Christian Henkel, *Von der Wüste Sonora zum Platz der Republik: Eine qualitative Studie zur politischen Interessenvertretung für undokumentierte MigrantInnen durch katholische Bischofskonferenzen und Nichtregierungsorganisationen in den USA und Deutschland*, (Münster 2019), online at https://nbn-resolving.de/urn:nbn:de:hbz:6-19179465655 (accessed 2024-12-29). This is a comparative study on the engagement of the Catholic Church (Bishops and volunteers) for migrants in the US and Germany.

[5] For the latter category, see, for example, David Miller, *Strangers in our Midst: The Political Philosophy of Immigration* (Cambridge, Mass.: Harvard University Press, 2016) and Andreas Cassee, *Globale Bewegungsfreiheit. Ein philosophisches Plädoyer für offene Grenzen* (Berlin: Suhrkamp, 2016).

ethicists in two of the world's most foremost immigration countries; an additional contribution is to highlight the valuable contributions of German Christian social ethicists on migration for English-speaking readers.[6]

Overview of approach

There is an old aphorism, sometimes attributed to Kant, which states that *eine gute Theorie ist das praktischste, was es gibt*.[7] To a considerable extent, this captures the present approach, which employs abstraction and taxonomizing for the sake of comparison and for devising a framework to accommodate Christian social-ethical scholarship on migration in both German and US contexts. Even if "a good theory", in the sense of a definitive account of social-ethical reasoning on migration, is not our aim, we are nonetheless interested in unpacking the reasoning by which Christian social ethicists generate their arguments about migration.

In our view, there are three particular elements that comprise Christian-ethical arguments about migration across German and US contexts: (1) problems, (2) impulses, and (3) approaches. By "problems", we mean flaws in the world that require reflection on how best to respond. By "impulses", we mean directions in which claims tend to move. By "approaches", we mean ways of generating normative claims. Broadly, these elements comprise a logical sequence, in that after problems are encountered, impulses for repairing this problem are imagined, and then approaches for achieving such a state of repair are pursued. Even if this sequence is not a blueprint that must be followed in a strict order by every ethicist writing about migration, there is nevertheless a logical coherence of this particular ordering. We employ these categories—with the categories of "impulses" and "approaches" conceived at our own initiative specifically for this project—comparatively, in order to navigate distinctions and commonalities between German and US literatures. In this way, we are able to frame what is nationally distinct (problems) within a common structure along with what is shared (impulses and approaches). Recognizing different sets of problems alongside shared impulses and approaches becomes a basis for a framework of exchange.

A fourth element, the anchoring distinction of stranger/neighbor, encompasses these three elements and structures their relations. With "anchoring distinction" understood simply as the most fundamental distinction within a given normative discourse, the claim is that stranger/neighbor is the anchoring distinction for Christian social-ethical commentaries on migration. This claim is justified on the basis of these terms' frequency in the literature and the fact that they represent a specification of the more general alien/citizen distinction.[8] Although not taken up at length within the present

[6] Original German quotations have been translated into English by the authors.
[7] In English: "A good theory is the most practical thing there is." For more on the history of this aphorism, see Arthur G. Bedeian, 'A note on the aphorism 'there is nothing as practical as a good theory", *Journal of Management History* 22:2 (2016), pp. 236-242.
[8] The stranger/neighbor distinction, as a metonym for other social relations, has always been as fundamental to Christianity and its biblical sources as has been migration. The meaning of *Apostolos*, for instance, is a "going forth" into spaces unknown. This exists against a backdrop of Christian commitments to hospitality. For a valuable history of the virtue of receiving the stranger across Christian history, see Christine D. Pohl, *Making Room: Recovering Hospitality as a Christian Tradition* (Grand Rapids, Michigan: Eerdmans, 1999). For a classic study of the importance of land within a Christian imagination, see Walter Brueggemann, *The Land: Place as Gift, Promise, and Challenge in Biblical Faith*, 2nd edition (Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 2002).

article, the stranger/neighbor anchoring distinction interacts with each of these three elements in a unique way: problems (stipulating that stranger and neighbor are alienated from one another in specific ways), impulses (visions in which stranger and neighbor are brought into redemptive relation), and approaches (bases or means for pursuing such conditions).[9]

The stranger/neighbor distinction could also theoretically frame positions in which the stranger is seen *as* the problem. This would be an accurate reflection of a considerable part of the political discourse concerning migration in both Germany and the US. When it comes to Christian commentaries on migration, however, the problem is typically not seen in terms of the presence of strangers per se so much as the vulnerability, exclusion, and suffering that migrants, as "strangers", face, as well as the challenge of better reconciling strangers and neighbors. This is our view, as well. In both Germany and the US, the present situation reveals an increasingly one-sided perception of refugees and migrants as "strangers", despite the fact that many of them *are* already "neighbors", in that they live as neighbors, participate in labor, provide help, cooperate with native citizens in many ways, and have in many cases become citizens themselves. This situation is especially urgent in the US, where, as a matter of federal policy, many such individuals have been targeted and subjected to invasive and often violent arrest, detention, and deportation at the hands of federal immigration enforcement.

Consistent with its interests in taxonomy and comparison, our approach takes a special interest in logic. Each of the key categories—problems, impulses, and approaches—has a distinct logical basis with respect to the logical forms of deduction, induction, and abduction.[10] The discernment of problems is largely inductive, in that problems are not invented by scholars but encountered as facts in the world by scholars approaching them from a specific ethical perspective. Impulses, for their part, are arrived at by the logic of deduction, in that they flow from the premises that the relationship between stranger and neighbor is currently problematic and that there are only so many forms in which this problematic relationship can be repaired. As for approaches, these are determined abductively, that is, through hypotheses that provide a durable but potentially revisable coherence for what is observed. For instance, in our engagement with the respective German and US Christian-ethical literatures on migration, we have observed within the literature a relatively small number of approaches adopted consistently. That such approaches are designated here as most important is simply a question of hypothesis—there is no reason to imagine that additional approaches might not be employed or discovered in the future.

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[9] For more on anchoring distinctions as a feature of the social ethical method, see Gary Slater 'Human/Nonhuman as Anchoring Distinction for Environmental Ethics', in *Gegen das Aus im gemeinsamen Haus! Die ökologische Krise – Paradigmenwechsel in der Christlichen Sozialethik?,* edited by Timo Hartmann, Esther Jünger, Pavlos Leußler and Alexandra Palkowitsch (Forum Sozialethik 26, Münster: Aschendorff, 2026), pages forthcoming; for stranger/neighbor as anchoring distinction for Christian social ethics on migration, see Gary Slater *Our Common, Bordered Home: Laudato si' and the Promise of an Integrated Migration-Ecological Ethics* (Leiden: Brill, 2024), pp. 43-49.

[10] Deduction and induction are classic syllogistic forms characterized, respectively, by general-to-particular and particular-to-general logical ordering, with induction predicated upon some form of observation and deduction predicated upon the ideas contained within the definitions of key terms. Abduction, for its part, is the logic of hypothesis, or inference to the best explanation. It is associated with the philosopher C.S. Peirce. See Ilkka Niiniluoto 'Peirce's Abduction and Its Interpretations', *The Oxford Handbook of Charles S. Peirce*, edited by Cornelis De Waal (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2024), pp. 208-225.

Problems

To say that migration represents a problem for Christian ethicists in both Germany and the US is uncontroversial. "Problem" can mean many things, however, and one should neither ignore a problem that is really there nor make something into a problem that is not one. Nor should one think that the problems that US scholars are writing about are the same as those of German scholars, or vice versa. In terms of categories of identity, for example, migration in Germany intersects primarily with religion (especially with regard to Islam), whereas in the US, the more salient categories concerning migration tend to be race and ethnicity (notwithstanding religious relevance, as well).[11] Such differences reflect varying social and historical contexts, in spite of features common to both countries, such as the securitization of migration or the primacy of the issue in right-wing populism.

On many issues, nationally distinct problems can be brought together under common headings, which create meaningful relations among disparate phenomena. Take "borders" as a common heading relevant to migration, for example. In Germany, the issue of borders is related to the EU context[12], and it has become a prominent topic of academic debate in Germany and the German-speaking countries in fields such as social ethics,[13] political philosophy,[14] and the social sciences.[15] The Mediterranean stands out as a particularly acute border problem, as it is one of the world's most dangerous and lethal borders for migrants.[16] In the US, "the border" refers almost exclusively to the US-Mexican border, which is not only the single most significant flow of migrants in the contemporary

[11] For further support for this claim within a larger comparative study of migration and identity, see Richard Alba and Nancy Foner, *Strangers No More: Immigration and the Challenges of Integration in North America and Western Europe* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2015). See also Daniel Bogner, 'Wechselseitige Irritation. Kann Religion eine Integrationsressource sein?', in *Zerreißprobe Flüchtlingsintegration*, edited by Marianne Heimbach-Steins (Freiburg i. Br.: Herder, 2017), pp. 149-162; Hansjörg Schmid, 'Hindernis oder Ressource? Die Rolle des Islams für die Integration von Flüchtlingen', in *Zerreißprobe Flüchtlingsintegration*, edited by Marianne Heimbach-Steins (Freiburg i. Br.: Herder, 2017), pp. 163-174.

[12] Markus Babo, 'Zwischen staatlichem Souveränitätsanspruch und menschenrechtlichen Anforderungen. Migrationspolitik in der Wertegemeinschaft EU', *Amosinternational. Internationale Zeitschrift für christliche Sozialethik* 18:1 (2024), pp. 12-19; Marianne Heimbach-Steins, 'Grenzenlose Offenheit oder begrenzte Verantwortung? Ethische Wegmarken europäischer Flucht- und Migrationspolitik', in *Die EU als ethisches Projekt im Spiegel ihrer Außen- und Sicherheitspolitik*, edited by Alexander Merkl and Bernhard Koch (Münster/Baden-Baden, 2018), pp. 225-249; Christof Mandry, 'Zwischen Verantwortung und Versagen. Die gemeinsame Asyl- und Zuwanderungspolitik der Europäischen Union', in *Begrenzt verantwortlich? Sozialethische Positionen in der Flüchtlingskrise,* edited by Marianne Heimbach-Steins (Freiburg i. Br.: Herder, 2016), pp. 134-145; Petr Stica, 'Risse im europäischen Haus? Eine sozialethische Begehung angesichts aktueller Konflikte um Flüchtlingsaufnahme und Grenzpolitiken', in *Begrenzt verantwortlich? Sozialethische Positionen in der Flüchtlingskrise,* edited by Marianne Heimbach-Steins (Freiburg i. Br.: Herder, 2016), pp. 146-159.

[13] Walter Lesch, *Kein Recht auf ein besseres Leben? Christlich-ethische Orientierung in der Flüchtlingspolitik* (Freiburg i. Br.: Herder, 2016), pp. 15-45; Lukas Schmitt, *Von Grenzen, Menschen und Mauern. Migrationsethische Perspektiven in der globalisierten Weltgesellschaft.* (Freiburg i. Br. Herder, 2022).

[14] For example, see Julian Nida-Rümelin, *Über Grenzen denken. Eine Ethik der Migration.* (Hamburg: edition Körber-Stiftung, 2017); Adrian Papenhagen, *Eine Stufentheorie der Migrationsethik* (Ethik in den Sozialwissenschaften 7), (Baden-Baden: Nomos, 2024).

[15] Volker M. Heins, *Offene Grenzen für alle: Eine notwendige Utopie* (Hamburg: Hoffmann und Campe, 2021); Volker M. Heins, Frank Wolff, *Hinter Mauern: Geschlossene Grenzen als Gefahr für die offene Gesellschaft* (Berlin: edition suhrkamp, 2023); Steffen Mau, *Sortiermaschinen: Die Neuerfindung der Grenze im 21. Jahrhundert* (München: C.H. Beck, 2021).

[16] Reese Jones, *Violent Borders: Refugees and the Right to Move* (London: Verso, 2017), pp. 12-28.

world, but also, at more than 12 million, the single largest number of undocumented migrants.[17]

Another common heading is irregular migration, which is understood as migration without legal authorization. In Germany, the topic of irregular migration has risen in prominence, even as the dependence of the German economy on its migrant workforce has been comparatively overlooked.[18] In the US, irregular migration is represented as a challenge to the legal and political structures of the state as well as the cohesiveness of the nation as a people.[19] The issue also reveals contradictions in the narratives of economic interdependence and the capacity to assimilate outsiders that occupy many US national self-descriptions.

Still another heading common to both countries is that of church and state. In Germany, the practice of Church asylum stands out as an effort on the part of churches to save persons from deportation in cases where the real dangers those persons have to face when sent back to their countries of origin seem not to have been evaluated correctly in the bureaucratic process.[20] Recent conflicts between asylum-giving parishes or monasteries and the police indicate that the changing political climate will not leave the practice of church asylum untouched.[21] In the US, the Sanctuary Movement of the 1980s, which began with the sheltering of El Salvadorian immigrants by Christian churches,[22] has lived on in the form of cities and even states designated as sanctuaries of non-cooperation for

[17] Thomas Nail, *Theory of the Border* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2016), p. 181. For trenchant commentaries on this border, see Jason De León, *The Land of Open Graves: Living and Dying on the Migrant Trail* (Berkeley, CA: University of California Press, 2015). See also: Justin P. Ashworth, 'Who Are Our People? Toward a Christian Witness Against Borders', *Modern Theology* 34:4 (2018), pp. 495-518. See also: Mark Adams, Minerva Carcano, Gerald Kicanas, Kirk Smith and Stephen Talmage, *Bishops on the Border: Pastoral Responses to Immigration* (New York: Morehouse Publishing, 2013).

[18] One of the earliest social ethical studies on irregular migration in the German political context is the monograph by Andreas Fisch, *Menschen in aufenthaltsrechtlicher Illegalität: Reformvorschläge und Folgenabwägungen aus sozialethischer Perspektive* (Schriften des Instituts für Christliche Sozialwissenschaften 56) (Münster: Lit, 2007). As an illustration of the contrasting emphases on asylum that received greater attention in the previous century, see: Hans Tremmel, *Grundrecht Asyl: Die Antwort der christlichen Sozialethik* (Freiburg i. Br.: Herder, 1992).

[19] Marie Friedmann-Marquardt, 'Double Threat? Unauthorized Migration as a Global Phenomenon', in *Religious and Ethical Perspectives on Global Migration*, edited by E.W. Collier and C.R. Strain (Lanham, MD: Lexington Books, 2014), pp. 13-34, at p. 14.

[20] Church asylum as a political-ethical issue was discussed in the German-speaking context under the notion of civil disobedience, cf. Marianne Heimbach-Steins, *Menschenrechte in Gesellschaft und Kirche: Lernprozesse – Konfliktfelder – Zukunftschancen* (Mainz: Grünewald, 2001), pp. 54-72. Further contributions to the topic: Klaus Barwig and Dieter R. Bauer, *Asyl am heiligen Ort. Sanctuary und Kirchenasyl: Vom Rechtsanspruch zur ethischen Verpflichtung,* edited by Klaus Barwig and Dieter R. Bauer (Ostfildern: Schwabenverlag, 1994); Rainer Krockauer, *Kirche als Asylbewegung. Diakonische Kirchenbildung am Ort der Flüchtlinge* (Stuttgart: Kohlhammer, 1993); Dorothee Wilhelm, 'Kirchenasyl bedeutet Unterbrechung', in *Kirche und Asyl. Legitimer Widerstand im Rechtsstaat?*, edited by Muriel Kadima and Jean-Claude Huot (Zürich: NZN, 1996), pp. 51-59.

[21] Michelle Becka, 'Gedanken zum Kirchenasyl – aus aktuellem Anlass', in *feinschwarz: Theologisches Feuilleton* (2022-06-21), online at https://www.feinschwarz.net/gedanken-zum-kirchenasyl/ (accessed 2025-06-19). An influential Christian initiative is the German Ecumenical Committee on Church Asylum, see: German Ecumenical Committee on Church Asylum, *Basic Information on Church Asylum*, online at https://www.kirchenasyl.de/wp-content/uploads/2013/12/kurzinfo_englisch1.pdf (accessed 2025-07-03).

[22] See: Ann Crittenden, *Sanctuary: A Story of American Conscience and the Law in Collision* (New York: Weidenfeld & Nicholson, 1988).

migration law enforcement, even as the second Trump administration expands its deportation efforts to target foreign students and even legal US residents.[23]

One problematic issue that does not lend itself to a common heading is integration, which disproportionately applies to Germany. Germany has only relatively recently developed an explicit integration policy, although the issue has been relevant at least since the late 1950s when the systematic recruitment of migrant workers (so-called guest workers) was started. [24] The integration of migrants is thus a long-neglected task of both national politics and civil society.[25] Issues of integration raise questions on different levels. Fundamental is the legal status of a person who has not been born in the country and thus is not a native citizen. Equally important is their degree of social participation, be it in education, labor, healthcare, or social security.[26] A third dimension of integration refers to the freedom to live up to one's customs and traditions, cultural features, and religious convictions—in general, to one's own identity—and to the impact the scope of action migrants can use in order to cultivate their identities has on the identity discourses of the native residents.[27]

For ethicists in Germany or the US wishing to engage with their counterparts across the Atlantic, understanding how or whether to group problems associated with migration under common comparative headings is a necessary task. Necessary does not mean sufficient, however: A richer comparative understanding is possible, one that is facilitated by reconstructing how Christian ethicists writing about migration frame their arguments and arrive at their conclusions. A set of categories concerning the impulses and approaches of Christian-ethical engagements with migration thus bears navigating.

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[23] These policies have been justified on religious grounds, as in US Vice President J.D. Vance's Invocation, on Catholic grounds, of the principle of *ordo amoris* in assigning a preferred moral status to citizens over migrants. Vance's position was forcefully rebuked by Pope Francis in a letter to the US Bishops on February 10, 2025. The position from Francis is consistent with that of then-Cardinal Robert Prevost, now Pope Leo XIV.

[24] A crucial moment for the debate on migration was the 2015 experience of open borders and large numbers of refugees coming in —recall Angela Merkel's famous and, later on, much criticized "wir schaffen das!"—followed by a short period wherein refugees were welcomed and supported, before the public mood rapidly changed. With the change came growing opposition, open hate against "strangers" and the still-growing populist and partly extreme anti-migrant movements.

[25] A critical social ethical perspective that relies on the fact Germany has been an immigration society at least since the end of the Second World War was first elaborated by Albert-Peter Rethmann. *Asyl und Migration. Ethik für eine neue Politik in Deutschland* (Schriften des Instituts für Christliche Sozialwissenschaften 33) (Münster: Lit, 1996).

[26] Michelle Becka, 'Zugehörigkeiten, Rechte, Partizipationsmöglichkeiten. Dimensionen von Citizenship und ihre Herausforderung durch Migration', in *Ethik und Migration: Gesellschaftliche Herausforderungen und sozialethische Reflexion,* edited by Michelle Becka and Albert-Peter Rethmann (Paderborn: Schöningh, 2010), pp. 81-105; Marianne Heimbach-Steins, Grenzverläufe gesellschaftlicher Gerechtigkeit: Migration – Zugehörigkeit – Beteiligung (Paderborn: Schöningh, 2016), pp. 119-144.

[27] Walter Lesch, 'Die Ambivalenz von Identitätsdiskursen. Bausteine zu einer kosmopolitischen Ethik in einer Welt von Fremden', in *Ethik und Migration: Gesellschaftliche Herausforderungen und sozialethische Reflexion*, edited by Michelle Becka and Albert-Peter Rethmann (Paderborn: Schöningh 2010), pp. 51-66; Hille Haker, 'Identität und Migration. Ein ethischer Kommentar zu Walter Leschs Beitrag 'Die Ambivalenz von Identitätsdiskursen", in *Ethik und Migration: Gesellschaftliche Herausforderungen und sozialethische Reflexion*, edited by Michelle Becka and Albert-Peter Rethmann (Paderborn: Schöningh, 2010), pp. 67-80.

