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# Meditations

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# Editor's Letter

Dear Reader,

The spring of 2024 has been a turbulent time on college campuses as protests and civil unrest have divided our community. During these troubled times, it is necessary to reaffirm our commitment to both dialogue and philosophy. In different ways, this is what each essay in the journal has accomplished. While some of the essays are more political than others, all of them provide a careful and critical meditation on the problems of philosophy. I would like to thank Hunter, Logan, and Wiley for their help in editing the papers and all their valuable comments. I would also like to thank Emma and Brandon for helping to put together the journal this year. Finally, I wish to express my gratitude for the UCLA philosophy department, especially Ashna and Doug, for all their support in making the journal possible.

Cheers,

BRENDAN BACON

*Editor-in-Chief*

# Contents

# The Paradox of Connectivity: Social Media, the Erosion of Individuality, and the World

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## Abstract

Social media possesses an intrinsic paradox. While it has enabled a level of interconnectivity unforeseen in human history, social media also promotes an aggregate singularity of perspective that inhibits the expression of human individualities. It then raises the question of what differentiates true connectivity and individual expression from mass conformism. In this paper, I will attempt to answer this question through the framework of *Vita Activa* in Hannah Arendt's book *The Human Condition* and Martin Heidegger's notion of the "world". I will show that the permeation of social media has had perilous consequences for the preservation of our authentic selfhoods and individualities. Beyond the erosion of individuality, the piece also assesses the danger social media places upon the degradation of the Heideggerian notion of the "world", in which through mass conformism and cultural domination, the very existence of humanity could be reduced to a meaningless singularity. I will conclude the piece by briefly analyzing the political salience of my analysis, of which through the erosion and degradation of the world, the very capacity of speech will be frustrated.

# 1  Introduction

Hannah Arendt's *The Human Condition* is a critique of the modern world's degradation from self-revelation into the public realm (the political life) in favor of the mere necessities of one's mortal life (the social life). Arendt is criticizing the perils of the modern world's loss of the "true importance of life" as the foundation of human existence. To supplement my argument through an analysis of Arendt, I will first define the foundation of Arendt's political philosophy: the trichotomy of *Vita Activa* and the notion of the "world". Following the definition of Arendt's key notions, I will discuss Arendt's critique of the notion of "laboring animal" in order to further illustrate the perils of one's existence deprived of unique meaning, perspective, and individuality. From this foundation of the deprivation of individuality, I will construct my central argument concerning the perils of social media and its "world-oriented" and political consequences.[1] From this perspective, I will argue against the modern domination of social media, whereby the domination will inevitably result in the erosion of the "world" and of one's authentic individuality. I will conclude my argument by briefly drawing a connection between social media and politics to illustrate a deeper hesitation surrounding the paradox of connectivity.

# 2  *Vita Activa* and the World

Any holistic assessment of the Arendtian account requires the exploration of the trichotomy of labor, work, and action in what she calls the *Vita Activa*, or the Active Life. There exists a conjunction between the Arendtian conception of *Vita Activa* and the notion of the "world", first posited by Martin Heidegger. The conjunction then elicits not only the application and expression of one's own individuality and existence, but also how the aggregate existences of all individualities contribute to a sense of shared meaningful

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[1] Or "world-related" consequences, namely the degradation and erosion of the "world".

familiarity characterizing the collective human existence. I will then begin with a discussion of *work*, which effectively clarifies the gap between individual expression and aggregate existence.

The notion of *work* can be understood from the perspective of durability and immortality. Men who are concerned with the ephemerality of their lives and their finite mortality can fabricate or work to leave behind a legacy or simply evidence of their lives. Work is closely connected with the generation of artifacts, or things that can outlive the maker of the artifact, in order to reveal the very existence of the individual. While examples of artifacts of work can be art or writing (which serve as the preservation of an individual's voice or perspective), other examples can be the creation of use-objects, or tools (or what Heidegger understood as equipment[2]), in order to further preserve and elongate the durability of one's individuality. Some examples of tools may include a house or a hammer, in which their use-purpose is as a means to further human biology such as the replenishment of energy or the hammering of a nail to further the biological cycle of life.[3] Other examples of work such as religious monuments may not necessarily be used for labor, but rather for the end of religious worship itself. In any case, work is constrained in a means-end dichotomy as the process of fabrication of work is always for a particular end, and that end facilitates the creation of something durable and/or excellent that outlasts our mortality.[4] Through work and artifacts, Arendt argues that humans create a sense of

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[2]Please reference the discussion of the Heideggerian world on pg. 5 for a more detailed account of equipment.

[3]It is conceivable that the distinction between tools and consumables could be opaque (consumable is a concept later examined in the presentation of labor, please refer to that section for a more holistic elaboration). After all, one can argue that a house or a hammer can serve as a consumable just as say, bottled water. I do not contest that and believe that hammers and houses, especially in the contemporary form, are more akin to consumables. My usage of these examples in this case, however, is to illustrate both the original authorial intent and the key of means-end relation inherent in work. The notion of work and the creation of tools are meant to illustrate human ingenuity in that humans, especially the first human who ever conceived of these tools, was innovatively creating something to leave a fundamental impact on the world and thus have increased the durability of his life and left behind an imprint. The creation of a hammer enabled men to leave behind further legacies in the forms of architecture or sculptures. The creation of houses enabled men to both leave behind their very fundamental existence as lived in a tangible form, but also their ingenuity in the creation of shelters.

[4]*The Human Condition*, 143

familiarity with their surroundings, and through that familiarity with the "world" (interchangeable with the Heideggerian notion), humans create history.

To illustrate how Arendt understands humans' familiarity with their surroundings, consider the fabrication of a sword. The sword, by outlasting its maker, carries on a record of the technology of sword-making, therefore rendering the next generation of individuals familiar with the knowledge of the past. Through the creation of history and the documentation of the existence of the past, the succeeding generations are conjoined with the preceding generations. Without work and its totalization of history then, human beings would be conceivably unfamiliar with one another across time, as there is no lasting evidence of durable knowledge. The Arendtian notion of work thus encapsulates the deeper human desire to go beyond their own casual mundanities and to embrace the examination of their individuality. Through this examination of individuality, one seeks to express oneself in a meaningful manner that characterizes one's distinct mode of being. Work then illustrates human individuality from a multi-dimensional perspective that not only captures one's internal agencies, but also one's external expressions.

Having now examined the conception of work and its related notion of familiarity, it is now sufficient to examine the notion of the "world", by which this notion of familiarity is more clearly substantiated. The term "world" originates from Martin Heidegger's *Being and Time*, and I will use it interchangeably with the Arendtian conception of the world for the purposes of my analysis, although they have subtle differences.[5]

To understand the Heideggerian notion of the world, let us consider the existence of a single cup. It would certainly be impossible to make sense of the cup extrapolated from its connection to the usage of other things, as when one is confronted with a cup, one will

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[5]Heidegger's conception of "world" certainly had profound impact on Arendt's own political and existential philosophy. There are definitely subtle differences in the usage of the term and the contexts in which they are used between the Arendtian account and the Heideggerian one. The Heideggerian one can be understood more as "the totality of things" or "aggregate existence of things", whereas the Arendtian one can be interpreted as "the known human existence of the history of cultures". These differences are less salient to our discussion and arguably beyond the scope of this paper. I will not make distinctions between the uses for the comprehensibility of this piece.

likely be confused as to what the object is, since intelligibility is inherently only elucidated against a background, and thus an object cannot be singularly intelligible. Intelligibility through meaning is only elucidated when the cup is connected to the usage of, say (when we ask what something is *for*, or its affordance), holding water. However, the chain of connection does not end there as even the holding of water has its own related purpose, as it can be aimed at the quenching of thirst. It is therefore apparent that the cup as a thing on its own cannot be rendered intelligible in singularity, but rather always as a totality of relation with other things. This is precisely what Heidegger means by *equipment*, or things that have a network or web of meaning and intelligibility which he refers to as a totality of involvements (*Bewandtnis*).[6] This totality or network of meaningful equipment (whether be it the cup, a pen, or a hammer) then conglomerates into and constitutes the notion of the "world". The world is therefore a meaningful space where each individual equipment can be traced into different nodes of involvements (or roles in which the equipment play or how they are involved in relation to the meaning or purpose of other equipment), and the individual nodes can be traced even further to other activities and equipment until it reveals the complex and multifaceted network of interrelated equipment through its meaning and significance.[7] It is therefore through the existence of the world that the meanings of things can be derived and understood, by which rather than a heap of unintelligible objects, we now have sensible and intelligible things connected to one another.

Crucially, however, we as individuals are rarely cognizant of this totality or network of meaningful equipment as we simply drink out of the cup or write with the pen without taking a mental note of the connected purposes or involvements they possess. This lack of active cognizance reveals what Heidegger refers to as *manipulability*, by which we are handy and *familiar* with the equipment as we are seemingly absorbed as one together with

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[6]*Being and Time*, 97

[7]To further illustrate this point, consider the previous example of a cup. A cup can not only be connected to the holding of water and the quenching of thirst, but also to the holding of coffee and self-energizing for the purpose of productivity, or even to the goal of measurement in cooking. There is evidently a plethora of directions in which a cup can be taken to and thus reveals a number of nodes of involvements in which meanings of equipment can be traced.

the network of involvement in an almost subconscious manner. This sense of oneness is then what Heidegger referred to as *readiness-to-hand*.[8] It is therefore our intrinsic readiness-to-hand towards the network of equipment that reveals our inherent *familiarity* with the world, by which we don't simply exist in the world or choose to know the world whenever we desire, but rather that we, as Heidegger would say, dwell or belong in the world and that the meaning and significance of the equipment are already known to us.[9] The world is then meaningful, and we are at home.

It is from the oneness or at-home-ness that the connection between the Heideggerian *world* and the Arendtian work/artifacts becomes evident. The amalgamation of artifacts then evidences the connection in that it creates a world in which the different nodes of involvements then give rise to a collective meaningful space, where diverse perspectives and individualities from across time and space coalesce into a greater commonality that defines the human existence. The world is therefore objective, as Arendt would argue not in the traditional philosophical sense of "the impartial or factual", but rather as a sum of all the diverse individualities.[10] Therefore, we can illustrate the said objective world as a world where individuals can simultaneously create artifacts that represent their individualities and legacies or share those perspectives publicly while freely considering and understanding one another holistically. The notion of "world" thus clearly demarcates an existential account of the connection between people and things.