Impulses and approaches

Unlike problems, which are nationally distinct, if sometimes comparable, the impulses and approaches that characterize the literature on Christian social ethics and migration apply commonly across German and US contexts. Approaches and impulses complement each other: If, broadly put, impulses are about where an argument is trying to go, then approaches speak to where that argument comes from. In what follows, we present two impulses (harmonizing and dismantling) and three approaches (scriptural-hermeneutical, cosmopolitical, and spatial-phenomenological), with examples provided for each category.

1.1 Impulses

The category of impulses represents an answer to the simple question, "What are your arguments working toward?" We have identified two divergent impulses in the German and US literatures. These are the tendencies to extend, absorb, generalize, and reconcile the categories needed to grapple with migration—the *harmonizing* impulse—versus those that work to reveal contradictions that the illusion of consistency has concealed—the *dismantling* impulse. These impulses are rarely expressed purely and explicitly, yet they are present across the field of Christian ethics of migration. Framed in terms of stranger and neighbor, both impulses start with the conviction that, regarding migration to Germany and the US, the present relationship of strangers to neighbors requires redemption. Both impulses also recognize that the present estrangement of stranger and neighbor is a function of the juridical structures that distinguish aliens from citizens and serve as the formal basis for the political and social attitudes that subject these groups to differential treatment.

The difference between the two impulses lies in their respective normative visions for how Christians should best approach those juridical structures. The harmonizing impulse operates along a *continuity* between stranger/neighbor and alien/citizen in seeking to harmonize existing juridical structures with values and principles drawn from a Christian social-ethical tradition.[28] Conversely, the dismantling impulse presumes a *discontinuity* between stranger/neighbor and alien/citizen, working, if not to dismantle said structures, then at least to keep them at bay in welcoming the stranger and redeeming their alienation. To put it dynamically, the dismantling impulse moves down, seeking to critique the state from below, that is, from specific perspectives and spaces. This differs from the harmonizing impulse, which moves up, seeking to critique the state by helping the nation-state live up to the universalism in its promise—or, more precisely, to uphold a contextual universalism within a Christian perspective that grants a vital, if limited, role to the national state. In other words, concerning the question of how one should engage with the national state (which is widely criticized by ethicists of migration as it currently exists), the harmonizing impulse retains the state as an object of reform or improvement to a far greater extent than in the dismantling impulse.

The harmonizing impulse, even when rooted in a particular tradition or oriented toward a particular readership, tends to generate claims that are generalizing and

[28] In their being predicated on a sense of continuity between these two distinctions, harmonizing projects draw inspiration from a range of background resources. Particularly influential in this respect are the traditions of Biblically-motivated theological anthropology and universalistic understandings of ethics. For an example of the former, see Marianne Heimbach-Steins, *Grenzverläufe gesellschaftlicher Gerechtigkeit: Migration – Zugehörigkeit – Beteiligung* (Paderborn: Schöningh, 2016), pp. 62-64. For an example of the latter, see Omri Boehm, *Radikaler Universalismus* (Berlin: Propyläen Verlag, 2022).

comparably optimistic. This impulse implies that there are not only general moral goods beyond particular societies or systems but also that more and more people, including dispossessed or displaced people, can gain access to these goods. The harmonizing framework lends itself to values such as common good or dignity framed in universal terms.[29] In the German context, an example of the harmonizing impulse is evident in the work of Michelle Becka, who has written extensively about the ethics of migration from a Christian social-ethical perspective. Writing on human rights, Becka articulates the claim that "post-and decolonial critique is indispensable, but that a universal normative claim must be defended."[30] In the US context, Kristin Heyer fits among those whose work extolls a harmonizing impulse. She expresses this impulse in pointing out that the "country's immigrant nation 'celebratory narrative' underscores ideas like hospitality, liberty, and democracy", even as "legislative debates about immigration have historically centered around issues of national security, economic instrumentalism and social costs rather than human rights."[31] In its conviction that the ideas of the "celebratory narrative" are worth committing to, Heyer's account suggests the possibility of working through and perhaps refining existing political structures, a sense of possibility that qualifies Heyer's position as harmonizing rather than dismantling.

As for the dismantling impulse, the diagnosis of institutional failure runs deeper, as does the relative emphasis on injury or harm.[32] An example of the dismantling impulse at work is the exhortation that the neighbor become the stranger in order to combat estrangement, for example by way of a Christology of resident alienage.[33] In the German context, Josef Könning's work exemplifies the dismantling impulse, in that he reflects the principal limitations of a human rights-based approach to the global situation of refugees. With regard to Hannah Arendt's "right to have rights", Könning makes the point that "[t]he *right to have rights* does not appear here as the last piece in the puzzle of a human rights ethics. Rather, it is conceived as a proviso that already points to the fact that this world must be different in order to achieve the breakthrough for which the *right to have*

[29] See, for example, Graziano Battistella, 'Migration and Human Dignity: From Policies of Exclusion to Policies Based on Human Rights.' in *A Promised Land, A Perilous Journey: Theological Perspectives on Migration*, edited by D.G. Groody and G. Campese (Notre Dame: University of Notre Dame Press, 2008), pp. 177-191.

[30] Michelle Becka. 'Whose Criticism of What? Ethical Reflection On Postcolonial and Decolonial Criticism of Human Rights. *De Ethica* 9:1 (2025), pp. 57-71, at p. 58. https://doi.org/10.3384/de-ethica.2001-8819.25915757/.

[31] Kristin E. Heyer, 'Migration and Structural Injustice', in *Christian Theology in the Age of Migration*, edited by Peter Phan (Lanham, Maryland: Lexington Books, 2020), pp. 185-200, at p. 187.

[32] See William O'Neill, S.J., 'The Place of Displacement: The Ethics of Migration in the United States', in *Living With(out) Borders: Catholic Theological Ethics on the Migrations of Peoples,* edited by A.M. Brazal and M.T. Dávila (Maryknoll, New York: Orbis Books, 2016), pp. 67-77, at p. 71.

[33] See Stephan Bevans, 'Mission among Migrants, Mission of Migrants: Mission of the Church', in *A Promised Land, A Perilous Journey. Theological Perspectives on Migration*, edited by D.G. Groody and G. Campese (Notre Dame: University of Notre Dame Press, 2008), pp. 89-106, at p. 90; Craig S. Hendrickson, 'Mission in an Urban Culture of Displacement: A Missional Theology of Place for the North American Church', in *God's People on the Move. Biblical and Global Perspectives on Migration and Mission*, edited by v.T. Nguyễn and J. M. Prior (Eugene, OR: Pickwick Publications, 2014), pp. 101-115, at p. 114. Văn Thanh Nguyễn, 'Migration in the New Testament: The Quest for Home', in *Christian Theology in the Age of Migration*, edited by Peter Phan (New York: Lexington Press, 2020), pp. 69-86, at p. 75. See also Stanley Hauerwas and W. H. Willimon, *Resident Aliens: Life in the Christian Colony (expanded 25th anniversary edition)* (Nashville, Tennessee: Abingdon Press, 2014).

rights stands […]."[34] A US counterpart to Könning's work can be found in the work of Justin Ashworth's Christian ethics of migration.[35] On Ashworth's account, "Because it was the theologically dubious means inherent in finite, fallen history that enabled us to imagine our nation as a people whose enduring life we must ensure, any discussion of belonging that fails to reckon with these realities will ring hollow to those who suffer national belonging—and alienage."[36] Perspectives as Könning's and Ashworth's do not call for eliminating political considerations from Christian social-ethical engagements with migration. Yet they do display skepticism about not only existing political structures, but also received assumptions about political membership. It is this sense of distancing or discontinuity that locates such arguments within the dismantling impulse.

1.2 *Approaches*

The category of approaches refers to the repositories of normative insight from which Christian ethical arguments on migration draw. The category represents an answer to the simple question, "What is your argument based on?" Unlike impulses, which are distinguished deductively, and which present essentially fixed and limited options, approaches are variable and combinable. A given approach is not, therefore, to be associated with a whole thinker, book, or article. A given approach refers, rather, to the level of specific arguments, and multiple approaches can and do work together within common projects.

In our experience of the literature, there are three approaches that stand out with particular frequency: the *scriptural-hermeneutical*, *cosmopolitical*, and *spatial-phenomenological* approaches. Stemming again from the premise that the anchoring distinction in Christian migration ethics is stranger/neighbor, the scriptural-hermeneutical approach can be understood as seeking an adequate normative stance toward the stranger in scripture, the cosmopolitical approach as seeking to enlist categories that encompass strangers and neighbors in common and extend the blessings of neighborliness to the stranger, and the spatial-phenomenological approach as seeking to represent the sufferings of the stranger via the stranger's own experiences within specific and concrete spaces. As with the impulses surveyed above, each approach can be taken in turn, with one German and one US example for each case.

In the German context, an example of the scriptural-hermeneutical approach is the claim from Marianne Heimbach-Steins that "Biblical anthropology at the same time provides a strong motif to overcome the distinction of stranger/neighbor by relating to the basic commonality of all humans being created in the image of God."[37] In the US context, an example of the scriptural-hermeneutical approach comes from the work of Ched Myers and Matthew Colwell, who are "firmly committed to the deepest biblical traditions of, and

[34] Josef Könning, Theologische Menschenrechtsethik angesichts der globalen Flüchtlingssituation: Eine Neuorientierung in der Diskussion um das Recht, Rechte zu haben (Gesellschaft – Ethik – Religion 23) (Leiden/Paderborn: Brill Schöningh, 2024), at p. 288.
[35] Justin P. Ashworth, *Electing Citizens and Aliens: A Theology of Migrants, Borders, and Belonging*, (Ann Arbor: ProQuest LLC, 2015), p. 189.
[36] Ibid. at p. 87.
[37] Heimbach-Steins, *Grenzverläufe*, pp. 62-64; Fisch, *Menschen in aufenthaltsrechtlicher Illegalität*, pp. 103-160. German Bishops' Conference and the Council of the Protestant Church in Germany in Cooperation with the Council of Christian Churches in Germany, *Shaping Migration in a Humane Manner* (Joints Texts 27) (Bonn/Hannover 2021), online at: https://www.dbk-shop.de/media/files_public/afb7023943fa893cb6eb8da751138aa5/DBK_627001_neu.pdf (accessed 2025-06-19), pp. 73-82; 98-101.

to current expressions of, immigrant justice and 'prophetic hospitality'", which, along with the authors' own experiences with immigrants, "have taught […] that God has a special relationship with those marginalized by social and political systems and therefore that the church should as well."[38] Regarding the hermeneutical-scriptural approach, the Samaritan story stands out with particular prominence.[39] The scriptural-hermeneutical approach is the rare position in which a nationalist orientation on behalf of the state and its laws appears.[40] For example, Romans 13:1-5 is a passage commonly cited in American literature to invoke restrictions on migration.[41]

As for the cosmopolitical approach, a German example comes from Walter Lesch, who writes, "As the regulative idea of a universalist ethic, cosmopolitan responsibility is the horizon of every human being who is not a prisoner of a territory, a state, an ethnic group or a religion."[42] As for the US, Luke Bretherton articulates a "Christian Cosmopolitan Framework" that "must incorporate the fulfilment of humanity via differentiation into particular sodalities of persons that involve differences of language, kinship and territoriality and a myriad of other aspects of creation."[43] In this approach, dignity stands with particular prominence, [44] as do themes of a Christian anthropology relative to the divine,[45] which often takes the form of a critique of the state.[46] Cosmopolitical approaches also support, in some cases, a Christian defense of human rights as indigenous to the tradition.[47] Perhaps unsurprisingly, the cosmopolitical approach tends to appear in projects that are animated by the harmonizing impulse.

Turning to the spatial-phenomenological approach, an example in the German context comes from Ulrich Schmiedel, whose claims are grounded in the direct observation of Muslim migrants being received with a handshake at the Munich train station to

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[38] Ched Myers and Matthew Colwell, *Our God is Undocumented: Biblical Faith and Immigrant Justice* (Maryknoll, NY: Orbis Books, 2012), p. 7.

[39] Pope Francis. *Fratelli tutti. On Fraternity and Social Friendship* (Rome 2020-10-03), online at https://www.vatican.va/content/francesco/en/encyclicals/documents/papa-francesco_20201003_enciclica-fratelli-tutti.html (accessed 2025-06-19), numbers 56-86. Similarly relevant are the commandments of love of the neighbor and the stranger (Lev 19,18.33f.) and the parable about the last judgment with its sentence on sheltering or not the stranger (Mt 25, 35.40.45), cf. Heimbach-Steins, *Grenzverläufe*, pp. 65-67.

[40] See, for example, James K. Hoffmeier, *The Immigration Crisis: Immigrants, Aliens, and the Bible* (Wheaton, IL: Crossway, 2009).

[41] Susanna Snyder, *Asylum-Seeking, migration, and church* (Burlington, VT: Ashgate, 2012), p. 146. It is important to clarify that Snyder is *representing* this position rather than expressing it herself.

[42] Lesch, *Kein Recht auf ein besseres Leben*, p. 161. See also Marianne Heimbach-Steins, 'Migration und Zugehörigkeit. Sozialethische Perspektiven', *Jahrbuch für Christliche Sozialwissenschaften* 51 (2010), pp 15-40.

[43] Luke Bretherton, 'The duty of care to refugees, Christian cosmopolitanism, and the hallowing of bare life', *Studies in Christian Ethics* 19:1 (2006), pp. 39-61, at p. 48. For another example, see Kanan Kitani, 'Jesus the Paradigmatic Migrant', in *Christian Theology in the Age of Migration*, edited by Peter Phan (Lanham, Maryland: Lexington Books, 2020), pp. 129-150.

[44] See, for example, William A. Barbieri, 'The Migrant Imago: Migration and the Ethics of Human Dignity,' in *Christian Theology in the Age of Migration*, edited by Peter Phan (Lanham, Maryland: Lexington Books, 2020), pp. 169-184.

[45] See, for example, Bretherton, 'The duty of care to refugees'; M. Daniel Carroll R. (Rodas), *Christians at the Border: Immigration, the Church, and the Bible* (Grand Rapids, Michigan: Baker Academic, 2008).

[46] Matthew Soerens and Jenny Hwang Yang, *Welcoming the Stranger: Justice, Compassion and Truth in the Immigration Debate* (Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity Press, 2009), p. 90.

[47] Daisy L. Machado, Bryan S. Turner and Trygve Wyller, 'Traces of a Theo-Borderland', in *Borderland Religion: Ambiguous Practices of Difference, Hope, and Beyond*, edited by Daisy L. Machado, Bryan S. Turner, and Trygve Wyller (Abingdon: Routledge, 2018), pp. 3-14, at p. 6.

formulate a critique of common framings for migration in Germany and suggest the possibility of interfaith exchange. "Drawing on the scene at the station", Schmiedel writes, "I advocate for a re-conceptualisation of migration ethics that takes multi-faith encounters, such as the scene at the station in Munich, as a point of departure to develop and discuss the theological ethics of migration in dialogue with Muslims." [48] In the US, Miguel De La Torre likewise aims to ground an ethical response to the suffering surrounding migration in concrete spaces rather than abstract principles. As De Le Torre puts it, "What is needed is to sit with the disenfranchised in the dust (at times the literal dust of the migrant trails), accompanying their suffering."[49] In the spatial-phenomenological approach, arguments are framed in specific, experiential terms, frequently invoking such references as bodies[50], borders[51], and specific sites of encounter as occasions for hospitality.[52] One also finds here a critique of abstract conceptions of time and space that are traced in terms of their consequences in the experience of undocumented migrants in US sanctuary cities.[53]

Conclusion

It is important to be clear on what this sketch of the foregoing categories does and does not accomplish. Readers will notice that we did not comment on the relative frequency of these categories across German/US contexts. To do so would presume total familiarity with the literatures, a task well beyond the scope of the present project. Readers will also notice that we did not argue for or against any particular impulse or approach. This is a substantive position on our part, as we do not believe that any single impulse or approach should

[48] Ulrich Schmiedel, "Take Up Your Cross': Public Theology between Populism and Pluralism in the Post-Migrant Context', *International Journal of Public Theology* 13 (2019), pp. 140-162; Ulrich Schmiedel, 'What's in a Handshake? Multi-Faith Practice as a Starting Point for Christian Migration Ethics', *Studies in Christian Ethics*, 35:3 (2022), pp. 561-583, at p. 563. https://doi.org/10.1177/09539468221090401. Schmiedel draws from the postmigration approach to migration in Germany, which attends to specific performances of everyday social life to confound the binary between migrant and citizen. For Schmiedel on postmigration, see Schmiedel, 'Take Up Your Cross', at pp. 140-152. For foundational texts on postmigration, see Naika Foroutan, *Es wäre einmal deutsch: Über die postmigrantische Gesellschaft* (Berlin: Ch. Links Verlag, 2023). Naika Foroutan, *Die postmigrantische Gesellschaft: Ein Versprechen der pluralen Demokratie* (Bielefeld: transcript, 2021). Naika Foroutan, Juliane Karakayali, and Riem Spielhaus, *Postmigrantische Perspektiven: Ordnungssysteme, Repräsentationen, Kritik,* edited by Naika Foroutan, Juliane Karakayali and Riem Spielhaus (Frankfurt/NewYork: Campus, 2018). Marc Hill and Erol Yildiz, *Postmigrantische Visionen: Erfahrungen – Reflexionen – Ideen*, edited by Marc Hill and Erol Yildiz (Bielefeld: transcript, 2018).

[49] Miguel A. De La Torre, *The US Immigration Crisis: Toward an Ethics of Place* (Eugene, OR: Cascade Books, 2016), at p. 101.

[50] William O'Neill, S.J., 'The Place of Displacement: The Ethics of Migration in the United States', in *Living With(out) Borders: Catholic Theological Ethics on the Migrations of Peoples,* edited by A.M. Brazal and M.T. Dávila (Maryknoll, New York: Orbis Books, 2016), pp. 67-77, at p. 69.

[51] Carroll `R. (Rodas), *Christians at the Border*, p. 136; Slater, *Our Common, Bordered Home.*

[52] Pohl, *Making Room*, p. 95. The motif is present also in German literature, but it is commented on in an ambivalent way, with regard to the precarious notion of Germany as an immigration country, on the one hand, and the specific meaning of hospitality which means to host people for a limited time and expect them to leave afterward, on the other. Cf. Axel Bernd Kunze, Wo stößt Gastfreundschaft an Grenzen?, in *Zerreißprobe Flüchtlingsintegration*, edited by M. Heimbach-Steins (Freiburg i.Br.: Herder 2016), pp.56-69; Dominik Ritter, Gastfreundschaft und Willkommenskultur. Wen sollen wir warum und wie willkommen heißen? In *Zuflucht – Zusammenleben – Zugehörigkeit? Kontroversen der Migrations- und Integrationspolitik interdisziplinär beleuchtet*, edited by Andreas Fisch, Myriam Ueberbach, Prisca Patenge, Dominik Ritter (Forum Sozialethik 18) (Münster: Aschendorff 2017), pp. 397-427.

[53] Hendrickson, 'Mission in an Urban Culture of Displacement', p. 105.

characterize the Christian response to migration. Christians do not always speak with one voice on this or any other social issue. As contexts shift, one should never expect that a single combination of problem, impulse, and approach with a single anchoring distinction will unlock every answer. The association of a given commentary on migration with a certain impulse or approach, therefore, does not constitute an evaluation of the strengths or weaknesses of that commentary, nor does it presume to guide readers, whether self-identified Christians or not, on how to orient their thoughts and practices to respond to migration as a social-ethical issue.

What the foregoing taxonomy helps accomplish, even as a sketch, is the creation of a framework by which ethicists can recognize each other's arguments as sharing certain impulses or approaches relative to their own or, when disagreements arise, help ethicists formulate more precise critiques. In terms of the comparative dimension at the core of this project, the fact of the commonality of the categories across German and US contexts not only facilitates a mutual recognition among migration-ethical projects in both countries, but also helps clarify how not all problems that social ethicists are responding to are the same. The relation between (distinctive) problems and (common) analytical structures, in the form of impulses and approaches, suggests why the scholarly output of Christian ethicists of migration sometimes varies across the respective national contexts. Navigating this balance suggests not just the possibility of facilitating further exchange between the respective literatures, but also engagement with the fundamental questions for a Christian ethics of migration: *Who belongs? What does it mean to think of strangers and neighbors across such categories of identity? What constitutes a common identity?*

The value of reflecting on migration, an inherently international topic, in a self-consciously international way, especially for countries like the United States and Germany, which share so much even as they are also affected by such different histories, demographics, and geographic locations, is clear. In an atmosphere in which migration continues to be an ethical challenge amidst deteriorating expectations for adherence to basic liberal-democratic processes, and in which the production of new Christian social-ethical literature on migration is unlikely to abate any time soon, the building of German-US bridges is a valuable undertaking.

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Is Hegel's Philosophy an Algebra of Revolution? Rediscovering the Ethical Impulse in Political Philosophy

Eirik Hasvik

This article examines the paradox at the heart of Hegel's political legacy: how a philosopher often dismissed as an apologist for Prussian conservatism became the intellectual wellspring for radical critique, inspiring revolutionaries from Marx to Bakunin. The key to understanding this tension lies in Hegel's famous Doppelsatz—"what is rational is actual, and what is actual is rational"—which has been interpreted both as justification for the status quo and as a revolutionary call to critique. Through analysis of Hegel's Philosophy of Right and the subsequent split between right and left Hegelians, I argue that Hegel's crucial distinction between mere reality (Realität) and actuality (Wirklichkeit)—what corresponds to its rational essence—opens a critical gap for evaluating existing institutions against rational standards. Rather than relying on Hegel's specific suggestions for a political philosophy, I propose understanding his approach as offering dynamic tools for rational critique that remain vital for contemporary ethical thought. The Doppelsatz signifies not resignation to what exists, but a call to engage critically with reality and reveal how it might become more fully rational and free.

In 1841, the Prussian authorities summoned Friedrich Schelling to Berlin with an explicit mission: to "stamp out the dragon seed of Hegelian pantheism."[1] Yet by then it was too late. In the audience for Schelling's inaugural lecture sat three young men who would personify the very revolutionary currents Prussia feared: Søren Kierkegaard, Mikhail Bakunin, and Friedrich Engels—progenitors of existentialism, anarchism, and Marxism. How had Hegel, often dismissed as an apologist for Prussian conservatism, become the intellectual wellspring for radical critique? The Russian revolutionary Alexander Herzen captured this paradox when he declared Hegel's dialectics to be "the algebra of revolution"—a fearsome intellectual weapon that "vaporized everything that existed" and left "not one stone upon another of the Christian world."[2]

[1] Terry Pinkard, *Hegel: A Biography* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 2000), p. 662.
[2] Alexander Herzen, *My Past and Thoughts: The Memoirs of Alexander Herzen* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1982), pp. 641-642n11.

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This tension at the heart of Hegel's legacy demands our attention. Was Hegel a conservative philosopher providing philosophical cover for the Prussian state, or was he—perhaps despite himself—articulating principles that would inspire generations of radical reformers and revolutionaries? The question is not merely of historical interest. Today, as we confront profound challenges to democratic institutions, social freedom, and rational discourse, Hegel's political philosophy offers resources we can ill afford to ignore.

The key to understanding Hegel's enduring relevance lies in his famous *Doppelsatz*—his bold declaration that "what is rational is actual, and what is actual is rational."[3] This statement has been interpreted both as a justification for Prussian conservatism and as a source of revolutionary critique. Indeed, the immediate split between the "right" and "left" Hegelians following his death in 1831 attests to the profound tension at the heart of his thought.[4] Rather than reading Hegel as either a reactionary apologist or a revolutionary prophet, I propose we understand his political philosophy as offering dynamic tools for rational critique. I argue that Hegel's philosophy, properly understood, contains a powerful ethical impulse—a commitment to rational critique and social transformation that remains vital for contemporary political thought.[5] This impulse flows from Hegel's crucial distinction between mere "reality" (*Realität*)—what merely exists—and "actuality" (*Wirklichkeit*)—what corresponds to its rational essence. This distinction opens a critical gap between what is and what ought to be, providing grounds for evaluating existing institutions against rational standards.

In what follows, I examine Hegel's political philosophy as developed in the *Philosophy of Right*, tracing how his followers grappled with competing interpretations of his legacy, and explore what his approach offers for contemporary ethical and political thought. My aim is to recover the ethical impulse in Hegel's philosophy—not as a fixed doctrine, but as a living resource for rational critique and social transformation.

Hegel's Political Philosophy

The Philosophy of Right was first published in 1821, based on a series of lectures Hegel had presented at the universities of Heidelberg and Berlin. This work is not the only one in which Hegel discusses explicit political issues: he commented on contemporary politics throughout his academic career, as seen in his work on "The German Constitution," which he wrote early in his career, and in his "On the English Reform Bill," which he wrote at the very end of his life.[6] Still, the *Philosophy of Right* is by far the most systematic overview of his political ideas—it is concerned with how objective spirit becomes concrete within relations of law, morality, and ethics—and he intended it to fit squarely within his broader philosophical corpus.

[3] G.W.F. Hegel, *Elements of the Philosophy of Right*, edited by Allen W. Wood, translated by H.B. Nisbet. Cambridge, UK: Cambridge University Press, 1991, p. 20.

[4] The Hegelian movement also fielded a substantial "centrist" tendency, although this position has not attracted the same posterior attention as have the "right" and the "left." See John Edward Toews, *Hegelianism: The Path Toward Dialectical Humanism, 1805-1841* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 1980), pp. 71-155, 203-242.

[5] By "impulse" I mean something weaker than a fixed doctrine and stronger than a mere opinion: a standing pressure—rooted, as we will see, in the properly active sense of *Wirklichkeit* itself—that requires any given social order to demonstrate its rational credentials rather than simply persist.

[6] See G.W.F. Hegel, *Political Writings*, edited by Laurence Dickey and H.B. Nisbet, translated by H.B. Nisbet (Cambridge, UK: Cambridge University Press, 1999), pp. 6-101, 234-270.

The *Philosophy of Right* pays homage to the promise of subjective freedom, which Hegel regarded as a genuinely progressive feature of modernity. Hegel follows Kant in distinguishing between legality and morality, but he departs radically from how Kantian moral philosophy insists on the personal autonomy of judgment. Kant locates morality within every individual, and, in his opinion, individuals who are free from corrupting influences will be able to make true and proper judgments on their own. Hegel, by contrast, insists that judgments and subjectivity develop in a social context, and without reciprocity or recognition no moral judgments are possible. Kant's autonomous subject is an abstraction and "purely formal," he argues, and it cannot offer any effective criterion or guidelines for evaluating the judgment's content. From early on in his engagement with Kant, Paul Franco writes, Hegel insisted that "the universality of Kantian virtue is always purchased at the expense of particularity."[7] Still, Hegel considers both universal civic rights as well as subjective morality to constitute important steps in the progression from the abstract to the concrete. "The sort of unity Hegel calls concrete is meant to be a 'higher unity,' one that preserves and embraces division, conflict, and otherness."[8]

Hegel's political philosophy can be read as an attempt to situate modern subjectivity within a social ontology, though, as I note below in discussing *Sittlichkeit*, whether Hegel intends anything so systematic as an "ontology" in its strict sense, rather than a theory of ethical agency, is itself disputed, and he introduces the *Philosophy of Right* by discussing the metaphysical basis for free will, which he essentially equates to freedom: If the will is free, then "freedom constitutes its substance and destiny."[9] He dismisses commonplace conceptions of free will as one-sided and incomplete. We ought rather to speak about self-determination than will, he suggests, to convey properly the totality of human freedom. Self-determination, for Hegel, is the process in which human beings articulate their true essence: Human beings *an-sich* already contain freedom, which is the essence of their will. But their will must moreover become freedom *für-sich*, they must express their freedom to the world through their acts, as free human beings. In that sense, to become truly free the will must project an image of human beings as they *should be* and make those values *their own*—only then can individuals actualize freedom *an-und-für sich*. Human self-determination, then, is not based on the "self-dependence" that Kant postulated, but on a reflective social dependence.[10] Society is necessary for human agency because it provides the ethical standards against which individuals can evaluate themselves and their moral judgments. This is not a digression from the essay's main line of argument: the same movement—from implicit possibility, through externalization in action, to a self-conscious and actualized unity—recurs in the *Doppelsatz*, notably in the contested identification of the rational with the actual, discussed below.

Freedom, then, is understood as the unity of the particular self and the social, ethical self: only in and through society can an individual become truly free. But before we can arrive at that conclusion, Hegel guides us through a veritable *Bildungs*-process, where

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[7] Paul Franco, *Hegel's Philosophy of Freedom* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1999), p. 44. See also Hegel, *Philosophy of Right*, §136-138.

[8] Michael O. Hardimon, *Hegel's Social Philosophy: The Project of Reconciliation* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 1994), p. 40.

[9] "The abstract concept of the Idea of the will is in general *the free will which wills the free will*." Hegel, *Philosophy of Right,* §27, emphasis in original.

[10] This terminology is Charles Taylor's. See Charles Taylor, *Hegel and Modern Society* (Cambridge, UK: Cambridge University Press, 1979), pp. 156-61.

we go from the most abstract perceptions of will and rights, to the more elaborate forms of freedom as it is expressed in social relations and in the sovereign state.

Hegel structures the *Philosophy of Right* as a progression through three moments. "Abstract right" is the dawning realm of legality, in which persons attain formal recognition as equals through property, contract, and a shared commitment to lawful coexistence—"the person is the individuality of freedom in pure being-for-itself."[11] "Morality" locates freedom in the rational agent's own judgment: against Kant and Fichte, Hegel insists that conscience develops only because every moral agent is already situated within a social nexus, oriented from the outset within an ethical universe. Finally, Hegel deals with *Sittlichkeit*—usually translated as "ethical life." *Sittlichkeit* denotes the communal context in which ethical attitudes, norms, and customs develop and flourish. *Sittlichkeit*, it should be stressed, is not simply coextensive with "the state": family and civil society are no less its moments than strictly political institutions. The standard rendering of *Sittlichkeit* as "ethical life" can obscure that Hegel's ethics and his political theory, while systematically integrated, are not identical terms. I treat them here as internally related rather than as separate domains, since it is precisely Hegel's refusal to hive political philosophy off from a more general theory of freedom's actualization that grounds the critical potential this essay is tracing. More specifically, his dialectical analysis explains how ethical life expresses itself as individuals find a higher unity in family relations, civil society, and the state. Even in his earlier writings, Hegel had used *Sittlichkeit* to describe the ethical life of the ancient world, notably in the Greek *poleis*, which had a substantial and ethical concept of freedom, while they had no substantial concept of subjectivity, that is, of personal freedom.[12] In fact, the *Philosophy of Right* concludes with a section on how morality (and ethics) has developed through history, and he claims that the highest historical stage expressed itself through the political forms of German culture.[13] Before we dismiss his views as outdated and Eurocentric, which they obviously are, it is worth noting how he sought to integrate civic virtues in political institutions. In the modern world, Hegel argued, it was possible to actualize a synthesis of formal rights, personal morality, and an ethical community; to actualize *personal* freedom and *moral* freedom, as well as *social* freedom. We can characterize Hegel's concept of *Sittlichkeit* as a "realm of actualized freedom."[14] It is important to capture the full meaning of Hegel's description here: As philosopher Frederick Neuhouser points out, "Hegel's claim is not simply that the rational social order brings about the social conditions that make freedom possible; rather, *Sittlichkeit* is itself said to be an actualization, a making real, of freedom."[15]

The *Philosophy of Right* is Hegel's explicit attempt to not only describe the social preconditions for moral agency but also delineate the concrete institutional structures that

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[11] Hegel, *Philosophy of Right*, §35a.

[12] Freedom for the ancient Greeks, Hegel claimed, was "substantial" and "ethical" because the individual found identity through involvement, indeed immersion, in the *polis*. Their will and their actions were shaped by the city's laws and traditions and laws, in marked contrast to modern subjective freedom, which is based on individual self-interest and rational choice.

[13] Hegel, *Philosophy of Right*, §341-360. By German culture, Hegel refers to the modern, Central-European nation-states, not strictly the German territories. Hegel's historical perspective profoundly informs his political theory and is more fully developed in his lectures on the philosophy of history. See G.W.F. Hegel, *Introduction to the Philosophy of World History*, translated by H.B. Nisbet (Cambridge, MA: Cambridge University Press, 1975), particularly pp. 124-151, 194-209.

[14] Hegel, *Philosophy of Right*, §4.

[15] Frederick Neuhouser, *Foundations of Hegel's Social Theory: Actualizing Freedom* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 2000), p. 18.

could embody an ethical political order. In contrast to the liberals of his day, Hegel was not fearful of endowing the state and the community with too great powers; in his eyes, individuals in the modern world suffer far greater from social "indeterminacy."[16] Hegel's political project has been defined as an attempt to counter the "pathologies of individual freedom."[17] To complement and fulfill the modern promise of subjective freedom, Hegel argues, society must provide a rational institutional and cultural framework that individuals can understand and identify with. Hegel is very explicit about what he considers rational social institutions: they are intelligible structures in which an individual can "be at home," that is, whose values can be comprehended, internalized, and harmonized with the demands of subjectivity and personal freedom. He identifies this with how a person's individual self-worth is transcended in familial love, how personal material interests can be collectively transcended through civic (*Bürgherlichen*) corporations and estates, and how personal political engagement is transcended through Hegel's prescriptions of what is essentially a modern nation-state.[18] The state is necessary, Hegel explains, because "the destiny of individuals is to lead a universal life."[19]

It is helpful here to take the historical predicament of Prussia and the German territories in Hegel's time into account: a state whose progressive reform movement Hegel was sympathetic to, but whose absolutist, monarchical structure sat uneasily beside the constitutional advances of the French Revolution and the Napoleonic Wars. As we will see later, the *Philosophy of Right* was often interpreted as accommodationist and conservative, if not outright subservient to Prussian absolutism. Indeed, the *Philosophy of Right* should be interpreted within its historical context, something Hegel himself predicted when he wrote his memorable lines: "When philosophy paints its grey in grey, a shape of life has grown old, and it cannot be rejuvenated, but only recognized, by the grey in grey of philosophy; the owl of Minerva begins its flight only with the onset of dusk."[20] In the *Philosophy of Right*, Hegel is at great pains to distance himself from utopianism and political radicalism. The ethical social order he envisions is not simply philosophical musings over how society "ought to be": quite to the contrary, Hegel insists any "ought" must be anchored in the historical realities and the political traditions of a given culture.[21] Attempts to change the state according to pure reason or universal moralism are patently dangerous, he warns. No man can "leap over Rhodes" or step outside of history; the best we can hope for is to philosophically grasp our "shape of life." As every individual is a child of his time,

[16] Hegel, *Philosophy of Right*, §4-8. This analysis is furthered by modern communitarians. See, for example, Taylor, *Hegel and Modern Society*, pp. 154-69.
[17] A pivotal problem for Hegelian politics, Honneth claims, is Hegel's urge to compensate for these pathologies by the "over-institutionalization" of "ethical life." Axel Honneth, *The Pathologies of Social Freedom: Hegel's Social Theory* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2001), pp. 63-80.
[18] To be sure, the nature of the Hegelian state is contested. Despite its authoritarian ring at times, it can also be associated with a liberal, republican state. In a pioneering study, Shlomo Avineri contributed to the reappraisal of Hegel's political aspirations; in this work he associates Hegel, broadly speaking, with social democracy. See Shlomo Avineri, *Hegel's Theory of the Modern State* (London: Cambridge University Press, 1972).
[19] Hegel, *Philosophy of Right*, §258r.
[20] Hegel, *Philosophy of Right*, p. 23.
[21] In response to this, philosopher Rebecca Comay wryly comments that "The task of philosophy is to mark the anachronism of the present-day," For Hegel, "Actuality (*Verwirklichung*) in this sense can mean nothing other than the *deactivation* of the existent and the reactivation and reenactment (of every sense) of the thwarted futures of the past." Rebecca Comay, *Mourning Sickness: Hegel and the French Revolution* (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 2011), pp. 143-145.

Hegel memorably claims, "philosophy, too, is *its own time comprehended in thoughts*."[22] Even if we accept Hegel's conclusion here, the perennial question remains whether we as individuals simply ought to reconcile ourselves with our social destiny or whether our rationality can pose demands on the social order. This question, as we shall see, was to torment Hegel's followers. The fracture that followed is not merely of biographical interest. It is the historical proof that the ambiguity built into the *Doppelsatz* carried real political stakes, and not only interpretive ones: each faction inherited the same formula and drew opposite institutional conclusions from it.

Hegelianism—and its splintering

When Hegel accepted a prominent university position in Berlin in 1818, his philosophical prestige was second to none: The "beginnings of the 1820s saw Hegel's philosophy increasingly establishing itself in Prussia as something like the official philosophy of state, with a monopoly of influence essentially guaranteed by the continued favor and support of the government."[23] But his influential, indeed revered, position was a precarious one.

At the time of Hegel's death, on November 14th, 1831, the Hegelian movement immediately began to disintegrate, as leading disciples "began to fight among themselves and even with Hegel's sons about the meaning of Hegel's legacy."[24] Because of these conflicts, the very possibility of a comprehensive and consistent philosophical system seemed increasingly illusory, and Hegel's reputation quickly plummeted. To be sure, this disintegration was not only because of internal disagreements but also because of the remarkable rise of the natural sciences, which made Hegel's attempt to categorize the totality of natural knowledge within the bounds of anything like an "encyclopedia of the philosophical sciences" quaint. Eventually, "Hegel's authority simply and quickly evaporated" from Prussian universities.[25] At any rate, Horst Althaus adds, "as far as the University and its students at least were concerned, the times themselves had long since begun to overtake Hegel."[26]

Still, it is not correct to assume that petty personal squabbles caused the dissensus and disintegration, nor that broader historical events and scientific trends simply overtook Hegelianism. Some disagreements point to significant differences in philosophical orientation, with increasingly explicit political consequences. Historian John Toews points out that the rifts between various strands of Hegelian interpretation did not emerge suddenly after Hegel's death, but was already simmering under the exhilarating "mass conversion" to Hegelianism in the 1820s, which had seemed to promise its disciples a "resolution of all the major conflicts of human existence, a reconciling recognition of the

[22] Hegel, *Philosophy of Right*, p. 21, emphasis in original.
[23] Horst Althaus, *Hegel: An Intellectual Biography* (Cambridge, UK: Polity Press, 2000), p. 158.
[24] This rapid process is vividly portrayed in Pinkard, *Hegel*, pp. 661-663. Indeed, it may be that this disintegration had started while Hegel was alive; biographer Horst Althaus even suggests that Hegel's death was precipitated by a political conflict with his talented disciple, Eduard Gans. See Althaus, *Hegel*, p. 273.
[25] Pinkard, *Hegel*, p. 661.
[26] Althaus, *Hegel*, p. 274. Revisiting the debates of the 1830s and 1840s, Breckman points out that "Hegelianism never enjoyed unchallenged dominion in German intellectual life, not even in Prussia." Warren Breckmann, *Marx, the Young Hegelians, and the Origin of Radical Social Theory: Dethroning the Self* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 1999), p. 17.

identity of reason and reality, self and community, man and God."[27] As became increasingly evident, not *all* social conflicts were easily resolved, and there emerged different interpretations of the "historical relationship between the universal structures of reason and the phenomenal reality in which reason articulated its self-determinations."[28] Toward the end of the 1820s, three distinct trends could be discerned, which responded differently to this historical conundrum: The Hegelian movement increasingly divided into a right, a left, and a center.[29]

The first tendency, which came to be known as the Hegelian right, was "accommodationist."[30] In political terms, it asserted with confidence that the administrative, judicial, and political system of the Prussian state already represented the constitutional embodiment of reason in the world, as "the actuality of the absolute spirit as fully present."[31] Reality, to them, was already rational, and it was the philosophers' responsibility to grasp this rationality of the real. Influential public figures like Johannes Schulze, Leopold von Henning, and Phillip Marheineke represented the right-wing Hegelians.