Crucially, Arendt understands the aforementioned point of public sharing as occurring through her conception of *action*. Action is a technical and nebulous term that concerns itself with the act of revealing oneself publicly and possesses several distinct characteristics. The first is the notion of speech (*lexis*), whereby individuals go into the public realm (or space of appearance, where individuals can gather and discourse) from their private households and spaces of isolation to share their own distinct perspectives and values with

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[8] *Being and Time*, 98

[9] *Being and Time*, 107

[10] In common understanding, the Arendtian notion of objectivity can be understood as akin to intersubjectivity.

others.[11] In other words, action and speech can be seen as "*inter homines esse*" ("to be among men"), where individuals go into a space of sharing and reveal to others the answer to the question "Who are you" as a unique human being, of the distinct thoughts and rationalities that characterize that individual as a human being in and of himself.[12] The characterization of action is plurality, or the multiplicity of human beings that exists, for which each human being reveals and shares their distinctiveness. Through sharing, human beings can become more attuned to one another's thoughts and thus cut across the boundaries of human affairs and bring new *initiatives* or *beginnings* to the human world.[13] The *end* of action, therefore, is the promotion or preservation of action per se in order to further ensure the diverse discourse and the multiplicity of perspectives maintained. The end of action is then itself.[14]

While the Arendtian notion of action is nebulous and practically obscure in that it bears no tangible formal shape, I find her picture of individuals rising up and discussing/answering inquiries of their respective individualities to properly illustrate beauty inherent in the plurality of human existence. This illustration therefore not only demonstrates the distinct existential individualities of humans, but also the discourse, discussion, and sharing that so ubiquitously characterize their interpersonal relations.

Having now examined the expression of one's individuality through either work and the construction of artifacts, or action and its discourses, we can now turn to the final element

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[11]The Arendtian distinction between the public and the private is a complicated notion that permeates her entire discourse in *The Human Condition*. The essence of this delineation, without going into the nebulous nuances, is that the public sphere, as found in the Greek polis, often concerns itself with the revealing of oneself publicly and the ascertaining of one another's individualities through sharing and discoursing (consider the example of a town square), while the private sphere concerns itself with the inner lives of the household (from the everyday cooking and cleaning, to financial management). One interesting point to note is that the public sphere is often considered as "free", whereby there is no hierarchy of rulers and being ruled as is found in the private sphere.

[12]*The Human Condition*, 178

[13]*The Human Condition*, 178

[14]To further illustrate this point about action, action is not to be confused with solely discoursing and coming to terms of agreement. In fact, action can be manifested in many forms, both disagreements (even oppositions) and agreements and harmony. So long as the diversity of thought and perspectives are achieved and preserved, action is achieved. Therefore, the point of action is not to achieve something, but to simply allow distinct individualities to be maintained and shared.

of *Vita Activa*: labor. Labor, as understood by Arendt, is considered as "the activity which corresponds to the biological process of the human body, whose spontaneous growth, metabolism, and eventual decay are bound to the vital necessities produced and fed into the life process by labor. The human condition of labor is life itself."[15] In other words, the notion of labor is closely connected with the biological and physiological cycle of needs that our body inherently possesses, by which we are hungered daily and need to consume sustenance in order to stay alive. The hallmark of labor is then the production of *consumables*, or things that are necessary for life, for people need to consume consumables in order to have the capacity to produce more to further the cycle of human biology. Cleaning, cooking, or operating a conveyor belt to produce any cyclical necessity of life can then be considered as examples of labor. In this sense, labor to Arendt is subjective and private, as the laborer's own production/consumption process and experience concerning the laboring process is only known to the laborer himself. Labor then evidently lacks the revealing of one's unique perspective or individuality through the production/consumption process and is wholly isolated from others. The production of the consumables essentially elicits nothing about the laborer just as the product of a particular conveyor belt has no bearing on the individuality or the perspective of the belt operator.[16] The laborer, as understood by Arendt, is therefore laboring "in complete solitude" and would not be considered human, but an *animal laboran* (an inherently Marxian term employed and critiqued by Arendt to characterize the perils of laborers).[17] Labor, albeit necessary for

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[15] *The Human Condition*, 7

[16] One can certainly posit the argument that the operator of the conveyor belt can add certain additional elements onto different products that she is making on the belt and thereby infusing her individuality or perspective into the product she is making. I am not here to contest that, but rather to merely consider the generalized case of the average belt operator who is oversaturated by the mundanity of her belt operation and is wholly consumed with the mindless cyclical production of goods on the conveyor belt. We can then agree that in this mundanity, no individuality is shed.

[17] *The Human Condition*, 178. I understand the potentially dramatic nature of the word "human". My usage of the word human and the point about "not be considered as human" is to cite from Arendt. I don't think neither Arendt nor I subscribe to the strictly elitist interpretation that an individual who shows no inclination or ability to exemplify his individuality is rendered to be sub-human within his intrinsic value as a human being. Rather, the point illustrated here is to the critical need for one to bear his individuality and express our existential nature akin to our unique individualities intrinsic within each of us as a single human being.

one's biology, is ultimately isolationist as it leaves behind no definitive evidence of one's existence, legacy, or individuality.

# 3   Problems with the *Animal Laborans*

Armed now with Arendt's trichotomy, I will turn to Arendt's own application of her framework: Arendt's critique of the Marxian notion of *animal laborans*, or the "laboring animal". In the Marxian understanding, the human being can be essentially defined as the "laboring animal", where in everything that he does, his prime function and life revolves around labor (as Arendt would understand it). The goal of a proletarian revolution and communism is then to emancipate men from labor, in which men are no longer subjected to labor and are truly free from labor.[18]

Arendt takes two issues with the "laboring animal": the contradiction between the emancipation of labor and consumption, and the degradation of the political life through the permeation of labor. The first issue is the contradiction between emancipation and consumption, by which through the permeation of labor, individuals become ever more engrossed in the cyclical process of life and are no longer remotely concerned with leaving any legacy or artifacts behind. The only thing the laboring animals care about is how to sustain their livelihood and enjoy more of this process of sustenance and thus consume more things for the sake of sustenance of life. However, with the advent of automation and mechanization that enabled a much more efficient manner of production, labor itself has then become increasingly futile as no longer are humans needed in the production process.[19] The end result is then contradictory as while it is true that labor is emancipated, the laboring animal now effectively becomes the *consuming* animal, by which his sole purpose in life is to consume (sometimes beyond the necessities of life) to even the superfluities of life.[20] In that sense then, consumption becomes the cornerstone of the

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[18] *The Human Condition*, 104

[19] *The Human Condition*, 133

[20] *The Human Condition*, 133. Examples of such superfluities can include the heavy splurging onto ex-

laboring animal and in everything that he does, he is no longer keenly aware of the higher capacities of life, of leaving behind his own perspectives, interests, or legacies, let alone engaging in the process of revealing oneself to others through speech and action.

This then brings us to the second problem Arendt observed about the "laboring animal". Through the pervasion of labor everywhere, human life at large and every individual is reduced to only biology and sustenance, of consumption and eating. Everything we do, and everything we care about is therefore tied to the things that gratify our immediate needs. When you aggregate all the labor of humans together, Arendt argued that you would see the invasion of the private into the public, where the government is no longer fostering discussions of individual perspectives but is now responsible for the sustenance of labor and human life. The government is now responsible for the economy, or wealth-generation, which was something that was only reserved for the families (as seen in the Greek *polis*). When humans at large become absorbed into only labor, they cease to "be among men" as they have stopped hearing and seeing other people through action and speech and are fully consumed by consumption itself. With the lack of speech, men have become subjective in their own experiences with no discourse and thus no politics with one another. Life, as Arendt put it, has become futile and meaningless, and we have "acquiesced in a dazed, "tranquilized", functional type of behavior."[21]

It is then evident that to Arendt, the notion of "laboring animal" is extremely problematic as it threatens the propensity, or even the opportunity, for human beings to engage in speech or even begin to care about things beyond their immediate consumption of things. With the perpetual consumption of goods, human beings will likely lose all sense of their respective individualities and become one mind with the consumption. Therefore, there is no longer a need for a space of appearance, or a public realm, where action and speech can be conducted and men can leave a meaningful mark upon the world they reside or reveal to one another their diverse thoughts and perspectives. The purported dichotomy

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pensive hobbies or luxuries.

[21] *The Human Condition,* 322

of consumerist capitalism and Marxism to Arendt is therefore based on the same mistaken outlook of human existence as both are fixated on the permeation and extension of labor, whereas capitalism is focused on generating wealth to perpetuate labor and consumption, Marxism is focused on the collective emancipation of laborers, yet neither truly focuses on the higher capacities of the human condition of work (leaving behind durable legacies or artifacts) or action (speech, plurality, and diverse perspectives).

# 4   Social Media, Cultural Domination, and Individuality

The central argument of this piece rests upon the point that the advent of social media will conceivably contribute to the degradation of the world and individuality. It is, however, equally as important to note that the issues inherent in social media and the critique I am positing here are not a definitive argument of the perils of social media being the *sole* or *fundamental* reasons for the degradation of the world and individuality, but rather as a symptomatic catalyst of a deeper issue of the contemporary society's tendency to isolate and conform. The argument posited here therefore does not aim to bear full culpability upon social media, but rather as both an existential analysis of and an admonition towards the contemporary phenomenon.

The issues I take here regarding the perils of social media may be purportedly paradoxical, considering that the ascension of information technology has contributed to undeniable progression in human interconnectivity through the creation of a space where individuals can reveal their individualities to one another online. A closer examination is nevertheless required. While social media has enabled greater convenience for interpersonal interactions across vast geographical localities, it is arguable that there exists a deeper interplay of profit-generation through mass attention curation. This interplay can be elicited through the notion of the "attention economy". The attention economy can be understood as the commodification of users' scarce attention through the construction of

algorithmically-curated and personally-tailored content to maintain users' attention as long as possible. This maintenance of users' attention is then to expose users to more advertisements to generate more profit. Rather than a free space for sharing and revealing oneself, major social media platforms have become spaces where individuals go and consume content predetermined by algorithms with the goal of profit maximization. The attention economy through its employment of centralized algorithms, both advances the notion of "mass societal culture" (thus degrades the "world") and erodes the sense of genuine individuality and discoursing.

The attention economy has the propensity to promote a constant rendering of the social media space into an echo chamber of cultural singularity. In an attempt to capture and maintain the constant attention of the general populace, social media tends to emphasize and popularize the "attentionally salient" to its users.[22] We, as frequent victims of the attention economy, are no strangers to the sentiment that seemingly every few weeks, a new fashion style, a novel food location, or a catchy phrase is being shared and capitalized emphatically across different platforms. This promotion of the mass culture then can be seen as the promotion of a singularity of acceptable or standardized behavior or taste, whereby any departure from this "commonly-accepted" standard is considered deviant and suspect.