The second tendency adopted a "critical-reformist" stance to reality: they recognized the progressive actualization of reason in the legacies of the French Revolution, Napoleonic codification, and Prussian reforms, but acknowledged that such an "essential" reality conflicted with the "appearances" of real political experience. Reality, for this Hegelian center, was not a completed process, but a dynamic one, which direly needed "philosophical comprehension provided the general principles for reformist activity," in order to "making appearances conform to the 'essential' reality of actualized reason."[32] This group included several of Hegel's closest associates and students, among them Eduard Gans, Carl Ludwig Michelet, and Karl Rosenkranz. For these thinkers, Hegel was essentially a theorist of the modern, liberal, and constitutional state.[33]

The third tendency, the nascent left, adopted a critical utopian or even revolutionary stance: they transformed Hegel's conceptual structures "from a history comprehended into a program for future action; the actuality of the absolute in self-conscious freedom became not a presupposition of knowledge but the object of constructive historical practice."[34] At first, this leftist tendency existed only on the very fringes of Hegelian movement, represented by figures like Friedrich W. Carové, Ludwig Feuerbach, David F. Strauss, and Bruno Bauer, but their influence would increase and become increasingly radical, as seen in the political trajectories of Arnold Ruge, Moses

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[27] John Edward Toews, "Transformations of Hegelianism, 1805-1846," in Frederick Beiser (ed.), *The Cambridge Companion to Hegel* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 1993), p. 387.
[28] Toews, "Transformations of Hegelianism," p. 387.
[29] In the 1830s, David F. Strauss would be the first to use this specific classification, clearly borrowed from French political terminology. And only later would Moses Hess explicitly link left Hegelianism to political radicalism and the communist movement. Allen W. Wood, "Hegel and Marxism," in Beiser (ed.), *Cambridge Companion to Hegel*, p. 414. Still, a strict classification along such ideological lines have been considered as problematic as the generational dividing lines between "Old" and "Young Hegelians." See Toews, *Hegelianism*, pp. 71-97, 205, 220, 217-242.
[30] Toews, *Hegelianism*, pp. 95-98.
[31] Toews, "Transformations of Hegelianism," p. 388.
[32] Toews, "Transformations of Hegelianism," pp. 388-89.
[33] Toews devotes significant sections of his *Hegelianism* to this political "center." See Toews, *Hegelianism*, particularly pp. 71-155, 203-242. Toews claims this center was left-leaning and republican, and until his death in 1839, Gans, for one, drifted markedly to the Left, inspired by the utopianism of Saint-Simon.
[34] Toews, "Transformations of Hegelianism," p. 390.

Hess, and Karl Marx. The left Hegelians or the Young Hegelians, as they are often called, challenged the rationality of the existing state of affairs, and they used the Hegelian logic to question the historical necessity of the Prussian state, the monarchy and the estates, and the emerging capitalist system.[35]

The conflicts first seemed containable within a broad Hegelian movement. During the 1830s, however, the philosophical battle lines were first drawn over fierce theological disputes about interpreting Christianity and God, but these tendencies soon crystallized into the distinct right, left, and center. In this period, the Prussian authorities also took a series of drastic measures to create the militarist state Prussia is renowned for, and these reforms intensified the conflicts over "reality" and its "rationality." Marx captured this historical irony when he wrote that Prussia is the only country to suffer a restoration without having endured its own proper revolution; it "never found itself in the company of freedom except once—*on the day of its burial*."[36]

In 1841, Schelling was summoned to assume Hegel's old chair, with a mission to "stamp out the dragon seed of Hegelian pantheism in Berlin." By the mid-1840s, Hegelianism had ended as a distinct historical movement, and was soon to be overtaken by the more radical approaches that grew in Hegel's fertile philosophical soil. Karl Marx certainly built his theories upon a Hegelian framework.[37] So too did the Russian anarchist, Mikhail Bakunin, whose statement that "the urge to destroy is a creative urge" is attributed to his education in dialectics.[38]

While the conflicts between the right and the left became by far the most significant during the late 1830s and early 1840s, and the Hegelian movement had all but disappeared, there remained a steadfast tendency that was committed to progressive reforms. These reformists continued to see Hegel as a guide for their aspirations. But their task became increasingly difficult. In 1857, Rudolf Haym published his influential Hegel study, *Hegel und seine Zeit*, which presented the philosopher as a parochial apologist for Prussian absolutism. Haym's image of Hegel would fundamentally shape the popular perception of Hegel, and the liberal reformers who had defended Hegel's progressive ideas—now seemingly against Hegel himself—gradually came to accept Haym's presentation, and their numbers dwindled to nothing.[39]

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[35] Breckmann, *Origins of Radical Social Theory*, and Toews, "Transformations of Hegelianism," pp. 389-90.

[36] Karl Marx, "Contribution to the Critique of Hegel's Philosophy of Law: Introduction," in Karl Marx and Friedrich Engels, *Collected Works: Volume 3, 1843-1844* (Moscow: Progress Publishers, 1975), p. 177, emphasis in original.

[37] Tom Rockmore even argues that Marx never truly severed his ties to German Idealism, although this is a claim that is, to put it mildly, controversial. See Tom Rockmore, *In Kant's Wake: Philosophy in the Twentieth Century* (Malden, MA: Blackwell, 2006), pp. 53, 55. Rockmore argues that Marx and Engels substantially differed in their philosophical approach. What *is* generally acknowledged today, however, is that the relationship between Hegel and Marx is far more nuanced than the classical account suggests, where Marx broke fundamentally with German idealism when he "turned Hegel on his head." Robert Fine, *Political Investigations: Hegel, Marx, Arendt* (London: Routledge, 2001), pp. 79-89. Even Marxists today speak of "the myth of Hegel as the idealist who has everything upside down." See, for instance, David MacGregor, *The Communist Ideal in Hegel and Marx* (Toronto: Toronto University Press, 1984), p. 3.

[38] Brian Morris, *Bakunin: The Philosophy of Freedom* (Montréal: Black Rose, 1996).

[39] For a recent and somewhat more nuanced version of Haym's criticism, see Ernst Tugendhat, *Self-Consciousness and Self-Determination* (Cambridge, MA: MIT Press, 1986), pp. 317-23. Still, in contemporary scholarship the consensus has tipped markedly in favor of evaluating Hegel within the mainstream of European politics. See Allen W. Wood, "Editor's Introduction," in Hegel, *Philosophy of Right*, xxxi.

These disagreements went deeper than theological disputes: they were political and essentially related to the philosophical interpretation of reality and how reason expressed itself phenomenally. The conflict between various strands of Hegelian philosophy revolved around how to interpret Hegel's perspective on actuality and its rationality.[40] It is precisely this interpretative fault line—between a Hegel who ratifies the given order and a Hegel who supplies the standard by which the given order is judged and found wanting—that the *Doppelsatz* forces us to confront directly. Therefore, before we venture into the legacy of Hegel's political philosophy, let us now have a closer look at his *Doppelsatz*.

The Real and the Actual

The *Doppelsatz states*: "What is rational is actual; and what is actual is rational."[41] This arguably encapsulates Hegel's basic conception of reason and reality, and how rationality and actuality are interrelated. It is easy, and quite common, to point out the problems in translations from German, where the main terms, *Vernünftig* and *Wirklichkeit*, are not properly carried into English as "reason" and "reality."[42] In German, Hegel distinguishes *Wirklichkeit* from *Realität* as well as from *Existenz* and *Dasein*, and these are nuances that are difficult to convey into English. But the early conflicts, we should remember, were played out in Prussia and other German territories, of which language of course would not present the same problem, as they did when various translations reached English readers.

At any rate, I believe the key to understanding what Hegel meant by these concepts is found within Hegel's corpus. Hegel's political analyses are arguably informed by his broader *Logic*, and his accessible *Encyclopedia Logic* is highly instructive in evaluating what Hegel himself meant by "rationality" and "actuality."[43] Rationality, for Hegel, is not simply "intelligibility," it carries both an epistemic and a normative aspect. And actuality is not simply reality but is defined as the "unity of essence (*Wesen*) and existence (*Existenz*)."[44] Phenomena, for Hegel, are actual (*Wirklich*) to the extent to which they manifest and correspond to their inner essence: the mere fact that something exists does not constitute a sufficient criterion. Hegel is not saying that everything that exists is rational merely by the fact that it exists. Quite to the contrary, "within his technical vocabulary, things are *by definition* real to the extent that they fulfill their essence. The essence of a thing is *defined* as its underlying rational structure."[45] Furthermore: "To the extent that things fail to live up

[40] There are plenty of other controversial statements in the *Philosophy of Right*, not the least his assertion that "the state consists in the march of God in the world." Hegel, *Philosophy of Right*, §258a. A discussion of Hegel's peculiar Christian beliefs, or of what he meant by the state in this context, falls outside of the scope of this essay. For a good discussion, see Avineri, *Hegel's Theory of the Modern State*, pp. 176-94.

[41] Hegel, *Philosophy of Right*, p. 20.

[42] The original German version reads: "*Was vernünftig ist, wirklich ist; und was wirklich ist, vernünftig ist*," which is easily translated into the Scandinavian languages. Still, the problem of defining *Wirklichkeit* against other concepts of reality persists.

[43] G.W.F. Hegel, *The Encyclopedia Logic*, translated by T.F Geraets, W.A. Suchting, and H.S. Harris (Indianapolis: Hackett, 1991), particularly his doctrine of essence, §112-159. The distinction Hegel makes between *Existenz* and *Wirklichkeit* here is also a central feature of his monumental *Science of Logic*.

[44] Hegel, *Encyclopedia Logic*, §142.

[45] Hardimon, *Hegel's Social Philosophy*, p. 55, emphasis in original. Still, the real impetus to comprehending a phenomenon, Hegel would say, comes not from definitions but from Hegel's more dynamic notion of the concept (*Begrieff*).

to their essence," Michael Hardimon explains, "they fall under the categories of "mere appearance" (*Bloße Erscheinung*) and "illusion" (*Schein*)."[46] Actuality, for Hegel, is the fundamental *unity* of a phenomenon's "inside" with its "outside": there must be a unity between the inner rational structure of a phenomenon and the external embodiment of that rational structure. In the political case, this essence is the rational content of *Sittlichkeit* already sketched above—mutual recognition, actualized freedom, the "realm" in which a person can be at home. A social order or specific political institutions correspond to their essence, and so achieve actuality, exactly to the degree that they embody these relations of recognition; a modern state that fails to express them is not, in Hegel's sense, an actual state at all.

This essence, however, is not distilled from the creative use of our speculative faculties—what Hegel would dismiss as "ideals of the imagination"—the rationality of a phenomenon would have to be grounded in reality. Still, his conceptualization of how the rational and the actual interact has profoundly *developmental* characteristics. Hardimon identifies two slightly different notions of this interaction in Hegel's earlier Heidelberg lectures, where he had defined the interaction between reason and reality as: "What is rational must happen, since on the whole its constitution is only its development," and "What is rational becomes actual, and what is actual becomes rational."[47] These versions are strikingly developmental and suggest that the future—and not the present—is the true locus of rationality. As Hegel understands reality as essentially a process of becoming, these versions seem to more adequately convey the critical ethical impulse in Hegel's political philosophy.

It may be argued, however, that Hegel also understands present reality as a *result* of historical processes, and that reason in many ways has *become* realized in human history so that the rational *is* the actual and the actual is the rational. According to Paul Franco, it is "probably a mistake to view Hegel's political philosophy as being fundamentally animated by a utopian impulse. Hegel's location of human freedom or autonomy in the political sphere and his ethical conception of the state seem to be motivated more by a concern to chasten and discipline the subjectivism unleashed by the Kantian-Fichtean conception of morality than by a desire to raise the stakes of politics."[48] Hegel's problem of political justification touches a deeper subjective chord as well. The "problem of consciousness" is, as Hegel says, to actualize social ideality by rationally justify the social determinations of one's life, to internalize these social determinations, and thus transform external necessity into internal necessity: "The ethical person is conscious of the content of his action as something necessary, something that is valid in and for itself."[49] To a large extent, freedom, for Hegel, consists in the recognition of necessity. "To be sure, necessity as such is not yet freedom; but freedom presupposes necessity and contains it sublated within itself."[50] There is a striking parallel between the emergence of self-consciousness and the social recognition of a rational essence that dwells within reality; how society comes to itself, so to speak, through its political constitution. Still, freedom for Hegel is not

[46] Hardimon, *Hegel's Social Philosophy*, p. 53.
[47] Hegel quoted in Hardimon, *Hegel's Social Philosophy*, p. 63.
[48] Paul Franco, *Hegel's Philosophy of Freedom* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1999), p. 31.
[49] "This consciousness," Hegel continues, "is so far from diminishing his freedom, that, on the contrary, it is only through this consciousness that his abstract freedom becomes a freedom that is actual and rich in content, as distinct from freedom of choice [*Willkür*], a freedom that still lacks content and is merely possible." Hegel, *Encyclopedia Logic*, §158a.
[50] Hegel, *Encyclopedia Logic*, §158a.

strictly a necessitarian, determinist concept of reconciling the individual with his social destiny. Shlomo Avineri emphasizes how the specific connotation of the word *Wirklich* derives from "its root in the verb "to act" (*Wirken*), which makes it clear that "actuality" (*Wirklichkeit*) is not a merely passive, natural given."[51] On the contrary, "what is "actual" is always a consequence of a deed, of action; hence a strong activist undertone runs through this couplet." Despite his objections to subjectivism, Hegel appreciated this "activist" impulse.[52]

This progressive construal of the *Doppelsatz* is not a recent gloss. In *Reason and Revolution*, Marcuse argued against readings that made Hegel a philosopher of resignation, insisting that *Wirklichkeit* designates a process, not any fixed state. Actuality is what has come to correspond to its own potentiality, so that whatever falls short of its concept—however stubbornly it may persist empirically—has not yet, or not fully, become actual in Hegel's technical sense. On this reading the *Doppelsatz* cannot license a simple affirmation of the given order, since the given order is precisely what stands to be measured against its own unrealized concept.[53] Marcuse pressed the point further: it was Hegel's dialectic, not positivism's affirmation of bare fact, that supplied the resources for a genuinely critical theory of society, since positivism forecloses in advance the very distinction—between mere existence and rational actuality—on which critique depends.

Hegel, however, was no political revolutionary; he explicitly warned against making ethical "oughts" out of air.[54] Indeed, he developed much of his ethics and political philosophy to counter what he regarded as irresponsible utopianism and abstract morality. Hegel's criticism of Fichte's *Sollen* (which perhaps best translates as "ought" or "a striving," not simply "should") is devastating, and he rejects any kind of unmediated normative postulates.

Conservative, Progressive, and Neutral Readings

As we have seen, there have been two readings of Hegel's dictum about the real and the actual: one is conservative or quietist (what exists is good), and the other is critical and progressive (only what is fully actualized is good). Robert Stern suggests that there is a third option for how to understand the *Doppelsatz*: a "neutral" one.[55] In going through how Hegel generally prefaces his works, Stern argues that the *Doppelsatz* is an argument in defense of methodological rationalism, not normative evaluations.[56]

Actuality, Stern argues, can be seen as a technical concept, distinguished from both existence (*Existenz*) and being (*Dasein*). For something to be actual, it cannot merely exist; it must correspond to its essential nature. Stern goes a long way in accepting that such a progressive interpretation is in line with Hegel's general system, reflected in the *Encyclopedia Logic*.[57] Of course, this is the very distinction that opens for a "critical gap"

[51] Avineri, *Hegel's Theory of the Modern State*, p. 126.
[52] In this respect, it is interesting to note that Hegel suggests a close affinity with the Aristotelian concept of *energeia*. Hegel, *Philosophy of Right*, §158a.
[53] Herbert Marcuse, *Reason and Revolution: Hegel and the Rise of Social Theory* (1941; Boston, MA: Beacon Press, 1960), pp. 150-153.
[54] Hegel, *Philosophy of Right*, §13. Hegel's discussion of "Absolute freedom and terror" in his *Phenomenology of Spirit* is also illuminating.
[55] Stern, Robert (2006). "Hegel's *Doppelsatz*: A Neutral Reading". *Journal of the History of Philosophy*, 44, pp. 235-266.
[56] Stern, "Hegel's *Doppelsatz*", pp. 235-236, 247.
[57] Stern, "Hegel's *Doppelsatz*", pp. 237-238.

between a phenomenon's existence and its essence, yet Stern argues that we should take a more cautious approach to this statement, precisely because it opens itself to subjective interpretations of just what this *ought* is.

Still, Stern also offers another understanding of the actual, which is what he claims Hegel intended in the Preface to the *Philosophy of Right*. He argues that actuality should be understood as a quality that is subject to rational inquiry. Stern's neutral reading suggests that Hegel's purpose in distinguishing between the actual and the existing is primarily methodological and epistemological, not normative. Philosophy is the quest for fundamental truths, insights into phenomena that deserve rational inquiry. For Hegel, Stern argues, the *Doppelsatz* implies that the actual is open to systematic investigation through rational science, in contrast to the merely existing, which can be arbitrary or insignificant. This, he argues, is not because the actual is "good," but because it is fundamental and necessary, and thus open to rational inquiry.[58]

By interpreting actuality as a category of necessity and systematic intelligibility, as that which is open to rational, scientific inquiry, Stern avoids assigning the *Doppelsatz* to a normative political agenda. The *Doppelsatz* is therefore not a claim that "the actual is right or good," but one that philosophy, through its rationalist method, can engage with the real (the actual), rather than lapse into empty utopianism or subjective arbitrariness. Stern does admit that there is nothing in his readings of Hegel that "suggests that philosophy cannot propose any institutional reforms at all—it just must do so based on a proper method, otherwise it will have the problematic status of merely subjective opinion."[59] While I agree with this, I also think that dialectics should be considered more of an approach, a sensibility, and an outlook, rather than a simple method: within a dialectical ontology, there is room for a broad set of developmental approaches that stimulate social development, creativity, and sensitivity.

My main objection to Stern's reading is that it is philosophically diminishing. Instead of classifying these readings as merely conservative, progressive, and neutral, they can also be classified as stifling, stimulating and trivial, respectively. The conservative reading is all too focused on justifying what is and therefore stifles philosophical exploration. The progressive reading, on the other hand, opens for philosophical reflections on the potentialities and rational developments, a quality I find analytically productive, and is witnessed historically in movements for civil right, political reform, and social progress. For these purposes, the neutral reading appears trivial. Stern may be right that this "neutral" reading was what Hegel intended, but Hegel's overarching philosophical system certainly also harbors the potential of understanding the actuality in a normative sense, as a commitment to explore and actualize what is rational. It is precisely this impulse, this search for what is rational in social development, that makes Hegel's political philosophy relevant today.

Even if we agree with Stern's rationalist interpretation, there is *also* an undeniable "ought" to be found within Hegel's philosophy, that guides the Hegelian ethos. The fact that these "oughts" can and should not be reduced to subjective proclivities, does not diminish their significance. The world is rational both in the sense of being intelligible and being driven by inner dynamics. As I see it, this ethos pulsates in Hegel's speculative metaphysics and its dynamic focus on totality, actuality, and transcendence, and it seems difficult to interpret his political philosophy as a finite, "closed system." Indeed, the nature

[58] Stern, "Hegel's *Doppelsatz*", pp. 238-242, 251.
[59] Stern, "Hegel's *Doppelsatz*", p. 246.

of speculative philosophy is concerned with precisely understanding how things are *and* are not, and the notion that the rational is the actual is a speculative proposition.[60] To be sure, Hegel also suggests that the period in which he lived was actualizing the *Geist* in world history; his philosophical approach was teleologically determinist and his world, he thought, was ripe to be classified into categories that would adequately encompass a dynamical reality. Still, as we have seen, he acknowledges philosophers could only come to insight in retrospect, after the fact; but I find it likely that he could accept a more open-ended unfolding of history than much of his works suggest. Again, how we interpret this "ought" is crucial: either we emphasize its location in "reality" as the existing expressions of the *Geist* in the world, or we locate it in the "actual" standards of rationality. But contrary to what Robert Stern has suggested, I do not think there is really a "neutral" approach to this dilemma, although his "trivial" reading may well be a part of the total picture.

But the historical expressions and interpretations are also part of the picture. As history has shown us, the difference in emphasis—or in translations and interpretations—carries weighty political conclusions. How we interpret reality and actuality directly informs our political analyses today, as they did historically.

The Algebra of Revolution?

Hegel's strong emphasis on the state as the actualization of freedom in history arguably seems politically suffocating, particularly if it is elevated to a principle. With minor adjustments, specific elements of his theory could indeed justify Karl Popper's rejection of Hegelianism as a dangerous approval of authoritarianism.[61] Still, when we consider the epoch in which Hegel lived; his emphasis is not at all that strange. For all the faults of monarchical centralization and its destruction of local freedoms (as they would appear in Hegel's own time), it is a fact that throughout the Medieval period and early modern times, the "king's peace" brought law to the land, undermined feudal arrangements, and created the historical preconditions for civic equality. Contrasted with the constitutional advances of the Great French Revolution and the Napoleonic Wars, his native Württemberg or Prussia must have appeared woefully outmoded as well as transitory, and he sought to encourage the political traits he deemed progressive by locating constitutionalism, centralization, and civic freedoms firmly within the German context. As we know the trajectory of European totalitarianism during the last century, it seems easy to reject his praise of the Prussian state. Fundamentally, Hegel is concerned with how the state transcends "natural law" into genuine social cohesion; yet Avineri is also correct in observing that Hegel's *Philosophy of Right* is not a philosophy of the *state* as such, but of *right*.[62]

Modern scholars have emphasized how recognition and intersubjectivity are components of Hegel's *Sittlichkeit* and downplay his verbatim appraisals of the unification of political will in monarchical authority. Indeed, new interest in Hegel's political philosophy stems rather from a broader reading of the *Philosophy of Right* as "a phenomenology of freedom."[63] This suggests that we can avoid the Hegelian ossification of political structures, which seems to me to contradict the critical and dynamic thrust of

[60] Jackson, M. W. "Hegel: The Real and the Actual," in Stewart, John (ed.). *The Hegel Myths and Legends* (Evanston: Northwestern University Press, 1996), p. 22.
[61] Karl Popper, *The Open Society and Its Enemies* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1994).
[62] Avineri, *Hegel's Theory of the Modern State*, pp. 82-86.
[63] Robert R. Williams, *Hegel's Ethics of Recognition* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1997), p. 27.

Hegel's philosophical project. Despite important differences, today's increased interest in Hegel's practical ethics stems from an appreciation that his political project is more open-ended than Hegel would allow for in the *Philosophy of Right*. While thinkers like Shlomo Avineri, Charles Taylor and Alasdair MacIntyre have emphasized Hegel's "communitarian" focus, others, like Allen W. Wood, Terry Pinkard, and Paul Franco reject this interpretation and emphasize instead Hegel's "liberalism." There is a distinct paradox here: by rejecting Hegel's more speculative philosophy— his philosophical system—these scholars suggest we can retain Hegel's insights as critical correctives, yet, as we have seen, it was precisely Hegel's dialectical metaphysics that made him capable of passing moral judgments over the rationality of reality. Regardless of whether Hegel himself failed to appreciate these ethical criteria of evaluating political realities himself, or if he chose to conceal them from Prussian authorities, the force of Hegel's political theory lies not in its concrete practical suggestions, but in the critical faculties it offers in evaluating the rationality of society and its "forms of freedom."

In the 1920s, just as Marxism developed into a stale doctrine that provided justification for established states like Soviet Russia under Stalin, it is worth noting how Marxists like Georg Lukács and Karl Korsch called for a return to Hegelian dialectics so as to preserve the critical tension in Marxist philosophy and politics. This attests to the critical force of Hegel's *negativity*.[64] By the same token, Marcuse, whose reading of the *Doppelsatz* I outlined above, did much to rescue Hegelian dialectics from the charges Karl Popper leveled against it. Indeed, positivism, Marcuse argued, was far more prone to fascism and totalitarianism than Hegelian thought ever was.[65] Additionally, it is interesting to note how a prominent heir to critical theory, Axel Honneth, appropriates Hegel's political theory in more general terms, and uses it to explain contemporary society and explore the social basis for political freedom.[66] In recent decades, Hegelian dialectics have also been explored as a possible foundation for radical ecological philosophy and participatory democracy.[67]

For all these reasons, and despite Hegel's own objections, it seems to me that his philosophical approach offers a dynamic theoretical framework on which to ground a social ethics and politics that is both utopian and reconstructive. This was also how many of his contemporaries saw him. Nobody expresses the enthusiastic reception of Hegel's philosophy within radical circles better that the Russian revolutionary exile Alexander Herzen: "Hegel's dialectic is a fearful battering-ram in spite of its double-facedness and its badge of Prussian Protestantism; it vaporized everything that existed and dissipated everything that was a check on reason."[68] These radicals understood the ambiguity of Hegel's practical politics, but held that his philosophy "emancipates man in an unusual way and leaves not one stone upon another of the Christian world, of the world of tradition

[64] Central to Hegel is the "negation of the negation," the *Aufhebung*. "Negative," here, does not necessarily mean "pessimistic," as it seemed to be in Theodor Adorno, *Negative Dialectics* (New York: Continuum, 2007).
[65] Marcuse, *Reason and Revolution*, pp. 323-88.
[66] Honneth, *Pathologies*, pp. 48-80.
[67] See, for example, Murray Bookchin, *The Ecology of Freedom: The Emergence and Dissolution of Hierarchy* (San Francisco: AK Press, 2005); *The Philosophy of Social Ecology: Essays on Dialectical Naturalism*, 2nd rev. ed. (Montréal: Black Rose Books, 1995).
[68] Herzen, *My Past and Thoughts*, pp. 641-642n11.

that has outlived itself."[69] Indeed, Herzen concludes: "Hegel's dialectics is the algebra of revolution."[70]

To conclude, there are at least three ways we can understand Hegel's *Doppelsatz*. The first is a reactionary or conservative view, which will read it as an apology for the status quo: what *is*, is rational. Few hold this position today. Even in his own time, Hegel's political philosophy could not be read as simply a rubber stamp for the Prussian state. Second, we could understand it in a "neutral" sense, as simply an appeal to reason, but that perspective is trivial and seems to counter the thrust of his dialectical metaphysics: it leaves us with a sterile version of the dynamic approach. A third reading is distinctly progressive, or even revolutionary. This is the approach I think makes more sense, both in evaluating Hegel's overarching approach, and in making his philosophy relevant for our time. It may not be an "algebra of revolution," but it is a perspective that constantly challenges the what is. From a dialectical viewpoint, everything should be judged by reason and evaluated according to its inner logic. The *process* of justification is central, not the specific forms that are justified: every constitution, political institution, and social arrangement should be subject to rational scrutiny, through critical tools that are available to us all. What is, should *always* be evaluated by what ought to be. Dialectical philosophy provides an ethical impulse that could generate a plethora of social and political alternatives that could advance society and its rational forms.

In this essay, I have briefly explored Hegel's political philosophy, as it was developed in his *Philosophy of Right*, and as it was interpreted by his followers in the decades after his death. I have also discussed the difficulties his contemporaries had in interpreting the *Doppelsatz* and how Hegel philosophically distinguished between reality and actuality. I then explored how his politics fit in with his broader philosophical outlook. The impulse traced here—from the will's movement out of bare possibility into self-conscious actuality, through *Sittlichkeit* as actualized freedom, to the unstable identification of the rational with the actual—is not incidental to Hegel's political philosophy; it is its recurring logical form. "Reality," as Hegel sees it, is unfolding, and may be more or less "real," depending on the extent to which it actualizes its inherent rational potentialities. This is a powerful normative guideline, and a creative point of departure for any social philosophy that seeks to transcend individual rationality and morality. While I don't think Hegel's political philosophy is useful as a blueprint for social organization, it is intellectually stimulating as an ethical corrective. Although Hegel's practical, concrete suggestions for political organization were cautiously reformist in his day—and woefully conservative and outdated in ours—I argue that his philosophy still contains a strong ethical, even utopian, thrust. The *Doppelsatz* signifies not resignation to what exists, but a call to engage critically with reality, and serves as a reminder that philosophy's task is not to mirror the world as it is, but to reveal how it might become more fully rational and free. This dialectical impulse offers critical insights for both political agency and social freedom.

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[69] Herzen, *My Past and Thoughts*, p. 237. Herzen was painfully aware of life under political repression and censorship and suggested that Hegel's political theory "perhaps with intention, [was] badly formulated."

[70] Herzen, *My Past and Thoughts*, p. 237.

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Pedagogical Tact as an Ethical Practice

Thomas Senkbeil

Drawing on Theodor W. Adorno's reflections on tact in Minima Moralia, this article revisits tact as a historically situated social capacity that emerges at moments when established conventions have lost their binding authority without fully disappearing. For Adorno, tact presupposes a fragile normative order and thus raises fundamental questions of belonging to, or deviating from, prevailing social norms. Building on this insight, the contribution adopts a phenomenological perspective to conceptualize pedagogical tact as a principle of difference – a capacity for "knowing deviations" in singular and unpredictable situations. Conceived as a cultural-aesthetic phenomenon, pedagogical tact integrates sociological and anthropological perspectives to orient professional judgment in educational practice. Such judgment is invariably shaped by ethical and moral demands grounded in an ethos of attentiveness and accountability. The article develops a normative understanding of pedagogical tact that is particularly suited to bridging theory and practice in special needs teacher education. It clarifies the relationship of this approach to related theoretical positions and highlights its specific value for professionalization and for coping with uncertainty in school-based teaching internships. The central elements are summarized in a concluding conceptual framework.

Introduction

> A child in the dark, gripped with fear, comforts himself by singing under his breath. He walks and halts to his song. Lost, he takes shelter, or orients himself with his little song as best he can. The song is like a rough sketch of a calming and stabilizing, calm and stable, center in the heart of chaos. Perhaps the child skips as he sings, hastens or slows his pace. But the song itself is already a skip: it jumps from chaos to the beginnings of order in chaos and is in danger of breaking apart at any moment.[1]

The figure of the child in the dark, as described by Deleuze and Guattari, points to a fundamental dimension of human existence: the experience of insecurity and vulnerability, as well as the search for orientation and belonging, which significantly shapes educational relationships. When the child finds stability in a world perceived as chaotic through a soft

[1]Gilles Deleuze and Félix Guattari, A Thousand Plateaus: Capitalism and Schizophrenia, translated by Brian Massumi (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1987), p. 311.

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song, it creates a temporary space of safety. The singing does not create a lasting order, but rather a fragile form of self-assurance—a small, fluid structure that can be thrown off balance at any moment. This oscillation between stability and vulnerability reveals a fundamental anthropological truth: humans depend on relationships, recognition, and a sense of social belonging, yet at the same time remain perpetually vulnerable to experiences of loss, exclusion, and alienation.

This phenomenological perspective provides an approach to educational issues centred on belonging, recognition, and difference. Educational practice always takes place within relationships, where people respond to one another, perceive differences, and decide which forms of expression, needs and ways of life are legitimate, normal or deviant. In school contexts in particular, it becomes apparent that recognition and difference affect not only individuals, but also institutions and society as a whole. Children and adolescents with mental health conditions or chronic illnesses are frequently confronted in their everyday school lives with increased stress, disruptions in their life contexts, and the feeling of having lost their rhythm. However, it cannot be understood exclusively as an individual physical or psychological disposition but must be viewed as a relational phenomenon that arises in interaction with social, institutional, and societal conditions. Experiences of a lack of recognition, stigmatization, or exclusion can exacerbate existing vulnerabilities.[2]

From the perspective of resonance theory[3] educational practice can be understood as the creation of relationships and spaces in which resonance can occur. In this context, resonance does not signify a harmonious or conflict-free relationship; rather, it represents a dynamic engagement with the world, where individuals are recognized, can respond, and are consequently transformed. Thus, vulnerability and resonance are not opposites, but interconnected dimensions of relationship-oriented pedagogical practice, which is characterized by indeterminacy and renders pedagogical action an ethical practice of judgement. This requires sensitivity to situations in which existing guidelines are insufficient and decisions must nevertheless be made. In this sense, pedagogical tact gains significance as a special form of professional attention. It refers to the ability to perceive differences without fixing them in place, and to respond to vulnerability without reducing people to their vulnerability. Against this backdrop, pedagogical tact—as a distinct form of professional ethical practice—takes center stage. Pedagogical tact describes the ability to respond appropriately in complex situations that cannot be fully planned, without resolving the ambivalences inherent in pedagogical relationships. Precisely where recognition, difference, and normalization come into tension, tact becomes a central professional competency that enables a sensitive approach to human vulnerability.

This article proceeds in three steps. First, it considers the importance of ethical reflections as a decisive skill in the context of pedagogical professional acting. It focuses particularly on problematic situations arising from the antinomic structures of educational practice, to which educational tact provides a response as a pedagogical skill and practical judgement. Secondly, from a theoretical perspective, the article analyses the distinctions that educators make in their everyday practices, as well as the practices that emerge within

[2]Daniel Burghardt, Markus Dederich, Nadine Dziabel, Thomas Höhne, Diana Lohwasser, Robert Stöhr and Jörg Zirfas, Vulnerabilität: Pädagogische Herausforderungen (Stuttgart: Kohlhammer, 2017).

[3] Hartmut Rosa, Resonance: A Sociology of World Relations (Berlin: Suhrkamp, 2016);
Jens Beljan and Michael Winkler, Resonanzpädagogik auf dem Prüfstand: Über Hoffnungen und Zwei fel an einem neuen Ansatz (Weinheim: Beltz, 2019).

fields of tension characterized by recognition, exclusion and normalization. In this case, pedagogical tact operates as a concept of differentiation. Thirdly, the article discusses how tact, and pedagogical tact in particular, can be developed as a form of action within complex, pluralistic and vulnerable social contexts. The focus here is on teacher education as a profession-oriented field of research that could significantly advance practice in this area.

Ethics and Pedagogy

During the twenty-first century, disability has emerged as a central analytical category in educational and social debates, as well as in the field of disability studies. Rather than being understood solely as an individual impairment, disability is increasingly examined as a category produced through social, cultural, institutional, and normative processes.[4] This has prompted a shift in pedagogical practice, moving the focus from diagnostic classification towards ethical and relational forms of engagement concerned with recognition, participation, and the removal of barriers to learning. Rather than constituting a new societal framework, "Education for All" should be understood as part of a longer international trajectory in inclusive education policy and practice, which can be traced back to the Salamanca Statement and Framework for Action on Special Needs Education. This perspective highlights continuity and gradual expansion rather than novelty, as inclusive education has since been further developed through subsequent international agreements and human rights frameworks. This evolving understanding of disability and inclusion provides the basis for the normative principles of the Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities. Beyond higher education, the convention has gained considerable prominence in public discourse and increasingly serves as a key point of reference and source of legitimacy for political decision-makers and governing bodies when developing policy decisions and shaping institutional practices. Consequently, pedagogical processes face the particular challenge of addressing complex learning conditions and support needs while deliberately incorporating inclusive educational practices that promote participation, inclusion and education for all learners.

Against this background, the question of whether professionals in special and inclusive education should possess ethical competences appears largely self-evident. However, what remains open, is how such competences can be effectively developed, expanded, and deepened within higher education. While it would be presumptuous to expect universal answers from educational systems or educational science alone, education is nevertheless inevitably implicated in the very processes it seeks to address. Approaching it constructively can be understood as a defining feature of *pedagogical professionalism*[5], particularly for educators and teachers. In practical pedagogical terms, education involves finding ways to empower students to shape possible futures, thereby keeping the utopian question "how now?"[6] present in an age characterized by uncertainty, complexity, and

[4]Markus Dederich, Körper, Kultur und Behinderung: Eine Einführung in die Disability Studies (Bielefeld: Transcript, 2007).
Franziska Felder, 'Unveiling Ableism in Education: A Critical Examination of its Normativity andImp lications for Learning in Schools', Educational Theory, 75 (2025), pp. 848-864.
[5]Werner Helsper, Professionalität und Professionalisierung pädagogischen Handelns: Eine Einführung (Berlin: Springer VS, 2021).
[6]Ernst Bloch, Geist der Utopie (Frankfurt am Main: Suhrkamp, 2018 [1918]).

ambiguity. Acting responsibly in such contexts requires educators to navigate unpredictability, make ethically grounded judgements, and remain attentive to the relational and moral dimensions of their practice.

This normative understanding of pedagogical tact is particularly well-suited to bridging the gap between theory and practice in teacher education, especially in the context of special and inclusive education. Unlike broader conceptions of pedagogical ethos, pedagogical tact emphasizes situational judgements and responsiveness in concrete educational interactions. This clarifies its relationship with, and difference from, other theoretical positions. This highlights its specific value for students preparing to become special educational needs and disability teachers. On the one hand, it supports the acquisition and integration of theoretical knowledge within processes of professionalization, particularly in the German context. On the other hand, it provides orientation for navigating uncertainty in the everyday demands of school-based practicum experiences.

Recent scholarship on pedagogical tact[7] reconceptualizes the classical theory–practice problem by emphasizing its ethical and aesthetic dimensions[8] as well as its inherent fragility and fluidity.[9] From these perspectives, the role of the teacher or educator—the subject of tactful interaction—becomes a matter of inquiry itself. Tact is not simply a skill exercised by an expert; rather, practitioners themselves are shaped by contingency and the situational dynamics of the educational environment, rendering tact a "balancing act"[10]embedded within the repetitive rhythms of pedagogical interaction[11]. Central to this phenomenological understanding of practice is the handling of fragility within the *Dazwischen* — the in-between spaces of interaction in which crises, conflicting interests, and uncertainty emerge. While fragility might suggest something tangible that risks breaking, it resonates more strongly with Jakob Muth's conception of pedagogical tact as inaccessible and uncontrollable, as well as with Jörg Zirfas's ethnographic studies of difference as evasive and intangible. In Muth's text, reserve and sensitivity converge in the form of pedagogy's self-limitation as a means of influence. As Muth emphasizes, self-limitation operates as an individualized and situational responsiveness attuned to the singularity of each encounter with the Other. This responsiveness is tactful in nature, insofar as it acknowledges the Other as ultimately inaccessible to our will, knowledge, or perception, and therefore requires that we rely on a felt sensitivity- a "feeling for the 'you'" or Thou of the Other[12] – rather than on mastery or comprehension.