Some might reasonably argue that contemporary social media is less of a monolithic culture of mass singularity, but rather composed of various disaggregated sub-groups (that possess their distinct, microscopic mass chambers) that revolve around various interests or niches. It may then be difficult to conceive social media being dominant in a singular mass culture rather than a multiplicity of niches. However, given the pervasiveness of the attention economy across the overarching function of social media, the individual niches are

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[22]One may abstract "attentionally salient" to "trendy", that social media tend to promote what is trendy. However, trendy may not be entirely apt in describing social media's promotion of certain content. Consider the promotion of certain political narratives or news in favor of other coverages, it may be insufficient to describe this as trendy for certain population as much as what is attention-prone or attractive to a particular demographic.

nevertheless predetermined and curated by the same algorithms. It is therefore conceivable that even within these niches, there will arise a standardization of norms that will inevitably contribute to a plausible point of regression, where all the niches coalesce into a singularity of mass culture.

To illustrate this point further, consider the example of food niches that are so ubiquitously found across different social media platforms. A simple search of videos documenting food traditions can reveal countless channels and niches of travelers and explorers, through the format of vlogs, sharing and enjoying traditional, sometimes even esoteric cuisines across cultures. While it is certainly reasonably justified to give credit to the creators for taking the initiative and embarking on journeys of exploration in order to reveal the distinct individualities and perspectives of certain groups as recorded through food, it is equally necessary to view such documentation through the lens of the attention economy. In other words, while the content shared and commonly viewed within the food niches does reveal oneself, there are conceivably countless other meaningful nodes of involvement in the form of cuisines that are simply not picked up, controlled by, or predetermined by the centralized algorithms. It is evident that despite the admirable efforts by creators to promote meaningful nodes, the constant standardization of favorability towards specific food niches means that other cuisines are rejected on the grounds of being "untrendy" or even "unacceptable". Traditional cuisines will then become marginalized by the behemoth of mass culture. The adherents of these traditional cultures may thus project a sense of confusion or anxiety for participating in a "deviant" cultural expression, as purportedly judged by others. This underlying anxiousness and the associated fear of external judgment would then reasonably result in the lamentable destruction of work as Arendt would understand it, whereby individuals are no longer keen to reveal their individuality through their respective artifacts that signify their legacies (in this case, the sharing of their traditional cuisines to preserve the durability of their distinct individualities).

The apparent contradiction created by social media and the attention economy is thus the dichotomy of the promotion of a certain curated and predetermined trajectory of narrative displayed across the platforms and the concurrent erosion and alienation of other practices that are considered to be less salient or "trendy". The diffusion of the attention economy, with its powerful algorithms, will therefore seep into the countless niches across different platforms. The niches then, albeit with their purported diversities expressed through their varied interests, are nevertheless all subjected to the same fundamental ontology (or structure, organization) of the attention economy, that is, the need to adhere to attention gathering and predetermined curations.[23] In other words, the numerous niches then all simultaneously experience the promotion of certain traditions and perspectives and the loss of other artifacts and revealings. This then effectively erodes the *world* because the collective losses of all the niches and the concomitant endorsement of certain favorable trends within each niche will eventually conglomerate into a standardized, conformist mass culture. This then is the gradual erosion of the *world*, whereby there now exists a conceivable future where the documentation of certain past traditions or perspectives will be gradually rendered unfavorable, meaningless, or even unrecognizable. The multiplicity of individualities and meaningful nodes of involvement that once existed from artifacts will then be rendered into a cultural singularity.

This is precisely the danger of social media poses to cultural domination, a phenomenon we have observed in numerous parts of the world, albeit only regional (and not global) and not derived from social media. A pragmatic illustration of this could be the linguistic standardization of China, whereby the government is instituting all primary and secondary education to be conducted in Mandarin Chinese irrespective of different provinces' traditional dialects or linguistic heritages. One example of this is then the urging for all

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[23]Another conceivable point of further lamentable critique associated with attention gathering and predetermined curation is the need for different perspectives, traditions, and revealings across niches to appeal, or even conform to the desires or standards of the aggregate population. To illustrate this point further, consider the sexualization and tokenization of different cultures in films. While there certainly exists praiseworthy reforms into this status quo, the point still stands in that the tailoring of one's sharing to the base desires of others is still rather ubiquitous.

instructions in Hong Kong to pivot from Cantonese and favor Mandarin. This can then be seen as an attempt of the Chinese government to linguistically Sinicize (make something more culturally Chinese) the Hong Kong traditions in order to exert greater political leverage through the erosion of the Hong Kong regional consciousness and identity. The teleological progression of social media and the subsequent ascension of the mass culture then bears crucial semblance to the tactics of the Chinese government, where the singularity of mass culture will eventually "standardize" culture globally in a way that defines the "definitive or objective" human existence. This standardization will then effectively overshadow and dominate all other regional or ethnic traditions to the point the other traditions will, in essence, be marginalized as potentially "deviant culture". The ascension of the mass culture and its consequential cultural domination will ultimately coalesce into the disintegration and loss of all heritages and traditions other than the tradition championed by the mass culture. Diversity in perspectives, legacies, and individualities will eventually be mitigated and replaced by the ultimate singularity that arose through the permeation of social media.

Having now examined the erosion of the "world" and diversity on the greater scale of aggregate human existence, let us now turn our attention to the micro-scale of the erosion of authentic individuality and discourse. It is often argued that social media presents a space where individuals can congregate and reveal their deeper thoughts and convictions, and in turn, exchange their respective individualities. However, with the permeation of the attention economy and the evident conformism brought forth by the mass culture, "discourses and self-revealing" on social media have become nothing more than what Heidegger would consider as *idle talk* (insignificant and unexamined conversations) or what Arendt considers as thoughtlessness.[24] Users are so consumed by discussions revolving around simple mundanities and baseless gossip that the deeper nuances of their individuality (or what remains) are largely neglected or hidden. However, even these idle

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[24]*Being and Time,* 220

talks are sparsely encountered in the contemporary space as more often, the revealing of individualities is more closely akin to what Arendt would call the "superfluities of life" (humor preferences or common splurges) rather than anything of higher capacity of individuality. It is therefore evidently regrettable that given the movement of mass culture and social media, the very opportunity to reveal one's unique perspective is now often reduced to mere meaningless talks that are so far removed from the substantive discourses that are considered as action.

The loss of individuality is further capitalized by the arguable mechanization of social media, whereby the very process of interpersonal socialization has now been converted into a form of *consumables.* We might, after all, consider the fact that human beings all need frequent exposure to social activities in order to not be lonely or isolated. However, rather than encouraging the satisfaction of our need for social interactions by engaging in speech and action through the illumination of our individualities and perspectives by "being among men" in the public realm", social media has made the entire social interaction process mechanized. In this case then, social interactions can now be consumed, as individuals can simply satisfy their social activities through social media and its false sense of connectivity without actively engaging with one another, hearing, and speaking to each other. From this lens, we can now see that the mechanization of social media as a consumable is therefore the further perpetuation of labor for the *animal laborans*, whereby even speech itself, which was reserved for the revealing of oneself to the public, is now a form of labor that serves as a means to the end of the continual survival and regenerative aspect of human biology. The distinct individuality found in each human being, therefore, has now been fully mitigated in the face of the behemoth that is consumption.

# 5 The Political

In examining the deeper ontology of social media throughout this piece, the perils of the erosion of individuality and the degradation of the "world" have become rather apparent. While it may be sufficient to pause the critical analysis here, it may be equally pertinent to briefly advocate for the employment of this philosophical framework against social media to further understand its salience to politics. The authorial intent and foundation argument behind Arendt's composition of *The Human Condition* has, after all, always been political.

The erosion of individuality has an obvious political dimension, which results from the *animal laboran's* perpetual consumption of socialization. Such consumption of speech is contrarian to *action*, the highest activity within *Vita Activa* that concerns itself with sharing and revealing of one's individuality and the engagement and advancement of discourse through plurality. Through action and its plurality of individuals, *power* is created to keep the public sphere together when men are sharing and revealing and "springs up" whenever men act together.[25] The erosion of individuality and speech will then create *isolation*, where all human capacities are frustrated as men are no longer keenly attuned to one another.[26] The permeation of isolation will render men to retreat to their own private spaces and to hide from the human capacity for action, discourse, and even thought. The perils of social media is therefore parallel to the perils of politics, whereby in their relinquishment of the sharing of authentic individualities and discourses in favor of the embracement of conformism, and through the degradation of the "world", men are increasingly isolated from one another in that we become less and less attuned to one another's thoughts and perspectives. In this relinquishment, we have embraced the consumption of socialization as the definitive mode of being as *animal laborans*, and have become numb to the deeper capacities of our existence. We are no longer concerned with our own distinct individualities and perspectives, let alone those of others.

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[25]*The Human Condition*, 200
[26]*The Origin of Totalitarianism*, 474

A more extensive Arendtian account of the perils of politics as they relate to social media may be outside of the immediate scope of this piece, albeit an undeniably pertinent one in our contemporary times. Nevertheless, I wish to employ my analysis of the erosion of distinct individualities and the meaningfulness of "world" as a meditated and critical warning towards the pervasion of social media, that our conversations could be seasoned with self-expressions rather than thoughtless idle talks, and that we may preserve the plurality of our diverse existence rather than contribute to its degradation. That we may break from the paradox of connectivity.

<div align="center">

People talking without speaking

People hearing without listening

People writing songs that voices never shared

No one dared

Disturb the Sound of Silence

*from the "The Sound of Silence" by Simon and Garfunkel*

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# Metaphors and Understanding in Quality Space Theory

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## Abstract

I critique Clark's epistemic claims about the role that quality spaces play in understanding terms associated with mental qualities. Clark claims that to have 'first-person understanding' of a mental quality term, one must both have their corresponding quality space properly developed and have had prior experiences of that quality in the past. I reject the second requirement. I do so first by refining the definition of first-person understanding to capture the epistemic value of understanding better. Then, I show that, on this refined definition, having one's quality space developed is necessary and sufficient for first-person understanding of its mental quality terms. In doing so, I respond to Clark's objection about being "oriented" in the quality space. Lastly, I appeal to cognitive linguistics to provide an example of a cognitive mechanism that can develop an individual's quality space without that individual having had any experiences. In combination, these arguments show that we can gain first-person understanding of a mental quality term without having experienced the term's associated quality previously.

## 1   Introduction

How do we understand terms like "red," "hot," and "loud" during discussions where we describe conscious experiences? Philosophers have traditionally postulated that terms

corresponding to the qualities of conscious experiences are represented by mental concepts in the interlocutors' minds. To understand a word like "red" we must have the corresponding mental concept RED. But why does this process of understanding sometimes fail? Why, for example, might we have difficulty understanding the terms that Martians would use to describe the conscious experiences of their alien sensory modalities?

A traditional answer to this question provided by Nagel[1] and Jackson[2], is that there are limitations on how these concepts can be acquired. Jackson's "Knowledge Argument" highlights the experiences we need to acquire mental concepts. He argues that past experiences of the conscious experiences associated with a term are required to *fully* have the concept associated with that term. One cannot have the concept RED until one has had a red experience. Since there are such strict requirements for acquiring the concepts associated with conscious experiences, it follows that statements about conscious experiences can only be understood from some perspectives. Only individuals who have met this requirement can understand what I mean when I say "red," making my statements about red inherently subjective.[3]

Quality Space Theory (QST) provides a more objective way for us to approach statements about conscious experiences. QST considers statements about our experiences to be statements about the mental qualities of our perceptual states of mind.[4] Mental qualities are the features of our perceptual states that allow us to distinguish and discriminate between them.[5],[6]We can experimentally identify these qualities by testing whether individuals can distinguish or match two different perceptual states and recording

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[1]Thomas Nagel, "What Is It Like to Be a Bat?," *The Philosophical Review* 83, no. 4 (1974): 435–50, https://doi.org/10.2307/2183914.

[2]Frank Jackson, "Epiphenomenal Qualia," *The Philosophical Quarterly* (1950-) 32, no. 127 (1982): 127–36, https://doi.org/10.2307/2960077.

[3]Ibid, 442.

[4]Austen Clark, *A Theory of Sentience* (Great Britain: Oxford University Press, 2000). 24.

[5]Ibid, 8. This definition can also be found in David M. Rosenthal, "Sensory Qualities, Consciousness, and Perception," in *Consciousness and Mind*, vol. 9 (Clarendon Press, 2005), 175–226. 202.

[6]Various authors differ in exactly how to categorize which mental states to ascribe mental qualities to. For the purpose of this paper, I will take Rosenthal's "Unitary" view, which states that perceptions both have mental qualities and intensional content. However, a precise specification of perceptual states is not necessary for my argument.
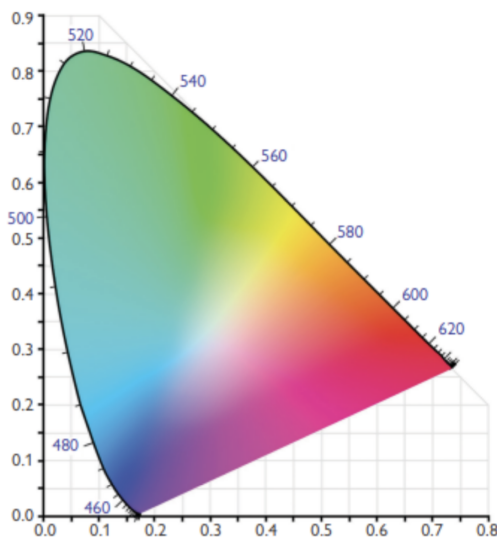
Figure 1: A diagram of a Quality Space found in Hakwan Lau's *In Consciousness We Trust*. The distance between any two points corresponds to how discriminable those colors are for the individual whose perceptions are being graphed. Note that this is only a slice of a color quality space, as a full color quality space includes 3 dimensions: hue, saturation, and brightness.

these discriminability and similarity relations. Mapping out all of these relations into a mathematical graph provides a picture of the similarities and differences between all of our perceptual states and the mental qualities predicated of them.[7] We can thus define mental qualities by their positions in this "quality space" graph.[8] Thereby, QST takes the statement "I see red" to be about a mental quality defined by its location in a quality space.

What role does the quality space play in my understanding of the term "red"? Clark and Lau[9] answer this by moving the quality space within the mind. Such theories postulate the existence of a quality space instantiated in the mind as a cognitive mechanism—which I will label as a "cognitive quality space" (CQS).[10] There exists a CQS for each perceptual modality we possess. These mechanisms help facilitate ascribing mental qualities to our

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[7] David Rosenthal, "How to Think About Mental Qualities," *Philosophical Issues* 20 (2010): 368–93. 377.

[8] Rosenthal, "Sensory Qualities," 202.

[9] Hakwan Lau, *In Consciousness We Trust: The Cognitive Neuroscience of Subjective Experience* (Oxford University Press, 2022), https://doi.org/10.1093/oso/9780198856771.001.0001.

[10] Clark calls this mechanism a "structure of qualitative similarity" however, I think the term "Cognitive Quality Space" more clearly distinguishes between the mathematical and cognitive spaces.

perceptions by encoding the discriminability and similarity relationships between them. So, having a cognitive quality space is necessary for discriminating between our perceptual states. This means that to be able to apply our mental quality terms to objects in the world (without having to rely on complex measurement tools and inferences), we must have those qualities encoded in our CQS. Clark labels this sort of "unstudied observational use" as a "first-person understanding" of a mental quality term.[11] Specifically, Clark defines *first-person understanding* of a mental quality term as the ability to apply it directly, without any special instruments or deductions, to objects in the world. Hence, Clark asserts that in order to have first-person understanding of a mental quality term, it is necessary for an individual to have the associated mental quality encoded in their CQS.

Developing this account, Clark adopts a Jacksonian requirement on our understanding of mental quality terms. He asserts that to properly encode qualities in our CQSs, we must first have experienced them. Experience is required to register which similarity and discriminability relations hold, to develop the CQS. Further, Clark asserts that applying our CQS to identify our perceptions requires us to be "oriented" in the CQS. He states that without having connected points in the CQS to our actual experiences, there will be indeterminacy about which mental qualities will be predicated of our perceptual states when we have such experiences.[12] This indeterminacy will make it difficult to apply the proper term to our mental states. So without such "orientation," we won't be able to adequately apply our terms. Thereby, experience is required for us to develop our CQS and to gain the orientation necessary to utilize the CQS to apply mental quality terms. Thus, Clark concludes that understanding mental quality terms in a first-person way requires us to have had many experiences of those qualities in the past.[13] Call this claim *the experience requirement.*

In this paper, I will argue that Clark's adoption of Jackson's requirement is mistaken. I

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[11] Clark, *A Theory of Sentience*, 19.
[12] Ibid, 21.
[13] Ibid, 19.

will show that having first-person understanding of a mental quality term does not require experiencing that quality. I first argue that having a mental quality encoded in one's CQS is both necessary and sufficient for our first-person understanding of that mental quality term—that no extra orientation is required. Then, I argue that we can develop our CQSs through cognitive mechanisms that require no experience. To do so, I provide an example found in the cognitive linguistics literature. I will appeal to facts from the cognitive linguistics theory of metaphors to show that the mechanisms that we use to understand metaphors can be alternatively used to develop the structures of our CQSs. This will show that we can gain first-person understanding of a mental quality term without ever having experienced that term's associated quality previously. This conclusion shows that Quality Space Theory can provide a versatile epistemology that interacts well with results found in cognitive science and neuroscience.

## 2   A Theory of the Cognitive Quality Space

My argument will appeal to two premises of a theory of cognitive quality spaces. Both of these premises are explicitly present in Hakwan Lau's *In Consciousness We Trust* and play a role in the reasoning present in Austen Clark's *A Theory of Sentience* and David Rosenthal's "Sensory Qualities, Consciousness, and Perception." The first of these premises is:

> **PERCEPTION**: The mental qualities predicated of a perceptual state of mind
> are determined by the similarity and discriminability relations that are
> registered in the CQS.

This premise states that the CQS plays a vital role in the process of perception. Given any set of stimuli involved in a perceptual state, the CQS compares them to one another and to other points encoded in that perceiver's CQS. Thereby, the CQS registers which similarity and discriminability relations are present in the perceptual mental state. With

The stimuli of a perceptual state and their
similarity/discriminability relations

The corresponding mental qualities,
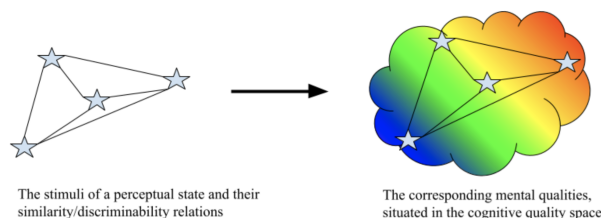situated in the cognitive quality space

Figure 2: The CQS utilizes the similarity and discriminability relations between the stimuli in a perceptual state in order to determine which mental qualities to ascribe to that state.

these similarity and discriminability relations, the CQS is able to determine which mental qualities will be present in each perceptual state. Thus, the CQS is responsible for ascribing mental qualities to our perceptual states, based on the similarity and discriminability relationships of the stimuli involved in these states. To illustrate, consider how Lau describes this mechanism working on a neural level. He asks us to consider the neurons that fire when we see two nearly indistinguishable colors: "Let's say for the neurons excited by these two colors, 98 percent of them fire at similar levels for both. By just knowing this fact, the brain should be able to infer that the two colors are not very discriminable."[14] Using this neural information, the brain can calculate which relations of similarity and discriminability hold between the stimuli causing the perceptual state. By mapping these relations, the brain will be able to locate which points in the cognitive quality space correspond to the stimuli (as in Figure 2). Since these points correspond to mental qualities, the brain can tell what mental qualities are a part of the current perceptual state.

If PERCEPTION is true, then having a CQS is necessary for having first-person understanding of the terms associated with the qualities in that space. Given PERCEPTION, without a CQS, the mind wouldn't be able to determine which mental qualities are associated with each perceptual state. Since mental qualities are those aspects of our perceptions that allow us to discriminate between them, without a CQS, we wouldn't be able to distinguish our perceptions. We must discriminate between our perceptions to

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[14]Lau, *In Consciousness We Trust*, 200.

properly apply mental quality terms. So without a CQS, we wouldn't be able to properly apply our mental quality terms and we wouldn't have first-person understanding of them. You couldn't properly utilize the terms "hot" or "cold" in a way that is directly grounded in experience if you couldn't distinguish between hot and cold experiences.