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[7]Morten T Korsgaard, Federico Rovea and Thomas Senkbeil, 'Introduction: Pedagogical Tact — Connections Old and New', Ethics and Education, 19:3 (2024), pp. 255–261.;
Norm Friesen and Thomas Senkbeil (eds), Pedagogical Tact: Reconnecting Theory and Practice in Education (New York: Peter Lang, 2026)

[8]Daniel Burghardt, Dominik Krinninger and Sabine Seichter, Pädagogischer Takt: Theorie, Empirie, Kultur (Paderborn: Schöningh, 2015);
Daniel Burghardt and Jörg Zirfas, Der pädagogische Takt: Eine erziehungswissenschaftliche Problemformel (Weinheim and Basel: Beltz Juventa, 2019).

[9]Thomas Senkbeil, 'Die Fragilität des Takts: Eine Rekonstruktion eines flüchtigen Moments', *Vierteljahrsschrift für wissenschaftliche Pädagogik*, 96 (2020), pp. 120–137.

[10] (ibid., p. 131)

[11] (ibid., p. 129)

[12] Norm Friesen, 'Pedagogical Tact: An Historical Overview', in *Pedagogical Tact: Reconnecting Theory and Practice in Education*, edited by Norm Friesen and Thomas Senkbeil (New York: Peter Lang, 2026), pp. 2–23, at p. 15.

Within this relational *Dazwischen* between child and educator, the individual needs and the group concerns, but also theory and practice, tact operates as a practice of managing and transforming differences. Drawing on Norbert Ricken (et al. 2023) account of the language of recognition (*Sprachlichkeit der Anerkennung*), recognition is understood as emerging through linguistic and dialogical engagements. Pedagogical tact sustains the relational space in which self and other encounter one another, differentiation as a reflexive practice: the careful articulation of difference without reification.

Practical pedagogical studies provide a key setting in which aspiring and experienced educators at all levels of education (early childhood, primary and secondary education, and higher education) are confronted with the complexities of professional pedagogical practice. Drawing on Ulrich Oevermann's structural-theoretical reflections on professional action[13], we view educational practice as inherently crisis-ridden and characterized by uncertainty and the pressure to make decisions. This perspective is expanded by incorporating antinomic structures in which educational action is embedded (e.g. closeness versus distance; support versus selection; autonomy versus heteronomy)[14]. Professional pedagogical practice must also grapple with the possibility of failure due to an implicit technological deficit, not only because of a lack of measurable impact on learners, but also with regard to professionals' implementation of planned methods and techniques. Recognizing these dimensions of failure and engaging with them reflectively can be seen as the first step towards developing the necessary skills and attitudes for professional practice. This practice is inseparable from the ethical and normative demands of professionalization, particularly in contexts shaped by exclusionary formations such as racism, nationalism, and religious discrimination. Conceptualizing *pedagogical tact as a principle of difference*[15] and as rooted in anthropological dimensions of caring for oneself and the world emphasizes its non-reifiable, relational, and situational character of professional judgement, a central concern within research on educational professionalism. Classically, special and remedial education has been defined as a specialized pedagogy that starts from a threat of personal and social disintegration and that is particularly concerned with establishing or restoring the conditions for self-realization and belonging, for the acquisition of competence and a sense of purpose, in short, for becoming whole. In this sense, rather than being grounded in dualistic oppositions, pedagogical tact is enacted through relational interdependence, shaping social interactions characterized by hospitality, mutual recognition, and coexistence, and supporting the holistic development and flourishing of each learner.

Tact as a Pedagogical Skill

This chapter argues that pedagogical tact is a form of embodied practical judgment that mediates between normative knowledge and situated educational action. The German word

[13] Ulrich Oevermann, 'Theoretische Skizze einer revidierten Theorie professionalisierten Handelns', in *Pädagogische Professionalität*, edited by Arno Combe and Werner Helsper (Frankfurt am Main: Suhrkamp, 1996), pp. 70–182.
[14] Werner Helsper, *Professionalität und Professionalisierung pädagogischen Handelns: Eine Einführung* (Berlin: Springer VS, 2021).
[15] Daniel Burghardt and Jörg Zirfas, *Der pädagogische Takt: Eine erziehungswissenschaftliche Problemformel* (Weinheim and Basel: Beltz Juventa, 2019).

'takt' is derived from the Latin *tactus*, meaning 'contact.' Etymologically, it refers to the sense of touch that occurs when contact is made, as well as the emotions that arise internally as a result of that encounter (*Begegnung/Kontakt*). In the modern era, visual perception dominates, and the original sensory meaning of 'takt,' which encapsulated the sense of touch, has lost significance. Nevertheless, a child's development is heavily influenced by their sense of touch. Touch is a fundamental sensory ability that connects newborns to the world: They feel their caregiver's embrace, suckle at her breast and feel her heartbeat. As they become mobile, babies begin to explore the world by touching, grasping and holding objects to understand their texture and weight, and putting them in their mouths. The body plays a central role in education and child-raising: It serves as an instrument and medium for learning processes based on experience, in accordance with the *concept of mimesis*[16]. Using mimetic processes, as early as in infancy, children learn by imitating and mimicking the behavior, gestures, and actions of others. In educational contexts, these processes can be used to gain knowledge, develop social skills, and transfer cultural norms. According to Kant (2000), the body can be understood as a representation of "body" and "soul". It is moved and can be moved, it can hear and can be heard. As Bernhard Waldenfels (2006) states, it is both a "sensorium" and "responsorium," forming a kind of response register. In this sense, to borrow from Herbart and Kant, it is also an organ capable of rapid (aesthetic) judgment and decision-making power. The receptive body perceives harmony, dissonance, inconvenience, shock, and resistance through a multitude of senses. It also feels on a tactile and emotional level, passively absorbs and actively creates atmosphere by relating with others. The highly normative and ethical nature of tact allow it to play an important role in pedagogy, which is essentially "rooted in our phenomenological response to the child`s natural vulnerability".[17] For early childhood education and upbringing, pedagogical tact, in the sense of social tact, is a necessary supplement or corrective to a more nurturing and child-centered sensitive responsiveness, which is the core of a *pedagogy of resonance.*[18] Tact, in this context, focuses on sensitive and resonant close relationships in early childhood and on the use of pedagogical tact as a medium for pedagogical reference, for establishing the balance between closeness and distance or personhood and role. It concerns the protective function of tact, shielding against injuries and embarrassments.

Tact as a skill can also be understood through analogies with music. Tact is the measure of the regular sequence and weight distribution of the sequence of notes. Pedagogical tact, as a rhythm, serves an organizing and liberating function and can be understood as an intuitive activity, a form of knowledge that is by its nature normative, personal, immediate. The musician's task is to harmonize the notes with the rhythm. This is done in accordance with an aesthetic order. The interplay between order and the liberation of structures creates an acoustic resonance that makes the body vibrate. From a phenomenological point of view, the tact integrates the individual with the general to create a certain harmony. This perspective was transferred to the social sphere as early as the 18th

[16] Gunter Gebauer and Christoph Wulf, Mimesis: Kultur – Kunst – Gesellschaft (Reinbek bei Hamburg: Rowohlt, 1992).

[17] Max van Manen, Pedagogical Tact: Knowing What to Do When You Don't Know What to Do (Lo ndon and New York: Routledge, 2016).

[18] Jens Beljan, 'Creating Contact, Making Things Sound: Resonance and the Expression of Tact in the Classroom—Respect and Timing as Mediators of Self-
World Relations', in Pedagogical Tact: Reconnecting Theory and Practice in Education, edited by Nor m Friesen and Thomas Senkbeil (New York: Peter Lang, 2026), pp. 169–194.

century. Blochmann (1887-1972) describes 'the social in time' as a basic principle that plays a central role in community building. It refers to the idea that a kind of common rhythm or tact is created in social groups that coordinates and structures interaction. The idea of the 'social in time' developed by Blochmann (1950) proves to be particularly significant in educational contexts, as it provides important impulses for the organization of group processes, the understanding of social dynamics and the promotion of a sense of community, emphasizing the importance of social harmony and coordination of interaction for individual development.

The term pedagogical tact was first introduced by the German philosopher and educator Johann Friedrich Herbart in his introductory lectures on education in 1802. Herbart (1896) described it as a teacher`s ability to apply educational theory in the moment of pedagogical action, emphasizing the connection between theoretical knowledge and practical teaching. Following its introduction, the concept appeared sporadically in educational scholarship but rarely received sustained attention. In the English-speaking world, van Manen (1995) revived the term in the 1990s, while in Germany Jakob Muth revitalized it in 1962 with his study *Pädagogischer Takt: Monographie einer aktuellen Form erzieherischen und didaktischen Handelns*. Despite this, the term largely disappeared as educational theory shifted toward contemporary *Erziehungswissenschaft*, emphasizing social-scientific methods and moving away from the hermeneutic and phenomenological traditions of *Geisteswissenschaftliche Pädagogik*.

Pedagogical Tact, however, persists as a hermeneutical attitude. Scholars often refer to Gadamer's *Truth and Method* (2013) and Aristotle's concept of *phronesis* in the *Nicomachean Ethics*. Gadamer's notio of tact and *sensus communis*, closely linked to the ontology of *Bildung*, helps frame pedagogical tact as the capacity to interpret contingent situations educationally[19]. Gadamer portrays tact as a distinct capacity rooted in personal disposition and style, yet emphasizes that it must be intentionally cultivated—it is not innate but develops through study and training. While universal in dimension, it is shaped by each individual's unique qualities, aligning closely with pedagogical tact in teaching: effective teaching cannot be reduced to methods or techniques, but relies on a teacher's cultivated sensibilities, attitudes, and modes of engagement. Similarly, Aristotle's *phronesis* highlights discerning judgement: navigating complex situations not by fixed rules but through attentive, context-sensitive engagement. In the 21st-century classroom, this translates into responsive, nuanced teaching that aligns learners' individual prerequisites with instructional conditions. The *performative triangle of tact*[20] provides additional insights in this regard, emphasising the delicate interplay between teacher judgement, learner requirements, and situational demands.

In contrast to this hermeneutic account, the turn of the 21(st) century has witnessed a renewed interest in understanding pedagogy as a practice-oriented discipline, particularly through proposals for a 'performative' pedagogy. As Zirfas[21] notes, "The goal of education

[19] Morten T. Korsgaard, Federico Rovea and Thomas Senkbeil, 'Introduction: Pedagogical Tact—Connections Old and New', Ethics and Education, 19:3 (2024), pp. 255–261.
Norm Friesen and Thomas Senkbeil, Pedagogical Tact: Reconnecting Theory and Practice in Education (New York: Peter Lang, 2026).
[20]Thomas Senkbeil, 'The Performative Triangle of Tact as a Professional "Action Competence"', Ethi cs and Education, 19:3 (2024), pp. 408–429.
[21]Jörg Zirfas, 'Pedagogical Tact: Ten Theses', in Tact and the Pedagogical Relation, edited by Norm Friesen (New York: Peter Lang, 2022), pp. 175-196. p. 223.

in the modern age is the independence of the individual in all practices of human life... In short: education is the audacious demand for maturity." This framing emphasizes that pedagogical practice is not merely about imparting knowledge but aboput navigating the ethical and performative tensions inherent in teaching: balancing freedom and law, autonomy and heteronomy, resistance and conformity. Zirfas (2012) emphasises that ethical responsibility in teaching involves 'restraint' — limiting oneself for the sake of the other — and the occasional need to 'push' learners to take the next developmental step. Such performative ethical judgement cannot be cultivated through superficial training in procedural skills alone. Confidence in navigating the complex antinomies of pedagogy requires a course of study that develops scientific reflective competence. As Müller (2026) notes,

> [a]ny 'external demand for self-activity' (Fremdaufforderung zur Selbsttätigkeit) (Benner, 2001, pp. 80-84) involves both an aspect of external imposition and an aspect of active contribution by the subject. Acting tactfully thus requires a careful balance between structuring a pedagogical situation and leaving it open.[22]

From a phenomenological perspective, the performative and the ethical are thus inseparable: effective pedagogy is simultaneously skilled enactment and responsibility for the learner's development. Tactful action rests on a form of "feeling [*Fernfühlung*] and touch [*Ferntastung*] for the distance of unremarkable, but information-rich things in the permanent oscillations of the situation of the social milieu".[23] This describes an intuitive mode of attumenent in which educators maintain a reflective distance while at the same time remaining affectively and perceptually open to the situation. Such oscillation between distance and engagement enables pedagogical action that is both responsive and situationally appropriate. This becomes a special skill when learning is influenced by difficulties within the system or at an individual level.

The negotiation of boundaries, whether bodily, emotional, or pedagogical, becomes particularly salient in pedagogical contexts, especially in elementary education, early childhood education or in special needs settings, which depend on a heightened sensitivity. At its most basic, education can be understood as the exercise of influence on others, especially children and young people. Boundary reflection, a heightened awareness of and sensitivity to boundaries and limitations, is concerned with the customary definition of boundaries to this influence. These boundaries are limitations determined by cultural and organizational rules and norms and by ever-changing situational parameters. Another way of putting this is to say that pedagogical tact is a matter of distinguishing differences and accepting divergences, both in thought and action. This understanding can be critically extended through Theodor W. Adorno`s reflections in Minima Moralia. Adorno shows that tact presupposes social conventions that are no longer fully stable yet continue to structure interaction. The historical moment of tact coincides with a reshuffling of what once appeared to be an objective, even universal, social order. "The precondition of tact is a

[22] Hans-Rüdiger Müller, 'Pedagogical Tact and the Limits of Community', in Pedagogical Tact: Reconnecting Theory and Practice in Education, edited by Norm Friesen and Thomas Senkbeil (New York: Peter Lang, 2026), pp. 97–112.
[23] (ibid., p. 100)

convention that is no longer intact, yet still present"[24]. Ultimately, he argues that tact depends on social conventions that have lost their full authority but have not yet disappeared. This always involves the theoretical question of belonging or differing from existing social norms. Adorno's understanding of the concept of "difference" serves primarily as a dialectical tool for envisioning the future, particularly in pedagogy, which is permeated with unpredictable situations and the potential for new beginnings. If theory is simply applied to practice, it will therefore ultimately fail. In its role as an arbiter between theory and practice, pedagogical tact can be described as a "systematic place of mediation".[25] Tactful pedagogical professionalism could therefore be recognized in the educator's ability to successfully mediate between theory and an uncertain practice in a unique situation, since "tact is not only to be understood as a theoretical conception of educational studies, but it also contains, above all, a pedagogical theory of action for the educator".[26] In this "in-between" (Dazwischen), tact continuously produces and redraws boundaries between self and other. In doing so, it does not merely regulate relations but also transforms itself through practice. Its function lies in continuously redrawing these boundaries, through which it transforms itself.

> *Takt*, which generates similar repetitions by itself by forming a boundary, transforms its function through its action. *Takt* is a motion that continues to form itself and it also forms a boundary by itself. *Takt* is always forming itself by means of forming a boundary. Indeed, *Takt* is comparable to skill, because it is polished as it is used.[27]

This process is a tension between repetition, which fosters identification, and differentiation, and within this dynamic, tact continually reshapes itself. Despite its lack of controllable or technical structure, tact is not "unruly" or "arbitrary." It is instead engendered by moral development, through which people are sensitized, stimulated, and strengthened in relation to their professional pedagogical goals. Through professionally meaningful activities and individual reflection, insight is gained that is assessed as significant and valuable. This subsequently becomes internalized in the form of principles that guide action both in and across individual situations. These theoretical principles must be critically questioned, contextualized, and evaluated so that they can be demonstrated in practice. Tact regulates the drawing of boundaries as an act of mediation between an inside and an outside. It facilitates the mediation between a deep sensitivity to the child's psychological state (closeness) and a detached judgment that comprehends the external situation. In other words, tact involves the ability to navigate the fine line between being empathetic and emotionally attuned to a child's inner world and, at the same time, being able to make judgments and decisions that are in line with the child's external situation. Since tact is characterized by mental activity, it, like Kant's logical tact, allows one to come "out with a correct result, without being conscious of the acts that are going on inside the mind during this process".[28] In this sense, pedagogical tact supplements sensitive

[24]Theodor W Adorno, Minima Moralia: Reflexionen aus dem beschädigten Leben (Frankfurt am Main : Suhrkamp, 1984 [1951]).
[25] Sabine Seichter, `Pedagogical Tact-Viewed from a Humanities Perspective`. in Pedagogical tact: Theory, empiricism, culture (pp. 43–52). Schöningh., at p. 45.
[26] (ibid.)
[27] Shoko Suzuki, Takt in Modern Education (Münster: Waxmann, 2010), at p.167.
[28]Immanuel Kant, Anthropologie in pragmatischer Hinsicht, in Werke in zehn Bänden, vol. 10, edited by Volker W. Weischedel (Darmstadt: Wissenschaftliche Buchgesellschaft, 2007 [1798]), at p. 250.

responsiveness in early childhood, guiding the balance between closeness and distance, personhood and role. It protects against harm or embarrassment and structures boundaries in bodily, emotional, and pedagogical dimensions. Education, in its most basic form, is the exercise of influence on others; tact allows teachers to do so ethically and skillfully. In this respect, Adorno's concept of difference underscores that pedagogy unfolds in unpredictable, uncertain situations and open-ended constellations, requiring tact to mediate between theoretical orientation and situated practice.[29]

Pedagogical tact as a concept of differentiation

To better understand pedagogical tact as a concept of differentiation (Burghardt & Zirfas 2019), it is first necessary to define the term 'difference'. This term operates on several semantic levels: as a formal distinction; as qualitative otherness; and as symbolic strangeness. In their seminal article, Ricken and Balzer (2007) distinguish between three dimensions: difference, understood as a categorical distinction; otherness, understood as a subjective perspective on difference; and strangeness, understood as a physical and emotional experience of the other.

Difference is therefore always double-coded, both as an epistemological criterion of distinction and as a normative structural element of social hierarchies. As critical theory reminds us, "No difference exists without a norm": those who appear 'different' are always positioned against what is considered 'normal'. In the school context, descriptions of difference – whether through performance assessments, diagnoses or support measures, thus become objects of critical reflection. Here, difference functions as an epistemic-normative prerequisite, shaping which distinctions are made and how they are pedagogically addressed. When considered alongside the category of inequality, difference refers to the production, evaluation and institutionalization of social and ethnic distinctions. To the extent that such processes result in sustained disadvantages for particular groups, they constitute forms of institutional discrimination.[30] From phenomenological and practice-theoretical perspectives, this raises further questions that allow for different areas of focus. The phenomenological perspective emphasizes how difference is physically perceived, experienced, and responded to in terms of its foreignness.[31] From a practice-theoretical perspective, the inquiry centers on which distinctions educational actors routinely make, and how practices emerge at the intersection of recognition, exclusion, and normalization.