The next premise is about how information about mental qualities is stored in our minds:

> **REGISTRATION**: The CQS stores which similarity and discriminability relations hold between mental qualities and provides this information for higher cognitive mechanisms to utilize.

Rosenthal talks about some higher cognitive mechanisms utilizing the content of the CQS,[15] but this premise is more explicitly presented in Lau's *In Consciousness We Trust*. He states, "perhaps it makes sense for downstream areas [higher cognitive mechanisms] to all refer to the same addresses or indexes when they communicate with each other about the relevant sensory content."[16] The idea is that when a higher cognitive mechanism needs information about how similar two perceptions are or the location of a mental quality in the quality space, it gets this information from the CQS. Part of the motivation for this idea is that it is too informationally clunky for every higher-order cognitive mechanism to have an attached quality space that it uses whenever it needs to compare two mental qualities. Instead, it can look to the CQS, which already has this information stored. Consider what our minds do when we try to describe a smell that we have just encountered for the first time. We might try to describe the smell by relating it to other smells or experiences. Perhaps we will describe the smell to our friend "It smells partly like rotten eggs!" The information about how the smell we just encountered compares to the smell of rotten eggs is not stored by our cognitive mechanisms responsible for language production.

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[15]For example, on the Higher Order Thought theory of consciousness, if a perceptual state is a conscious perception, it is accompanied by a higher-order thought that refers to the state of the CQS to specify the qualitative character of that state. See Rosenthal, "Sensory Qualities," 187, 215.

[16]Lau, *In Consciousness We Trust*, 209.

It's not their job to compare how similar two smells are. Instead, our language mechanisms get this information from our perceptual mechanisms, and the perceptual mechanism responsible for storing discriminability relations is the CQS.

## 3 A New Understanding of First-Person Understanding

In this section, I will utilize these premises to argue that having a properly developed CQS for a sensory modality is necessary and sufficient for having first-person understanding of the mental quality terms associated with that modality. We've already shown how having a CQS is necessary for this type of understanding, so we will focus on showing that it is sufficient in this section. We will begin by refining Clark's definition of first-person understanding, and then we will show that having a well-developed CQS entails meeting the conditions of our revised definition.

First, I will show that Clark's definition of first-person understanding is not comprehensive enough to cover all cases. It is important to understand at the outset that Clark takes the notion of first-person understanding from Thomas Nagel. Nagel conceives of first-person understanding not primarily after the model of linguistic content but more in epistemic terms, as an epistemic virtue.[17] Clark's definition states that one has first-person understanding of a mental quality term if they are able to 'natively deploy' the term or use it in a 'direct and unstudied' way.[18] This means that one should be able to use their terms to label their experiences without having to use any sort of conscious inference or deduction. Clark provides counter-examples to explain what would fail to account as being direct and unstudied. For instance, Clark says that if we found out that bats (or any arbitrary echo-locating species) used words to refer to the mental qualities presented to them through echo-location, we wouldn't be able to learn those words in a first-person way. If we found out exactly the perceptual stimuli that induced this mental quality, we would

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[17]Nagel, "What Is It Like to Be a Bat?" 442, see esp. footnote 8.
[18]Clark, *A Theory of Sentience*, 19.

still need instruments to detect the stimuli and deductions for correctly applying the bats' words.[19] Instead, consider how normal-sighted humans apply the term "red": they see red things and directly label them with the term "red" without any intermediary considerations. In this case, since they can apply the term in such a direct way, they have first-person understanding of the term.

I will now show that this account is too restrictive. As a counter-example to this definition, consider the case of Mark. Mark has spent 40 years studying the art of painting and color theory and is a virtuosic artist. He can explain the effects of juxtaposing any two colors and how the appearance of any color can change based on minute changes in lighting. He can organize Munzel chips perfectly and can identify a wall's color by its paint's Pantone code. Then, tragically, Mark goes completely blind. Mark no longer has the ability to apply his color terms ostensively, since he can't perceive colors. So, by Clark's definition, he no longer has a first-person understanding of the color terms. However, there is something wrong about stating that Mark has lost his understanding just because he has gone blind. He could still speak with a colleague about the colors and their effects in various combinations and could probably speak more eloquently about colors than most people.[20] It seems that as far as understanding a word like "red" goes, Mark still understands more than the average English speaker. It doesn't seem like Mark is missing anything epistemic that a normal-sighted person has. If Mark lacks "first-person understanding," then most people do as well.[21] In sum, understanding is an epistemic accomplishment, and it feels wrong to assign epistemic failure to someone just because of an altered sensory organ. Hence, it seems that Mark still has first-person understanding of his color terms, and that Clark's definition of "first-person understanding" is too restrictive.

To remedy this issue, I will modify Clark's necessary conditions on first-person

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[19]Ibid, 19. Additionally, Clark here uses his definition to provide a Wittgensteinian argument for the necessity of having a developed CQS for first-person understanding.

[20]Mark's potential ability to imagine colors is not relevant here, as many individuals who have no visual imagination are still able to correctly apply color terms.

[21]For a parallel example, consider Beethoven. Beethoven retained his understanding of music even after he went completely deaf. Famously, he wrote Symphony No. 9 after he was already nearly completely deaf.

understanding to include Mark as a genuine first-person understander.[22] To include Mark, the definition of "first-person understanding" of a mental quality term should be modified to "being able to properly apply the term in a direct and unstudied way in circumstances where the agent's perceptual mechanisms are working normally." If Mark could see again, he would be able to correctly apply his color terms to objects. His understanding is recognized beyond his abilities in actual circumstances. Instead, what is valued are his abilities in circumstances where he would be expected to properly apply his terms. So, this definition better captures what is epistemically valued in first-person understanding because it only asks how well a person would utilize a term in circumstances where they would be expected to do so.

Now I will show that having a developed CQS is sufficient for meeting the terms of our revised condition. This result follows from PERCEPTION and REGISTRATION outlined above. Assuming that one's perceptual mechanisms are all in working order, then by PERCEPTION, their CQS will register their perception's similarity and discriminability relations and assign them to positions in the mental quality space. By REGISTRATION, their higher cognitive mechanisms would utilize this information—including those linguistic functions responsible for using mental quality terms. Hence, the individual will correctly register the similarity and discriminability relations of their perceptions, and their CQSs will correctly determine their perceptions' mental qualities. Then, later mechanisms will use this information to correctly apply mental quality terms. So, if one has their CQS properly developed, then in ideal perceptual circumstances, they will be able to correctly apply mental quality terms. Ergo, they will have first-person understanding of them. Therefore, having one's CQS developed is sufficient for having first-person understanding of that quality space's associated terms. Mark's case shows that first-person understanding is

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[22]Alternatively, we could re-label Clark's notion from "first-person understanding" to "ability to correctly apply." This would remove the epistemic implications of the notion, but would render the concept philosophically uninteresting to a quality space theorist. For, the question whether one can apply a mental quality term correctly is a question of vision science and potentially of the philosophy of color. Clark takes this term originally from Nagel, whose intentions were epistemic.

a dispositional property of epistemic agents. We utilized PERCEPTION and REGISTRATION to show that the CQS grounds this disposition. We conclude that having a CQS filled out is necessary and sufficient for applying its associated terms in ideal circumstances, which occurs if and only if we have a first-person understanding of those terms (by definition).

# 4   Clark's Objection: Maps and Compasses in our Conscious Experiences

In this section, I will develop and respond to Clark's objection to the above account. Clark states that having a CQS developed is insufficient for one's first-person understanding of its associated terms. He asserts that we must also be oriented in that quality space; we must have our "bearings" in it.[23] He explicates this notion by claiming that mental quality terms have an "essential indexical component."[24] He states that to apply our mental quality terms, we need a point of *reference*, a correspondence between a place in our CQS and our experiences that aligns the two correctly. Otherwise, our CQS points will not correctly label the mental qualities of our perceptions with their linguistic terms. Only when a mental quality has been ostensively pointed out to us and associated with a term can we properly orient our CQS with respect to our experiences and terms and utilize these mechanisms to apply our terms. Prior experience is necessary for our ostensive training in the use of the term. Thereby, Clark derives the experience requirement on understanding mental quality terms: to understand the term, we must have experienced its associated mental quality in the past.

To illustrate this point, Clark compares the "Ozma" thought experiment and Jackson's famous "Mary" thought experiment. The Mary thought experiment is about a girl named

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[23]Ibid, 21.
[24]Ibid, 20.

Mary who spends her entire life in a colorless greyscale room while she studies and learns every physical fact that there is to know about human color vision.[25] When she exits her room and sees color for the first time, she purportedly learns something new about colors, which she couldn't have learned otherwise. For the purpose of our argument, let's modify the case to state that while in the bunker, Mary has developed a CQS corresponding to the color quality space.[26] Being the advanced neuroscientist she is, she designed a surgery to modify her sensorimotor cortices to have the exact neuronal structure of someone like Mark. Or, perhaps, she underwent some sort of cognitive therapy that had the same effect—the details of the case don't matter.[27]

Clark asserts that Mary's position is parallel to somebody who has just traveled to planet Ozma. On planet Ozma, the inhabitants have terms for all the cardinal directions, left, right, clockwise, and counter-clockwise in their own language. All of these terms are definable in terms of the others, but to figure out how to apply any of the terms, we must ostensively identify at least one. If somebody looks at us and says, "*that way* is 'Oorth,' and *this* is your 'Oight' hand" ("Oorth" being a cardinal direction of Ozma and "Oight" corresponding to some handedness in Ozmian language), we would be able to infer the rest of the directions and utilize these terms ostensively. Mary's CQS is like a map of Ozma. Her CQS encodes all the logical relationships between mental qualities and their associated terms like a map. But, until she ostensively identifies in her experience at least some of the points on the map, the map won't allow her to identify *any* points. She needs a "You are here" label in her CQS. Thus, Clark concludes that until Mary has identified the points in her Quality Space, it won't properly be oriented with respect to her experiences, and she won't be able to use it to apply her mental quality terms. Thus, Clark asserts that she wouldn't be able to demonstratively use "red" correctly when leaving the bunker. If she

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[25]Jackson, "Epiphenomenal Qualia."

[26]Clark isn't explicit about whether he makes this move. He states that Mary has all of the possible propositional understanding of her mental qualities, which via REGISTRATION, would tightly correspond to having a developed CQS. The insights of my argument thus leave this ambiguity as a moot point.