The constructed nature of the category of disability became a relevant topic in the 21st century in the context of the inclusion debate and disability studies. Traditional diagnostic approaches, once viewed as guiding action, are increasingly criticized for reinforcing inequality and producing exclusion. In response, contemporary pedagogical approaches emphasize identifying structural and interactive barriers to participation and transforming them wherever possible. From this perspective, inclusive pedagogical tact can

[29]Seichter, Pedagogical Tact-Viewed from a Humanities Perspective, p. 45.
[30]Mechtild Gomolla and Frank-
Olaf Radtke, Institutionelle Diskriminierung: Die Herstellung ethnischer Differenz in der Schule (Wiesbaden: VS Verlag für Sozialwissenschaften, 2009).
[31]Bernhard Waldenfels, Grundmotive einer Phänomenologie des Fremden (Frankfurt am Main: Suhrkamp Verlag, 2006).

be understood as a practice that becomes visible precisely at the boundaries of social participation and recognition.

Just as the child uses his song to navigate the boundaries of chaos and safety, educators exercise pedagogical tact to guide students across the social boundaries that shape participation. This delicate navigation of emerging order and chaos mirrors the social processes that performativity research seeks to understand.

The aim of performativity research[32] is to empirically understand concepts and processes of personal self-limitation, as they apply to the successful socialization of the individual. Performativity research offers a framework for analyzing how such boundaries are enacted and negotiated in everyday pedagogical interactions. In *Boundaries of the Social*, Lindemann (2006) analyses how social relationships and communities are defined by certain boundaries. These boundaries can be physical, cultural, economic or social and influence how people interact and feel part of a community. The relationship between sociology and anthropology is reformulated following the historical-reflexive anthropology of Helmuth Plessner. Plessner's anthropologically grounded sociology places social tact at the center of his critique of community, most prominently developed in *Grenzen der Gemeinschaft* (1924). Rather than treating community as an unqualified social ideal, Plessner approaches it as a form of social organization that is inherently limited and potentially dangerous when absolutized. His intervention was shaped by the rise of what he called "social radicalism," a broad cultural tendency in the early twentieth century that sought to overcome modern society by replacing mediated, impersonal relations with immediate forms of communal belonging.

How is the boundary between social persons and other entities actually drawn within social processes? Because of the human capacity for "eccentric positionality",[33] individuals can create consistency. "In order to realize this, a self would not only have to be the current consummation of the mediation between perceiving and self-activity, but it would have to be simultaneously within and outside of this mediation".[34] Furthermore, Plessner (1924) defines tact as "a bindingness which does not bind," as a "sphere" in which "there should be neither good nor evil, neither truth nor error, but only the value of beneficence—the hygiene of the greatest possible nurturance [Schonung, or protection]".[35] It can be considered a specific feature of modern societies that only people living in this world can be social persons in a generally recognized sense. Other societies draw the boundaries of the social in a different way and include, for example, gods or animals in the circle of legitimate persons. Plessner had already referred to in the importance of tact for diplomacy in the public sphere on the basis of determinate interstices, by granting the "balancing of inner tension through the stamp of a spiritual function, [so] this relationship in turn acts back on the effective whole and thus gives the public sphere inner structure and

[32]Bernd Huppauf and Christoph Wulf, Dynamics and Performativity of Imagination: The Image betw een the Visible and the Invisible (London and New York: Routledge, 2009).
[33] Helmuth Plessner, The Limits of Community: A Critique of Social Radicalism, translated by Alan Wallace (Amherst, NY: Prometheus, 1999 [1924]).
[34] Gesa Lindemann, 'Sociology—Anthropology and the Analysis of Societal Border Regimes', in Philosophical Anthropology in the 21st Century, edited by Hans-Peter Krüger and Gesa Lindemann (Berlin and Boston: De Gruyter, 2006), pp. 42–62., at p. 51.
[35] Plessner, The Limits of Community, pp. 163–164.

outer form".[36] As the "beat of the heart" and the "cement of society",[37] tact manifests itself as a perceptible phenomenon in the "in-between" and characterizes the fragility of human bodily existence in terms of its performance, which must be cultivated and civilized as the variable shaping and "mastery of one's own body [...], which had to be learned and demands constant control. This distance in me and to me only gives me the possibility to overcome it".[38] Tact describes a state of liminality and mediates as a creative act between a negating past. This moment calls for new modes of attunement and care, new ways of living alongside the non-human world, and new practices for sustaining fragile relationships across differences. The fragility of these interactions reflects the fragility of life itself in the Anthropocene: both require attention to the elusive and ephemeral yet essential elements that sustain our worlds. To think of tact in this way is to understand it as a practice of care — not only for students and situations, but also for the worlds and relations that uphold life amid ecological and cultural uncertainty.

The role of reflection for pedagogical tact

According to Suzuki (2014), tact is situationally an appropriate agency for humans "to comprehend their material and psychological distance in relation to other people and their environment and to adjust accordingly".[39] Tact represents a reflexive moment, which presupposes self-activity and self-authorization. "Moreover, in the sense that it functions as an instinct or intuition on the borderline between consciousness and the unconscious, it is neither purely rational nor is it purely affective".[40] Confidence in the reflection of self-representation creates security in the environment and the interactions within it, and, from an anthropological perspective, provides complexity reduction. Tact ultimately creates a "style," a bundle of heterogeneous, fuzzy elements combined with professional components, such as self-reflection, awareness, motivation, and self-regulation, e.g. resulting in consistency in the form of a territory or professional attitude (*Haltung*).[41]

Again, the adjective "reflexive" means a self-referential movement. "Tact enables the active person to grasp a situation in seconds. Tact is the ability and the art of grasping a fixed point at which the best balance can be found within a movement".[42] This leads to questions of what structures thought and which forces are involved. Tact, with its aesthetic-mimetic structure follows taste as one of the sensory cognitive faculties or aesthetic judgments that needs to be cultivated. According to Kant, the education of the soul is always linked to the education of the body: "The education of the soul can therefore just as

[36] Plessner, The Limits of Community, p. 95.
[37] (ibid.)
[38]Helmuth Plessner, Mit anderen Augen: Aspekte einer philosophischen Anthropologie (Stuttgart: Rec lam, 1982).
[39] Shoko Suzuki, 'Takt', in Handbook of Pedagogical Anthropology, edited by Christoph Wulf and Jörg Zirfas (Cham: Springer, 2014), pp. 295–301., at p. 298.
[40] Shoko Suzuki, Takt in Modern Education (Münster: Waxmann, 2010). at p. 169.
[41]Thomas Senkbeil and Norm Friesen, 'Pedagogical Tact and Teacher Professionalization: A Conceptualization', in Pedagogical Tact: Reconnecting Theory and Practice in Education, edited by Norm Friesen and Thomas Senkbeil (New York: Peter Lang, 2026), pp. 195–212.
[42] Suzuki, 'Takt', p. 298f.

well be called physical as that of the body"[43]– but this still leaves it far removed from the highest level of moral education, as mere cultivation. Kant's conception of power is closely tied to concepts of freedom and moral autonomy. He believed that individuals possess inherent moral worth and should be treated as ends in themselves, not as means to an end. Consequently, the concept of freedom plays a central role in his notion of Enlightenment, which he famously defined as "man's emergence from his self-imposed immaturity." Leaving this self-inflicted condition can be interpreted as a professional action, a step toward emancipation. Self-reflexivity addresses the interstices in the transitions between different milieus. Each milieu has different codes, which in turn encode other milieus and are themselves constantly transcoded. The impulses constantly pass from one milieu to another, and milieus also pass from one to the other, by their very nature, communicating. The space in-between forms the union of rhythm and chaos that gives humans their signature, their style – their tact, understood as a place to stay, a home, at least for the moment. Pedagogical tact as a reflexive, responsive, and ethical practice navigates boundaries, fosters belongings, and creates solidarity across human and non-human worlds. It is a practice of inclusion rather than exclusion, attentive to fragility, and oriented toward sustaining life, relationships, and communities in all their complexities.

In this context, the philosophy of Kitaro Nishida, founder of the Kyoto School, offers profound insights into the dynamic interplay between intuition, repetition, and action, which resonates with Deleuze's concept of the *ritornello*. Deleuze and Guattari's musical notion of the refrain, or *ritornello*, in *A Thousand Plateaus: Capitalism and Schizophrenia*, highlights the creative potential of repetition and return. Similarly, tactful teaching can manifest as dynamic irregularity within static regularity, as Muth (1967/2022, p. 91) has put it. Nishida's "logic of place" (basho no ronri) situates human consciousness and action within a continuously shifting field of interactions, drawing on both Eastern and Western philosophical traditions.[44] Influenced by Leibniz's differential logic and Buddhist thought, Nishida proposed that human consciousness is not a fixed entity but a reflective process in which the self mirrors itself in action. His concept of "active intuition" (kōiteki chokkan) suggests that intuition is not passive observation but an active process unfolding within the dynamics of being and place.[45]

In Nishida's framework, this "place of acting intuition" is precisely where tact operates. Tact, for Nishida, emerges as an intuitive awareness that arises not through reflective reasoning alone but through habitual and creative acts of self-awareness. Similar to Deleuze`s understanding of thought emerging from unconscious repetitions of memory and habit, Nishida conceptualizes repetition not as mechanical recurrence but as mimesis, through which something genuinely new is created. This creative dimension of repetition is captured in Nishida`s notion of *effort*, understood as a conscious striving that shapes intuitive action.[46]

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[43]Immanuel Kant, 'Über Pädagogik', in Schriften zur Anthropologie, Geschichtsphilosophie und Päda gogik, vol. 2, Werkausgabe, vol. XII (Frankfurt am Main: Suhrkamp, 2000 [1803]), pp. 695–768. At p. 728)

[44] Kitaro Nishida, Intuition and Reflection in Self-Consciousness, translated by H. Valdo, T. Viglielmo, T. Takeuchi and J. S. O'Leary (Albany: State University of New York Press, 1987 [1912]). at p.28).

[45] Nishida, Intuition and Reflection in Self-Consciousness, p.31.

[46] Kitarō Nishida, 'Essays on Philosophy', vols. 6–7 (1945–1946), in Nishida Kitaro Zenshu, vol. 10 (Tokyo: Iwanami Shoten, 2004), p. 288-290.

Tact in this sense, sharpens the self-reflective process through effort. It bridges the gap between the internal reflective process of judgment and the external action, enabling the individual to navigate the complexities of social and educational interactions.[47] Deleuze's ritornello similarly functions as a metaphor for returning to and reorganizing structure within ongoing processes of interaction. Thus, tact emerges as a medium for creative action, wherein judgment, intuition, and effort converge.

In its pedagogical dimension, tact manifests as intuitive professional behavior and thinking. Van Manen (1995) observes, that "a thoughtful teacher discovers in concrete situations that he or she has pedagogical tact,"[48] emphasizing that tact cannot be separated from the curriculum, subject matter, or didactic-methodological considerations. Pedagogical tact is "thoughtless" in the sense that it cannot be fully articulated through rational deliberation or calculation; it is a reflective thoughtfulness embedded in action. Tact is therefore both intuitive and ethically informed, functioning as a critical distance or clarity that arises from habituated professional experience. Tact can be understood primarily to be an intuitive action, and in its embodiment as habitual territory, a kind of critical distance or clarity. Because of the self-reflective character of an ethical-moral embodied attitude or judgement, particular attention is therefore paid to research into tact in therapeutic settings, especially in psychoanalysis. "Tact, then, is neither an outdated construct of thought nor a new invention; rather, it is an expression of an educational self-understanding on the one hand and a characterization of a professional cognitive ability on the other".[49] Tact that suddenly appears in a particular unconscious state "arises when consciousness has been ground down by the formation of routines".[50] So, too, is the role of the ritornello in Deleuze's work, which can be considered a metaphor for such a form of thinking. The connection between these elements is a form of resistance and empowerment, less a territorial locality absorbed in its structured provincial or regional determinations, more a spiritual companion in territorialization, which unconsciously returns to a structure of its own, as a form of *professional intuition*, or as Deleuze refers to the construction of his thought, as a kind of "trajectory of the intuition".[51]

How Can Pedagogical Tact Be Learned and Cultivated?

The relationship between enactment of pedagogical tact and "learned" professional competence requires particular attention when considering the learnability of tact. The problematic aspect of pedagogical tact in terms of the mystery posed by the indeterminacies in pedagogical practice cannot be easily remedied through scientific logic, rational planning, or technical controllability. Also, tact plays a role when professionalism is prescribed without anyone being able to justify it, when determinations prove futile or when the rationality of practical decisions or of appropriate practical action in pedagogy is

[47] Nishida, 'Essays on Philosophy', p. 288.
[48] Max van Manen, 'Herbarth und der Takt im Unterricht', in Didaktik und/oder Curriculum: Basic Problems of an International Comparative Didactics, edited by Stefan Hopmann and Klaus Riquarts (Weinheim and Basel: Beltz, 1995), pp. 61–80, at p. 61.
[49] Seichter, Pedagogical Tact-Viewed from a Humanities Perspective, p. 46.
[50] Suzuki, 'Takt', p. 299.
[51] Alain Badiou, Deleuze: The Clamor of Being, translated by Louise Burchill (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 2000 [1997]). at p. 35.

not only casually but principally in question. New and more profound discussions about the heuristic of pedagogical tact are clearly worthwhile when supporting a learning subject's own efforts to educate themselves or developing one's own moral and pedagogical responsibility.[52] As a conceptualization of pedagogical tact in teacher education, examined by Senkbeil and Friesen[53], pedagogical tact represents a professional orientation that enables educators to exercise responsible judgement under conditions of uncertainty. Its relevance emerges precisely in situations where pedagogical professionalism is required but cannot be fully predetermined, where established solutions prove insufficient, and where appropriate pedagogical action depends on reflective and context-sensitive judgement.

From this perspective, pedagogical tact can nonetheless be approached as something that is cultivable—although not in a strictly technical or linear sense. Its development should therefore not be understood as the transmission of a fixed skill set, but rather as an iterative process of professional formation. This process may be supported through three interrelated dimensions: (1) academic preparation grounded in scientific methods, subject-specific and didactic knowledge, illustrative examples, and practical demonstrations; (2) experiential learning through practical training placements; and (3) structured reflection in seminars and mentoring contexts. These dimensions do not operate independently but should be understood as mutually reinforcing elements of professional learning that reconnect theoretical knowledge with practical experience.

Against the background of praxeological research conducted within reflection seminars with student teachers, I have developed a course design in the field of practical teacher education that examines the significance of pedagogical tact for processes of professionalization. The aim of this approach is not to suggest that pedagogical tact can be directly taught or technically acquired, but rather to create learning environments in which students can critically engage with complex pedagogical situations, reflect on their experiences, and gradually develop professional judgement. Through the systematic interplay of practical experience, theoretical knowledge, and collaborative reflection, students are supported in developing a reflective orientation towards uncertainty and the relational, ethical, and situational demands of pedagogical practice. In this sense, the cultivation of pedagogical tact emerges not as the application of a predefined method, but as an ongoing process in which theoretical understanding and practical experience continuously inform each other. Pedagogical tact as a reflexive-normative concept may be considered a valuable approach, providing orientation both for theoretical training and professionalization and for handling situations involving uncertainty. This is achieved 1) through academic preparation using scientific methods, subject-specific and didactic instructions, illustrative examples and practical demonstrations, 2) through experience and practice in the context of practical placements and 3) through reflection as a framework for thought in the reflection seminars. The central aspects of professional action competence(s) and the pedagogical tact can be introduced in order to then discuss application horizons and practical realization in reflection seminars and internships. Against this background, a possible justification with application potential and reflection potential for the 1) internship

[52] Senkbeil, 'The Performative Triangle of Tact as a Professional "Action Competence"'; Friesen & Senkbeil, Pedagogical Tact: Reconnecting Theory and Practice in Education.
[53] Senkbeil & Friesen, 'Pedagogical Tact and Teacher Professionalization: A Conceptualization'

and 2) reflection seminar & mentorship follows, with the aim of practicing and embodying pedagogical tact which is marked by a distanced-reflective attitude and critical thinking, whereby this professionalization process is an iterative and lifelong endeavour. Ultimately, this involves aesthetic-sensory judgments that can be put into practice. In the context of professionalization and teacher education, the performance of pedagogical tact involves the fusion of subject knowledge and professional competency and occurs based on reflective action. To make the process of learning pedagogical tact more concrete, it is essential to consider practical training models that foster reflective practice. For example, role-playing, case-based learning, and peer feedback could be incorporated into teacher education programs to enable future educators to practice real-time decision-making while reflecting on their actions. This hands-on approach allows learners to integrate theoretical knowledge with experiential learning, creating a dynamic feedback loop where reflection and action continuously inform each other.

The goal of professionalization in pedagogy, especially in Teacher Education in Special Needs, is the critical-reflexive examination of the human image and self-determination of the human being in pedagogical child-raising and educational relationships. This is understood first and foremost as a self-reflexive regulating process, which acts structurally in psychodynamic relational processes to itself and its intertwined environment. In special education, this boundary becomes apparent when attributions of deficiency, deviation, or non-normativity call into question the status of humanity and at the same time generate a claim to recognition and responsibility. This article argues that remedial education necessarily operates within this tension: between criticism of normative images of humanity and the indispensability of a reference to humanity. The boundaries of the inhuman do not mark a place beyond humanity, but rather a reflective space in which humanism is redefined in conditions of vulnerability and unavailability. In the sense of an implicit normativity of manifold forms of knowledge, it is necessary to represent these fields of knowledge while maintaining the manifold, unfathomable essential cores of humanity in a complementary manner that is radically open and objective.[54] Likewise, as a superficial maieutic achievement of pedagogy, it is necessary for the unconscious or internal, in the form of imagination and imagery, to be fostered and brought forth. Only focused and repetitive engagement between the unconscious and external stimuli, experiences, and forces allows consciousness and attitude to emerge. Pedagogical anthropology, therefore, does not constitute a "firmly defined, systematic canon of knowledge, but rather a scientific attitude or stance that poses the question of what is human, precisely because it is enigmatic and not fully recognizable".[55] Moreover, it is important to recognize that pedagogical tact does not exist in a vacuum; it is shaped by the cultural and societal contexts in which it is practiced. In diverse educational environments, tact must adapt to varying social norms, values, and expectations. For example, what is considered tactful behavior in one culture may be perceived differently in another. Therefore, developing pedagogical tact requires not only personal reflection but also an awareness of cultural differences and the flexibility to adjust one's actions accordingly.

[54] Christoph Wulf and Jörg Zirfas (eds), Handbuch der pädagogischen Anthropologie (Wiesbaden: Springer, 2014).
[55] ibid., p.11.

This can be considered as the foundation[56] for tactful action based on the practices of theory and praxis, as opposed to intuitive action. Tact is characterized by its structuring of itself in practical pedagogical activity on the basis of corresponding theoretical orientation and knowledge. It is intended to mediate a structuring function within the framework of reciprocity. In the performativity of pedagogical tact, practical experience and theoretical knowledge are consistently united, shaped, and exemplified. Neither comprehensive theoretical knowledge nor retrospectively gained practical experience can fully capture the singularity of pedagogical practice. Professionalization, therefore, should not be understood as the application of fixed knowledge or ready-made solutions. Rather, it functions as a rehearsal process for a reflexive scientific habitus and, as Burghardt and Zirfas (2019) argue, as a "problem formula" (*Problematisierungsformel*). In this sense, professionalization does not primarily offer instructions for action but provides a framework through which pedagogical situations can be critically framed and examined. Its central function lies in problematizing fundamental pedagogical facts—rendering visible those aspects of practice that are structurally problematic and enabling them to be addressed both theoretically and practically.[57] As an action of thought and practice, pedagogical tact combines scientific knowledge and professional practice. It can be understood as an immediate, intuitive reflection in action that is appropriate to the individual case.