[27]I will prove the possibility of such a cognitive therapy and provide an account in later sections. This stipulation is irrelevant to the point that we are making at the present time.

saw an apple that induced red experiences in her, she wouldn't be able to apply the term "red" to it in a direct, non-inferential way. Someone would need to ostensively point out to her "That's red," or she would need to infer redness from some other fact—like facts about apples. This provides an example where having a developed CQS is insufficient for having first-person understanding of its associated terms.

I will now respond to this argument by arguing that Mary's CQS would automatically orient itself upon her leaving the bunker. This will show that the CQS is not like a map in Ozma. Rather, it is more akin to a compass. First, I will argue that we shouldn't test Mary's first-person understanding by her ability to apply her terms to just one color. Instead, we should test her first-person understanding in an everyday scenario. Our refined definition includes "circumstances where the agent's perceptual mechanisms work normally." But this condition is not met in the usual circumstances where people place Mary. If we removed Mary from her room and placed her in a solid, circular, uniformly lit, red room, her perceptual mechanisms would not be in circumstances where they are correctly working. This is because mental qualities are relational to the quality space theorist. A perceptual state is ascribed a mental quality because it holds certain similarity and discriminability relations to other perceptual states. This is best seen through the "contrast colors." Such colors only appear the way they do when presented juxtaposed to different colors. Black, for example, can only be seen if there is a brighter background to contrast it.[28] The relational nature of color causes Hakwan Lau to conclude, "The qualitative experience of seeing specific colors only comes about because there are different colors that we can see and subjectively distinguish from one another."[29] Our perceptual mechanisms normally work only in environments where there are multiple qualities to compare and contrast. So, if we wanted to test whether Mary could apply color terms in circumstances where her perceptual system was working normally, we would want to place

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[28]See C. L. Hardin, "Color and Illusion," in *Mind and Cognition*, ed. William G. Lycan (Blackwell, 1990). For a good description of such colors and their philosophical relevance.

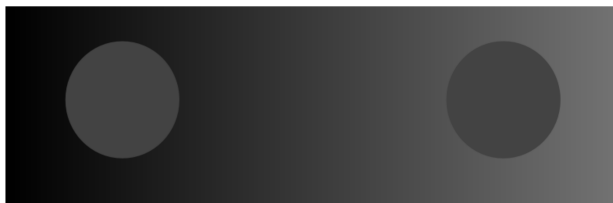[29]Lau, *In Consciousness We Trust*, 198.

Figure 3: This simultaneous brightness contrast illusion illustrates the relational nature of mental qualities. The physical colors of the two circles are exactly the same. However, their appearances differ because their relations to their surroundings differ.

Mary in an environment with many colors to try to identify. To test her first-person understanding, let her out of the bunker into the richly colorful world we see daily!

To refute Clark's claim that Mary wouldn't be properly oriented in her quality space, imagine now what would happen if we let Mary out of her bunker and into an everyday situation—perhaps a roadside field of flowers. In this situation, we can see that Mary would be able to apply her color terms ostensively. By PERCEPTION, her CQS would suddenly be bombarded with thousands of discriminability relations. The greater the number of colors we allow to be present in Mary's testing scenario, the greater the number of similarity and discriminability relations that will be registered in her CQS.

This huge amount of discriminability and similarity relations will remove the indeterminacy about how to orient the CQS with respect to Mary's experiences. This follows because the visual quality space is asymmetrical. Clark labels the shape of the visual quality space as "lumpy, asymmetric, [and] anisotropic" and both Clark and Rosenthal assert that this asymmetry will prevent any sort of inverted experiences with respect to our mental qualities.[30] Since Mary's CQS for colors is already developed, Mary's CQS has an asymmetrical shape. Further, the relations of similarity and discriminability that her CQS registers are arranged asymmetrically, as this is the feature of color perception that Clark and Rosenthal highlighted above. This means that there will only be one way to fit the two together, and Mary will be able to orient her CQS with respect to her perceptions and experiences. Mary will be oriented in her CQS instantaneously upon

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[30]Clark, *A Theory of Sentience*, 17. And Rosenthal, "How to Think About Mental Qualities," 380.

leaving the bunker and seeing the thousands of colors in a normal visual scene. This orientation will cause Mary's red mental quality in her CQS to align with her perceptions of red objects and her red experiences. So, her CQS will correctly be able to ascribe red mental qualities to perceptions of red objects. Via REGISTRATION, this information will be shared with the mechanisms relevant to her telling her friend, "That's red!" Thereby, Mary will have first-person understanding of the term "red" without having had any prior experiences with red. Leaving her room and going into normal circumstances, she will immediately be "oriented" in her CQS and be able to apply her color terms. This means that she has first-person understanding of them. Therefore, Clark's assertion that Mary will not be oriented in her CQS is false. Further, Mary does not act as a counter-example to the claim that having a developed CQS is necessary and sufficient for having a first-person understanding of the mental quality terms associated with that space. If she were placed in a scenario where her visual mechanisms were working correctly—one where there were ample colors to compare—she would be able to apply her color terms. In the bunker, she's not in the circumstances where we would test her first-person understanding. She is not realizing this dispositional property, but she still has the disposition.

This argument shows that instead of considering Mary's CQS as like a map in Ozma, we should consider it to be like a compass. A compass simultaneously stores the logical relationships between the cardinal directions and provides points of reference for us to identify them. When a compass is in a bunker, shielded from any magnetic fields, it isn't labeling any cardinal directions. This doesn't mean that it won't work in circumstances that we would expect it to; it's not a bad compass. Similarly, Mary's CQS provides reference points for mental qualities while simultaneously encoding their logical relationships. Further, it does so reliably in situations we would expect it to. Clark's argument discounted the role of the CQS in perception and instead focused on REGISTRATION, causing him to draw a false parallel to a map.

At this point, a natural objection can be made about the necessity of this conclusion.[31] For, it is a contingent feature of human perceptual mechanisms that human visual quality spaces are asymmetric. We can consider a scenario where Mary's neurosurgery goes awry and implants a symmetric CQS in her brain.[32] Upon leaving the bunker, one thought is that she would be able to see colors but be unable to identify them. Because the CQS would be symmetric, there would be indeterminacy of reference between her experiences and her CQS, such that she would be unable to align the two for purposes of ostensive identification. This scenario would disprove our conclusion since Mary would have a quality encoded in her CQS but not have a first-person understanding of the word associated with that quality.

Fortunately, the scenario described would not act as a counter-example on the grounds that a symmetric CQS would not produce any perceptions of mental qualities.[33] By PERCEPTION, a perceptual mental state is ascribed a mental quality that is determined by the similarity and discriminability relations registered in the CQS by that state. But if the quality space is perfectly symmetric, then for each mental quality in the CQS there will be at least one other mental quality with the exact same similarity and discriminability relations. Hence, the CQS would not be able to define which mental quality to associate with any state, and so the perceptual role of the CQS would fail. So if Mary had a symmetric quality space, then she would not have any perceptual mental states in that sensory modality and so we would not have normal conditions to test her first-person understanding in. With a symmetric quality space, there would be something deeply malfunctioning in her perceptual mechanisms, akin to the blind man's altered sensory systems. So, we would not have the grounds to test Mary's first-person understanding of color terms. Therefore, her failure to ostensively apply color terms in this scenario would

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[31]I am indebted in this section to discussions with David Chalmers, Brandon Ward, Brendan Bacon, and Logan Cary.

[32]For Mary to have such an asymmetric CQS, it would require her to be missing several regions of colors. This is because a scenario where the standard human CQS is symmetric would be impossible, since in this situation every human would be unable to properly use their perceptual mechanisms.

[33]For a similar version of this response, see Rosenthal, "How to Think About Mental Qualities," 380.

not allow us to infer that she lacks first-person understanding, and this scenario would not act as a counter-example to our conclusion that having a quality properly encoded in a CQS is necessary and sufficient for first-person understanding of that mental quality.

## 5 Developing the Cognitive Quality Space

The result that having a CQS developed is necessary and sufficient to have first-person understanding of its corresponding terms is useful when we consider how we can develop our CQSs. If it turns out that the only way to develop a CQS is by being in perceptual states with the mental qualities that it encodes, then the experience requirement follows. This would mean that the only way to develop the structures responsible for first-person understanding would be through experience—even if no orientation was required to use them. So, we would only be able to gain first-person understanding via experience. In the previous section, we stipulated that Mary had developed her CQS through some method or another without experiencing the qualities in that CQS. However, we left it ambiguous how Mary achieved this cognitive development with no experiences and provided no argument for its possibility. If this stipulation was impossible, if Mary couldn't develop her CQS without experiencing the qualities that she was adding to her CQS, then the experience requirement would follow.

Here I will provide an argument for the possibility of this stipulation. In this section, I will argue that individuals can develop their CQSs to include mental qualities that they haven't yet experienced. I will do so by providing an example of a cognitive mechanism that modifies CQSs without any required experiences of the qualities of that CQS. More specifically, I will use the resources of the theory of metaphors in Cognitive Linguistics to show how understanding metaphors modifies the CQS. This provides just one example of the sort of cognitive mechanism that we can utilize to modify the CQS and gain first-person understanding of its corresponding mental quality terms without having

experienced those qualities. Such examples override the experience requirement. If we have mechanisms that don't rely on experiences to develop our CQSs, and such development is sufficient for having first-person understanding of the mental quality terms of our CQS, then we can gain first-person understanding of these terms without having experienced their associated qualities. So, by providing an example of a mechanism that can develop the CQS to include mental qualities that haven't yet been experienced, we can fully establish the falsity of the experience requirement.

First, I will lay out the foundations of the cognitive linguistics theory of metaphors, and then I will discuss the role that CQSs play in this theory. This theory has its roots in Lakoff and Johnson's book, *Metaphors We Live By*, and has been developed by the Cognitive Linguistics community since the late 1970s. In the theory of cognitive linguistics, metaphors are conceptualized as a "mapping." Specifically, when we understand a metaphor, our minds map between a "source domain" and a "target domain" in the mind.[34] These domains are information structures in our minds, such as clusters of related concepts.[35] For example, take the metaphor "Our relationship has reached a dead end." Here, our mind maps entities in the domain of concepts related to the concept of LOVE[36] to entities in the domain of concepts related to the concept of JOURNEY[37]. Doing so, we are able to understand entities in one domain in terms of concepts in the other. This mapping allows us to extend the metaphor and make further consistent metaphorical statements like "We're at a fork in the road." Here, we're once again utilizing concepts from the domain of a JOURNEY to characterize a love relationship—just like a car at a split in the street, the lovers in the relationship can progress in the relationship in multiple different ways.