In this context, Kitaro Nishida's concept of "effort" in his work *An Inquiry into the Good* offers a valuable perspective on cultivating tact.[58] Nishida describes how "pure experience," - a state in which the distinction between subject and object dissolves[59] - can be cultivated through effort, which he defines as a reflective and dynamic process rather than mere mental or physical labor. Thus, effort becomes a technique for guiding oneself into a state of pure experience, where the self and the world are mirrored in a unified process of reflection.[60] This active reflection on one's being within the dynamics of action enables individuals to refine their sense of self, much as pedagogical tact is continually honed through reflection and practice. Nishida's emphasis on the self's ability to structure and cultivate itself through effort is similar to the process of developing tact, where reflective engagement with theoretical knowledge and practical experience shapes professional competency, as Suzuki (2022) points out. As a result, pedagogical tact can be understood as an ethically grounded skill mediating between theory and practice. This concept echoes Herbart's "Mittelglied" and resonates with Kantian concerns for moral responsibility in education. Pedagogical tact is not a purely intuitive skill; it presupposes reflective ethical judgement and a disciplined form of empathy that is attuned to the vulnerability of others without overstepping professional boundaries. This empathetic restraint allows educators to respond sensitively to specific situations, safeguarding the

[56] As a foundation, pedagogical anthropology highlights that theory and practice are part of a constantly evolving process, and that tact emerges and develops from that dynamic relationship. Tact is not a static precondition, but as something that evolves and is shaped by the ongoing relationship between theory and practice.

[57] Burghardt & Zirfas, Der pädagogische Takt: Eine erziehungswissenschaftliche Problemformel., p. 10.

[58] Kitarō Nishida, 'Essays on Philosophy', vols. 6–7 (1945–1946), in Nishida Kitaro Zenshu, vol. 10 (Tokyo: Iwanami Shoten, 2004). p. 288.

[59] Nishida, Intuition and Reflection in Self-Consciousness, p.28.

[60] cf. Nishida, Intuition and Reflection in Self-Consciousness

dignity and integrity of children while minimizing the risk of harm. As Zirfas (2022) emphasizes, the practice of 'limiting oneself for the sake of the other' highlights the ethical core of pedagogical action. This positions empathy and responsibility as foundational conditions for professional educational practice, rather than optional dispositions.

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Book Review: DuFord, Rochelle. *Solidarity in Conflict: A Democratic Theory*. Stanford, California: Stanford University Press, 2022, 216 pp.

Per Sundman

In *Solidarity in Conflict A Democratic Theory* Rochelle Du Ford sets out to formulate a non-ideal democratic theory that centers on the concept of solidarity, and on non-pathological solidarity organizations. The book is densely argued, based on a well digested learnedness, but also original, particularly in its way of delineating the political role of solidarity.

Avoiding ideal theory is claimed to be significant. The text has the admirable ambition of avoiding common traps of positive ideal theory accounts, primarily John Rawls's alleged (inadvertent) idealization of the circumstances of white men, and Jürgen Habermas´s politically "useless", yes, it is called useless, account of an ideal speech situation.

Allegedly, the lived practices of concrete (non-ideal) solidarity organizations harbor the solution. They namely provide both pro-democracy motivation and orientation. DuFord writes: "[…] solidarity is actually two relations in one, the internal and the external, each set of relations can be guided by different norms given the members´ different roles. Internally, members can be guided by a commitment to norms of nondomination and nonexclusion—democratic norms through which the process of democracy is both enabled and lived. Externally, a solidarity group can be guided by strategic action because the world at large lacks commitment to democratic norms or nondomination."[1] Moreover: "[…], the democratic solidarity I want to develop is not merely strategic and tactical. It is also guided by an internal democratic ethos of nonexclusion, justice, and liberation."[2] That is, it is not just argued that members "can be guided by a commitment to norms of nondomination and nonexclusion", DuFord claims that there are non-pathological and pathological instances of solidarity, and that non-pathological practices of solidarity are characterized by having egalitarian inclusivity, the ending of all kinds of exclusions, as a shared goal. Pathological solidarity on the other hand is purely strategic, and anti-social. The strategic nature reveals itself in virtue of how any end (except honestly attempting to end oppression) can be the shared goal of collective action, and the antisocial consists in a shared intention to uphold (one´s own) domination, rather than fighting together to counteract unfair access to power. Interestingly, DuFord notes that in reality inauthentic solidarity groups, say white supremacists, or Men´s Rights Activists, tell stories about themselves as marginalized by contemporary liberal society, i.e. hiding the fact that they fight to regain lost privileges built on domination of others.

[1] DuFord, Rochelle. *Solidarity in Conflict A Democratic Theory*. Stanford, California: Stanford University Press, 2022, p. 68.
[2] Ibid., p. 65.

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Moreover, DuFord makes an eloquent distinction between liberal solidarity and democratic ditto. Liberal solidarity typically takes the form of privileged people who solidarize with other (oppressed) people, whereas democratic solidarity is lived and practiced by oppressed people themselves. It is labelled democratic in virtue of its aim, to end domination, to realize a way of living together that will not reproduce power over people constructed as insignificant, subordinate, or mere resources/things. "[…] the goal of a feminist solidarity group is that no one should be a patriarch any longer, and thus that no one should remain excluded permanently."[3]

The point is well taken. To be perfectly united or at one in aspirations to uphold undeserved privileges based on exploitation of others is wrong, according to most accounts of social justice. However, it is ambivalent to name unjust, racist and misogynist solidarity organizations, pathological. One could say that not all solidaristic organizations aim at something outsiders have any kind of, moral and other, reasons to value. Some may be examples of collective arrogant selfishness, and worse. There might be a reason for explicating such organizations as pathological rather than destructive or unjust. Naming the unjust pathological appears to hide the explicitly normative distinction between solidarity as it ought to be, ideal solidarity and wrongful, non-ideal solidarity. It is namely tricky to make necessary normative distinctions, between solidarity that undercuts and solidarity that strengthens democracy, and remain coherently within the confines of non-ideal theory. Non-ideal theories are not supposed to apply positive normative concepts on solidarity organization to map the contours of a less imperfect political reality. Lived experience is supposed to provide content and orientation, not theory. But, to name something an illness is to say that it is bad, in peculiar way. Indifference towards the pathological is not an option. On the contrary, the sick person, here society and white male "solidarity organizations", ought to be cured. One should not belong to those who just let the sick person. Moreover, naming wrongful solidarity sick comes with the risk of hiding that it is not solidarity alone that constitutes the exemplary character of emancipatory groups, it is what they are trying to achieve, and perhaps the means they would never use.

That being said, *Solidarity in Conflict* investigates urgent connections between democracy, a diminishing way of organizing society, and actual political activity that furthers democracy, and that counteracts tendencies to be mere reflections of current majority preferences.

The latter points us towards a second problem. Put bluntly, the non-ideal account of democracy offered in the book fails to acknowledge two significant aspects of the phenomenon. Firstly, democracy is about rule by the people, that is democracy connotes self-government as opposed to be governed by someone else. A specific way of ruling is democratic to the extent that the subjects rule themselves. Organizing distribution of scarce goods according to varying conceptions of need does not belong to the defining properties of democracy. Secondly, to be self-governing is different from just getting what you want. Self-government is about being in control of yourself, i.e. to have a say in whatever desire we are moved by. Collective self-government entails acknowledging others as not merely holders of preferences or desires, but as self-directing people worthy of respect. Put in other words, democracy should on principle include all self-directing subjects. This is why we could say that a government that does not represent some groups who live under its rule suffers from a democratic deficit.

[3] Ibid., p. 19.

Democracy is hard, especially when it comes to large organizations, when rule through representatives is found pragmatically necessary. However, DuFord draws an apparently wrongful conclusion: "Democracy as a form of life undermines democracy as a form of government because democracy as a form of government is an exercise of power over people."[4] Since all remaining actual democracies are indirect/representative, aggregative, and majority ruled, democratic government entails being ruled more than to rule. Just like some solidarity groups are destructive, some democracies are not completely authoritarian rather than perfectly democratic. The point is double; to identify flaws we need a conception of an ideal. Moreover, to govern oneself rather than to be governed is not necessarily a sign of mere non-ideal conditions, which DuFord claims, but can also be viewed as a sign of a respectful society of and for grownups.

Somewhat paradoxically, *Solidarity in Conflict* offers a nuanced and original ideal theory of solidarity (labelled non-pathological), and a less useful non-ideal account of democracy. All in all, this book is highly recommended.

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Ibid., p. 155.

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Book Review: Zerilli, Linda M. G. *A Democratic Theory of Truth*, Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2025, 259 pp.

Fredrik Stjernberg

We are in trouble. As a society, we are facing serious challenges, ranging from geopolitics to the advent of AI, environmental degradation and climate change. Along with these issues, some new pressing issues can come up, as the pandemic did a few years ago. Handling these problems would require a firm grasp of what is going on, i. e., a grasp of what is the case, of the truths out there. Yet there are strong forces working to loosen our grasp of the truth. Authoritarians over the world are uninterested in the truth and actively promote completely false narratives. Their intent is not just to get us to believe in falsehoods, the aim is the more insidious one of making us give up the idea that there is an interesting distinction between truth and falsehood to uphold, to care about, as Hannah Arendt pointed out long ago:

> The ideal subject of totalitarian rule is not the convinced Nazi or the convinced Communist, but people for whom the distinction between fact and fiction (i.e., the reality of experience) and the distinction between true and false (i.e., the standards of thought) no longer exist. (Arendt 1966, p. 474)

Post-truth, as it has been called, is all around. At times, it can feel as if you could throw a rock in any direction and hit a discussion of post-truth and its problems. Zerilli's book provides a large and useful set of references, and a useful discussion of many of the pressing issues in this context.[1]

This large debate points to severe problems, problems that are likely to get worse over time. The fact that the Swedish Broadcasting Corporation recently (November 2025) inadvertently posted an AI video as real footage is but one telling example. If even the most stringent, most respected, channels start serving AI slop as the real thing, where will we end up? Is it time to forget about truth?

One almost reflexive response is to stress the need for fact-checking. Couldn't we fact-check our way out of these problems? This would probably not help much; fact-checkable, and fact-checking, media are a shrinking part of people's media consumption. There seems to be a growing attitude that facts themselves are up for grabs – talk of "alternative facts" is not the solecism it used to be. Zerilli is pretty unenthusiastic about fact-checking. Not because it has turned out to be rather ineffective (which it has), but for more complex reasons. The poverty of appeals to facts is in effect a central theme in the book. Zerilli's lukewarm attitude towards fact-checking is stated concisely:

[1] Footnote 1 to the Introduction (p. 195) provides a very useful list, listing almost twenty books featuring "post-truth" in the title. Penco (2024) is also very useful, with many examples and a historical background to the cases discussed.

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> Fact-checking that dismisses opinions as cognitively worthless does not disclose truth but leads, instead, right back into the jaws of positivism, the tenacious idea that facts speak for themselves, that they do not rest on opinion or 'seems-to-me' (p. 70).

This brief passage in fact expresses much that is central to Zerilli's book. A democratic theory of truth does not mean that the winner of the popular vote is the true view (whatever that might mean – voting about the correct result of 2+2 looks like a non-starter); what is intended is that truth must respect opinion, in a sense which Zerilli takes great care to characterize. Here, Zerilli takes her cue from Hannah Arendt, who made use of the Greek notion of *dokei-moi*, "seems-to-me".

Zerilli's work can perhaps be contrasted with Lynch's (2021, 2025; see also Roquen 2025). Lynch has also written much on connections between truth and the demands of democracy, but he concentrates on a slightly different question: what role should truth have in a democratic society?

The book first introduces what it sees as the problem of truth. We appear to have a too deferential conception of what truth is, and what it really does. Zerilli's view is that we (or at least many of us) have been thinking about the role of truth in politics in the wrong way. We have a:

> fateful view of objectivity [that] has decisive consequences for democratic politics. It binds truth to science, cognitive expertise, and epistemic competence (e. g. epistocracy), and, not least, it erodes ordinary citizens' view of opinion. As no exercise of human subjectivity can produce objective knowledge, opinion – one's own and that of one's fellow citizens – is ipso facto merely subjective. (p. 9)

We can sum up Zerilli's book as follows: we need a notion of truth that works for a democratic society, and this will mean that we give up certain cherished preconceptions about the nature and import of truth. The book is a sustained discussion of several philosophers, mainly Arendt, Foucault, and (the later) Wittgenstein. Guided by their ideas, we are to arrive at a saner view of what truth for political purposes might amount to. A saner view will, almost automatically, turn out to be a democratic theory of truth, one that leaves room for human disagreement.

We ought also to ask what makes it so important that our theory of truth be precisely "democratic". Wouldn't it be enough, perhaps even better, if it were *correct*? This question is not really dealt with head-on in the book, but we can piece together a kind of answer. The book is not an attempt to run through different conceptions of truth and tell us which of these that is most democratic (p. xiv). A guiding idea is to "take seriously the Socratic idea that there is truth in opinion" (ibid.). Truth good enough for being useful in a democratic society.

So, what is the book trying to accomplish? The Preface tells us. Given the threats posed by fake news and alternative facts, working in tandem with politicians not caring about truth, we face an erosion of the very notion of truth being something worth holding on to – truth can be replaced by something that appeals to just me, we can all choose our own set of truths. But this is not a sustainable position – if truth is just a matter of what I think, then polarization will ruin society. In the face of this threatening development, many want to stand up for something they see as an alternative to purely subjective truth, namely objective truth – truth that answers to no one, truth that is independent of all points of view. But, Zerilli holds, looking for this kind of objective truth, which will give us simple answers to all our questions, cannot work. A truly democratic view of truth will be positioned to take into account the human perspective. We are trying to make truth safe

for democracy. The term "intersubjective" is not in use in the book, but it seems to cover much of the kind of truth that Zerilli is interested in.

Zerilli's democratic world is one where our disagreements are not immediately turned into polarizing "my facts/your facts" tribalistic displays, a world where disagreements are allowed to play out – either when we find a correct solution, or when we find that there actually is room for a respectful, non-polarizing, disagreement. In this world, all parties are clear that the truths we arrive at are piecemeal and possibly only hold for now. Truth is to be (re-)connected with citizen opinions.

Much of the book is written in opposition to a specific picture of objective truth. This is a notion of truth as a very harsh mistress, in fact, we might call it "dominatrix truth". This conception of truth leaves no room for our subjectively based disagreements, no room for opinion. Such a view of capital-T Truth is held to be almost as bad as the purely subjectivist view of truth as amounting to nothing more than true-for-me. This objective notion of truth "compels submission from those who first track its presence" (p. xiv). This notion of Truth has no connections with what people think, with what people find worthwhile, with what may seem to be the case to us. It must just be obeyed. Thinking that this is the "real" nature of truth is arguably a recipe for disaster; it would be equally damaging to a democratic society, ushering in a regime of pure expert rule.

Setting up the main division in this way seems less than helpful to this reviewer. Yes, if we think that the *only* options are true-for-me and Truth-with-capital-T, dominatrix truth, then it is important to try to find a useful middle ground, avoiding both extremes. I take it as a given that purely subjective truth is not a viable option, so we can leave that to the side. But what about dominatrix truth? Perhaps there are some who think that this is the only remaining option, but I am not convinced that it is.

In practice, there are few cases where the existence of some objective truth would give us a direct recipe for political action. The step from fact to action is usually filtered in many ways. It appears that the envisaged dominatrix truth would be call for pure expert rule, something that pretty clearly would not be much in the way of a democratic view of truth.

But not even the cases where the experts are right, and agree that something is the case, must lead to some particular actions. And in fact, the situation with experts is normally much messier that pure agreement among all experts. We have a few different cases here. At times (very often), experts in one area disagree. On other occasions, experts in one area disagree with experts in another area about what is to be done. Experts in the natural sciences tend to think that it would be a good idea if fossil fuels could be banned today. This would clearly mitigate climate change problems. On the other hand, experts in the social sciences, mainly economists, think that the disruptions caused by such a ban would be so large that it would make things worse, even if it were good for decreasing polluting factors. No one is an expert in all these issues at once, and the problems must be hashed out in political fora. This is (I think) precisely what a democratic theory of truth is supposed to give us.

On yet other occasions, the experts simply don't know what the case is. The pandemic was an instance of this. Pure expert rule was a kind of fantasy here, since the experts were not equipped with sufficiently solid evidence to provide much more than qualified guesses, based on what they knew about similar cases in history. But which cases where similar? As to this, experts kept on disagreeing.

And there are also cases where there are no experts, where the experts simply have no answers at all (yet), because a situation is completely new.

Given examples like this, I don't think the notion of dominatrix truth really covers what is going on. The objective truths we can come by have to be navigated in some manner, but how this is to be done is a matter for a kind of political discussion, presumably of precisely the kind Zerilli is hunting for. Here, we must give science a role, but not as a dominatrix.Science should be trusted, even if there are systemic or structural problems rampant in the practice of modern science (the replication crisis is but one of these issues, but perhaps the most prominent). Science is not right about everything – perhaps it's not even right about much! But the alternatives are worse.

Consider vaccines, for example. Vaccines would be a useful example of how a post-truth era could turn out, and it also shows why aspects of Zerilli's insistence upon the powerless nature of facts perhaps doesn't really address the issues, while more mainstream worries about post-truth do.

Vaccines work. They have saved countless lives. But vaccines can also be ineffective for a few reasons. They can be too expensive. They can have too many side effects. They might also not help enough against the targeted disease. State and local capacity for distributing vaccines may not be up to the task. And we could perhaps also add that the disease we are vaccinating against might not be very severe in the first place, or that there are other treatments that work nicely. The very fact that a given vaccine works (an objective truth) doesn't in itself answer the later questions. Answering these questions will essentially involve making value judgements and most likely engaging in some sort of cost-benefit analysis. Democratic truth, especially since resting with subjective truth here is a non-starter: leaving decisions about vaccines only in the hands of a possibly uninformed individual could put others at risk in an unjust way.

Asking science to provide more than a best shot is asking for more than the scientific method can deliver. This is in fact a fantasy, not unlike the child's fantasy of the omnipotent and omniscient parent. Growing up cures most of us from this misconception about our parents. Some degree of scientific literacy would contribute to curing us of the former fantasy.

The book is erudite, interesting, carefully argued, and presents convincing interpretations of the ideas of its main characters (the focus is strongly on Arendt, Foucault, and Wittgenstein). But there remains a certain unease, at least to this reviewer. The high-octane philosophy discussed and expounded here seems curiously irrelevant to many of the forces and developments that are in play in today's society. There are many very illuminating discussions of the main protagonists (I particularly enjoyed the concluding chapter's discussions of Wittgenstein and McDowell, and what a quietist attitude would amount to). Many of the points made are interesting, and probably also interestingly correct, but how much do they help us?

I expressed a certain hesitancy about the usefulness of the high-powered philosophical theories for the problems we are facing. One example. To this reviewer, Foucault's possible contributions to issues in political philosophy tend to be quite unimpressive. In fact, he often comes across as the Las Vegas of political philosophy. All ritzy and flashy and entertaining, but built on a desert and mainly a large-scale trap to lure people in. Worth a visit, but not a place to settle in. What happens in Foucault better stay in Foucault.

I think that there is a risk of over-intellectualizing the problems we are facing. Many of the problems connected with truth in the public realm are not particularly theoretical or abstract (they can still be very difficult). Is climate change real? Should people get vaccinated? Is it healthy (and good for the environment) to eat massive amounts of red

meat? The high-octane philosophical machinery employed by Zerilli might not be of much use here. The issues where post-truth discourse is rampant is most visible in areas where the philosophical issues don't seem to be very pressing. But your mileage may vary, and there is very much of interest in the book.

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