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[34]George Lakoff, "The Contemporary Theory of Metaphor," in *Metaphor and Thought*, ed. Andrew Ortony (Cambridge University Press, 1993), 202–51. 207.

[35]George Lakoff and Mark Johnson, *Metaphors We Live By* (Chicago: The University of Chicago Press, 1981). 8.

[36]The convention in the Cognitive Linguistics literature is to label a domain by a concept that holds a central position among the rest of the concepts in that domain.

[37]Lakoff, "The Contemporary Theory," 207.

However, the many different metaphorical statements we can make from metaphorical mapping are only consistent because the structures of the domains are preserved in the mapping.[38] The logical structures of the domains involved in metaphorical mapping are called schemas.[39] These schemas provide the logical structures of our cognitive domains, such that metaphorical mappings preserve our inferences about entities in one domain to entities in another.[40] Take the metaphor "That due date is farther down the road." Here, entities in the domain of SPACE are mapped into entities in the domain of TIME. The schemas that structure both domains involve a linear structure—both time and space can be logically represented by points arranged with a one-dimensional array (assuming we're talking about one space dimension). This supports the sort of inferences that help the metaphor make sense. Just as there is a lot of space between a speaker and something far down the road, there is a lot of time between now and the deadline. The compatibility of these schemas is thus important for allowing metaphorical language to make sense and for the mapping to be successful.

Another important fact about metaphorical mappings is that the schema of the source domain is often imposed on the schema of the target domain. This allows us to use metaphors to expand our conceptual domains and their underlying schemas.[41] Take, for example, the metaphorical mapping between the domain of MONEY and the domain of TIME. Here, both schemas share a logical structure that involves scalarity. Just as we can have more or less time, we can have more or less money. This feature supports the coherence of metaphors like "I'm broke on time." However, there are also places where the schema for MONEY develops our schema for TIME. For example, money, unlike time, can

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[38]George Lakoff, "The Invariance Hypothesis: Is Abstract Reason Based on Image-Schemas?," *Cognitive Linguistics* 1, no. 1 (1990): 39–74.

[39]Here, the word "image schema" is often used alongside "topological structure" and "cognitive topology." For the sake of this paper, I will use the term "schema" to refer to a broad structuring of a cognitive domain, and "Image Schema" to specifically refer to schemas that structure our perceptions. This is in line with Grady's distinction (See Grady, "Image schemas and perception: Refining a definition").

[40]Ibid, 54.

[41]Mark Turner, "Aspects of the Invariance Hypothesis," *Cognitive Linguistics* 1–2 (1990): 247–56, https://doi.org/10.1515/cogl.1990.1.2.247. 254.

be traded between individuals. This feature of the schema for MONEY supports metaphors like "Lend me some time" and "You're not worth my time." However, this feature isn't inherent to our notions of time and requires us to expand our domain of TIME to include concepts like SPENDING, as in "spending time." These new logical relationships are imposed by the domain of MONEY when we map between the two domains by making metaphors about them.

A final important notion from cognitive linguistics is the Image Schema. Image Schemas are schemas that structure domains of perception.[42] Such domains of perception organize our experiences with a particular sensory modality and some of the concepts associated with them.[43] Take the metaphors that map the domain of HEAT to the domain of ANGER, such as "He needs to cool down" and "He was burning up with rage." In these cases, the structure of the perceptual domain of HEAT is an image schema, which allows us to map from our perceptual domain of heat registration (HEAT) into entities in the domain formed around the concept of ANGER. We initially grasp heat through our experiences and sensations of the temperature around us. We experience heat as a scalar property that can increase or decrease. The logical structure of these experiences is encoded in the image schema of the domain of HEAT and is used to map onto the (equally scalar) domain of ANGER. Hence, the image schema organizes our experiences in a particular perceptual domain and presents this information to help structure other cognitive domains. Being schemas, these mechanisms also play a central role in our understanding of metaphorical language.

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[42]Mark Johnson, "The Philosophical Significance of Image Schemas," in *From Perception to Meaning: Image Schemata in Cognitive Linguistics*, ed. Beate Hampe (Berlin-New York: Mouton de Gruyter, 2005), 15–33. 18-19

[43]Grady ("Refining a Definition") states that these domains structure our concepts of our sensations, however this point in the literature is controversial. I have chosen to define the domain this way to match Johnson's emphasis on image schemas as being a part of our perceptual mechanisms, a theme echoed by neuroscientists in cognitive linguistics.

# 6 The Cognitive Quality Space's Role in the Theory of Metaphor

I will now show how CQSs fit into the theory of metaphors in cognitive linguistics. CQSs and image schemas both structure our conscious experiences and communicate this structure to higher cognitive mechanisms to be used when reasoning about these experiences. I will be arguing that CQSs are instances of image schemas. Whereas image schemas are a diverse group of cognitive mechanisms, CQSs fit within this group and thus play the role that image schemas play in metaphorical mappings.

To show that CQSs are image schemas, I will show how they meet several requirements embedded in the definition of an image schema. Johnson presents three conditions a cognitive mechanism must meet to be an image schema. His first condition is that image schemas are an important part of allowing our bodily experiences to have meaning to us.[44] Johnson's notion of 'meaning' here is underdescribed, so it is best to explain via example. Consider how image schemas help us understand the metaphor "He needs to cool down." The image schema provides the scalar structure of the domain of HEAT so that we can use scalar reasoning on ANGER. By REGISTRATION, the CQS also contains these relationships and provides them to the mechanisms responsible for our understanding language about mental quality terms. So, the CQS plays the same role as an image schema when providing the 'meaning' of language that appeals to the structure of our bodily experiences.

The second condition that Johnson presents is that image schemas must operate beneath the level of conscious awareness.[45] We're not fully conscious of all of the entities in the domain of HEAT when we feel heat or even when we understand a metaphor like "He needs to cool down." In other words, the structural elements of the image schema are not

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[44]Ibid, 21.
[45]Ibid, 21.

consciously presented to us when we utilize it in metaphorical mapping or even when we have the experiences that the image schema organizes. CQSs operate the same way. When we have visual experiences, our experiences don't represent colors as having a specific coordinate in a quality space. They instead show colors that, in fact, have a particular position in the quality space.[46] The many thousands of discriminability and similarity relations that define a mental quality's position in the quality space aren't all presented to us by our visual experiences, but they are being utilized to determine the mental qualities present in those perceptual states. In this way, the work of the CQS is beneath our conscious awareness, just like the workings of an image schema.

Johnson's third condition is that image schemas have an inherent internal logic. As we mentioned before, the image schema attached to the domain of HEAT involves a scalar logical structure. Entities in this domain can either be more or less hot in comparison to one another. All CQSs have a logical structure. For example, the quality space of vision is structured along various dimensions—hue, saturation, and brightness. Looking at these dimensions, we can apply different types of spatial logic to the space. If mental quality A stands in the "greater brightness than" relation to mental quality B and mental quality B stands in the same relation to mental quality C, then mental quality A also stands in the "greater brightness than" relation to mental quality C. The relation is transitive.[47] This example shows that quality spaces do have an inherent logical structure, and thus so do their representations in the mind.

Since CQSs meet the definitional requirements of image schemas, I conclude that we can consider CQSs as image schemas. CQSs can play the role of an image schema in metaphor. Like other schemas, image schemas can be modified and expanded upon by the schematic structure of domains that we metaphorically map into the perceptual domains that image schemas structure. Just like how we used the schema of the domain of MONEY to expand

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[46] Clark, *A Theory of Sentience*, 9.

[47] For a more nuanced view of the logic present within the quality space, see Andrew Y. Lee, "Modeling Mental Qualities," *The Philosophical Review* 130, no. 2 (May 1, 2021): 263–98.

the schema structuring TIME, we can impose the structure of a schema onto an image schema through metaphorical mapping. But, if the image schema that we are mapping to is a CQS, then we can impose the structure of a schema onto the CQS and develop that CQS. Just like how we developed the TIME schema by imposing the MONEY schema, we can develop our CQSs by imposing different schemas. We don't need a highly developed understanding of TIME to learn about "spending time," and similarly, we don't need to have a fully developed CQSs to impose a schematic structure onto it. By understanding metaphors about it, we can provide structure to undeveloped areas of the CQS, expanding it. This process doesn't require us to have experienced any of the qualities in the newly developed areas. Consequently, this result overrides the experience requirement. We can use the metaphorical mappings our mind makes when understanding metaphorical language about mental qualities we haven't yet experienced to develop our CQS with information about those qualities. Since having a developed CQS is sufficient for having first-person understanding of its associated terms, it follows that we've identified a method of gaining first-person understanding of a mental quality term without having experienced it first.

# 7 Limitations on Metaphorical Mappings Into Cognitive Quality Spaces

So how could Mary use metaphors to gain first-person understanding? To answer this question, it's important to note the limitations that cognitive linguistics places on metaphors. While a schema can impose structure onto another schema, it can't contradict the structure already present in the target domain's schema. If money wasn't a scalar property, and instead, it was impossible ever to increase or decrease the amount of money one has, it wouldn't make much sense to use it to talk metaphorically about time. The logical structure of the two domains needs to align where possible. So, to find a metaphor to map between a CQS and a conceptual domain, we need to find conceptual domains

whose schemas are logically compatible[48] with the CQS.

Luckily, the logical structure of the CQS is well-developed. The CQS is structured as a series of points arranged in a multi-dimensional plane.[49] So, we only need to find conceptual domains that are structured this way. One way to do so is to consider each dimension of the CQS individually, like in the metaphor: "The saturation of the boat's color had aged considerably, but its hue was still rather valuable." Here, we map the saturation dimension of the CQS to the domain of AGE and the hue dimension to the domain of VALUE. All of these domains have an associated scalar logical structure associated with them. When we understand a metaphor like this, we compare the structure of the CQS to these domains. If our CQS hasn't developed these structural dimensions yet (if we've been living in a grayscale bunker), we add them. Hence, when Mary understands these metaphors, she's expanding and developing her CQS, and working towards greater first-person understanding.

To object to this account, one might claim that the above metaphors are not specific enough. Quality spaces are highly ordered, with thousands of well-defined points and clear borders. Since these are important logical features of the CQS, a successful metaphorical mapping into a CQS might need these logical features. Since most concepts aren't arranged like this, it would be hard to find such a domain, and thus, there would be no possible metaphor we could use to modify a CQS.

This line of reasoning is misguided in two ways. Firstly, metaphorical mappings don't need to map entire domains or extremely specific information. As Turner notes, it is not the case that the entirety of each schema is preserved in metaphorical mapping.[50] There are plenty of aspects of the domain of a JOURNEY that aren't relevant to the domain of LOVE. So, we don't need to worry about mapping the entirety of a conceptual domain into

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[48]By this term, I mean that the one domain preserves inferences that are possible in the other domain.

[49]Clark and Lau's picture of a quality space depicts it as closer to a vector space, while Rosenthal's account of the quality space makes it appear more like a graph theory model, with different binary relations corresponding to JND relations in different dimensions of the space. Hence, two mental qualities might lie in the "Just Noticeably Different in the direction of greater hue" in the visual quality space.

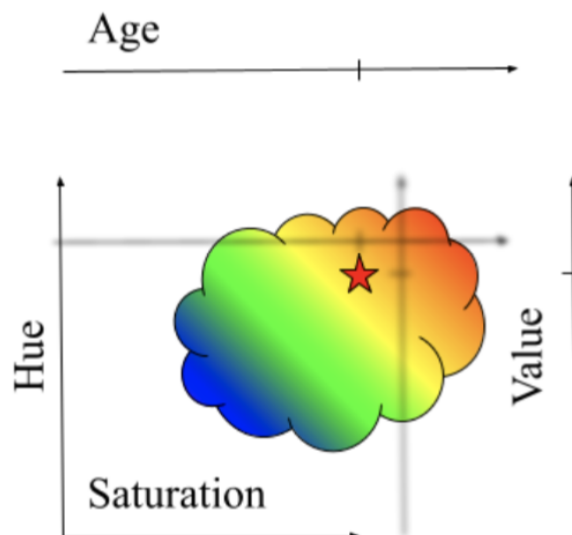[50]Turner, "Aspects of the Invariance Hypothesis," 254.

Figure 4: This diagram illustrates the metaphor "The color's saturation had aged considerably, but its hue was still rather valuable." This metaphor shows how we can locate and construct points in a CQS by mapping from points in other domains. In this case, the CQS mapped onto is a part of the color quality space, and we utilize the conceptual domains of Value and Age to locate the color referred to.

a CQS with perfect accuracy. We can metaphorically discuss small portions of the CQS. We did this earlier by splitting the visual CQS up by its individual dimensions. The lack of clear bounds on the domain of VALUE mapped to the boat's color does not imply that we are unable to use this domain to structure the hue dimension of the CQS. The metaphor teaches us about the scalar structure of this dimension and how it's arranged—features relevant to defining the mental qualities in the visual CQS.

Secondly, it is not the case that metaphors about our sensations cannot be bounded and discrete. Take Akins' metaphor about the perceptual dimensions of a bat. In Akins' paper, "What is it Like to be Boring and Myopic?" she describes what the mental processes of a bat are like by asking her reader to imagine "that *you* are the bat – or rather, that you are the bat's wingflapper located in the frontal cortex. It is your job to man the motor controls, to steer the bat given the instruments on the control panel in front of you, namely

by watching a couple of lights, some digital meters, and a compass-like dial."[51] She proceeds to give vivid descriptions of every one of these instruments, connecting each to a domain of sensory information that bats process. She outlines the ranges of values each instrument reads off and what each value corresponds to, all in discrete and bounded domains. Throughout her description, Akins develops metaphorical mappings to sensory domains using only conceptual domains that are bounded and discrete.[52] Therefore, while we don't need a bounded and discrete domain that provides specific information to develop the CQS through metaphor, we can find domains to do so. Mary could use such complex metaphors to expand her CQS in a more detailed way.

## 8  Conclusion

In this paper, I have shown the following two premises. 1) Having a developed CQS is both necessary and sufficient for having first-person understanding of the terms associated with the mental qualities in that CQS. 2) We can develop our CQSs to include mental qualities that we have not yet experienced. We argued for 1) by appealing to two plausible premises within the Quality Space Theory literature: PERCEPTION and REGISTRATION. These two premises provided a picture of the CQS mechanism that is incredibly useful for applying our mental quality terms. We also used these premises to refute Clark's objection to this view about the insufficient orientation that merely having a CQS provides. We argued for premise 2) by detailing an example of how the CQS could be modified through non-experiential methods. Specifically, we discovered that when we understand metaphors about our mental qualities, our minds impose structures onto our CQSs that can develop and expand these spaces. I'm sure that there are a plethora of other mechanisms that interact with our perceptual mechanisms in a similar way, but the developments in

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[51]Kathleen Akins, "What Is It like to Be Boring and Myopic?," in *Dennett and His Critics*, ed. B. Dahlbom (Blackwell, 1993). 147.

[52]While we can't gain first-person understanding of the qualities in this metaphor (due to species limitations), we can certainly create a similar metaphor for human-accessible quality spaces.

cognitive linguistics provide a succinct framework for discussing one of these processes. These two premises, in combination, show that the experience requirement that Clark imposes on our first-person understanding of mental quality terms is false. We can gain this understanding by developing our CQSs via non-experiential methods. So, Jackson's assertion that we need to experience a mental quality before we understand the terms associated with it in a first-person way is false in the Quality Space Theory framework.

I will conclude by noting a deeper insight that the above account provides. The above argument illustrates that Quality Space Theory can provide a more versatile epistemology around mental qualities. It does so when considering more carefully the neuro-cognitive fact that the same mechanisms we use to talk and reason about our conscious experiences are utilized when we have those experiences. There is a great overlap between the perceptual mechanisms responsible for our conscious experiences and those mechanisms that we use to talk and reason about our conscious experiences.[53] This feature of the quality space is captured by the conjunction of the two premises, PERCEPTION and REGISTRATION. These two entail that the same mechanism that tells our higher processes about the structure of our experience is part of the mechanism that allows us to perceive our experiences this way in the first place. The same entity that structures the mental qualities provides this structure to our language about those qualities. Clark's orientation objection to our account fails because his account doesn't consider the CQS as a perceptual mechanism and instead only considers its use in our speaking about mental qualities; his account focused on REGISTRATION instead of PERCEPTION. Considering both premises, we could override his limitations on using the CQS to apply our mental quality terms. Further, this allowed us to connect the theory of Cognitive Quality Spaces to a burgeoning body of literature about how these sorts of perceptual mechanisms aid our

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[53]For a summary of such neurological evidence, see George Lakoff and Ellen Dodge, "Image Schemas: From Linguistic Analysis to Neural Grounding," in *From Perception to Meaning: Image Schemas in Cognitive Linguistics* (Berlin-New York: Mouton de Gruyter, 2005), 57–91. 73 Also see Lawrence W. Barsalou et al., "Grounding Conceptual Knowledge in Modality-Specific Systems," *Trends in Cognitive Sciences* 7, no. 2 (2003): 84–91.

understanding of language. This gave us the resources to provide a more detailed and versatile account of how an individual might gain a first-person understanding of mental quality terms. Thereby, we overcame deeply rooted philosophical limitations on the epistemology of mental quality terms. Thus, by considering the CQS both as a mechanism important for perception and the understanding of language, we were able to drastically expand our epistemology.

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# The Problem of Abstract Thinking in the Categorical Imperative

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## List of Abbreviations

- **CI**: Categorical Imperative

- **FUL**: Formula Of Universal Law

- **PR**: Outlines Of The Philosophy Of Right

## Abstract

This paper delves into Hegel's critique of Kantian ethics, focusing on the accusation that Kant's Categorical Imperative (CI) represents an abstract ethical philosophy. Hegel argues that Kantian ethics relies on an unproductive form of abstract thinking, exemplified in Kant's emphasis on universalizing maxims without considering the concrete particularities of situations. The author contends that Hegel's critique remains valid even when considering Christine Korsgaard's responses. The paper unfolds by elucidating Hegel's notion of "abstract thinking" and explaining how the CI's emphasis on formal principles leads to abstract ethical judgments. It critically analyzes Korsgaard's defense, asserting that her responses do not sufficiently address Hegel's concerns. The paper underscores Hegel's claim that the CI lacks concrete content, rendering it unable to accommodate the complexities of real-world ethical situations. Furthermore, this analysis explores how the inheritance of abstract thinking from Kantian ethics continues to detrimentally impact

contemporary approaches to ethical challenges. Ultimately, the paper upholds Hegel's assertion that the CI's abstract nature hinders its effectiveness as a comprehensive ethical framework and that any abstract approach to ethics is destined to fail when it comes to teaching someone how one ought to act.

# 1    Introduction

In his pamphlet "Who Thinks Abstractly?" Hegel argues that abstract thinking is a limited way of thinking.[1] He presents abstract thinking as seeing "nothing in the murderer except the abstract fact that he is a murderer, and to annul all other human essence in him with this simple quality."[2] It is not coincidental that Hegel illustrates abstract thinking with an ethical example wherein a person is "abstractly" labeled an unethical "murderer" based on a single act they have committed. This instance marks the inception of Hegel's critique of Kantian ethics, a critique that becomes more apparent in his later work, namely in the *Outlines Of The Philosophy of Right* (PR). In this text, Hegel characterizes Kant's ethical framework as an "empty formalism" since Kant's framework relies on abstract judgments that subsume given particulars under a priori concepts or universals.[3] According to Kant, the Categorical Imperative (CI), i.e., the supreme practical principle of morality in the Kantian framework, is an "objective, rationally necessary and unconditional principle," that must be universally obeyed without exception.[4] In his *Groundwork For The Metaphysic Of Morals*, Kant emphasizes that anyone who does not

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[1] Georg Wilhelm Friedrich Hegel, *Who Thinks Abstractly?* (New York: Anchor Books, 1966).

[2] Ibid.

[3] This is because ethical judgments are determinate judgments and not reflective judgments (i.e., judgements where the particular defines the universal concept). Yet, it can be argued that ethical judgements rely on reflective judgements. Regardless, the critique of the paper stands because even if the particular defines the universal (like in the case of reflective judgements), there is still a universal that is taken as the absolute. In such cases, the particular still has to be objectified/universalized and the paper argues this process of abstracting concepts from the concrete is still a limited method when it comes to ethical judgements.

[4] Robert Johnson, and Adam Cureton, "Kant's Moral Philosophy" The Stanford Encyclopedia of Philosophy, September 21, 2022, https://plato.stanford.edu/archives/fall2022/entries/kant-moral/.

act in accordance with the universal ethical duties derived from the CI is acting unethically regardless of the particular situation.[5]

In this paper, I will contend that Hegel's characterization of the Categorical Imperative (CI) as an abstract ethical philosophy remains compelling, even when one considers Korsgaard's (a modern, prominent representative of Kantian ethics) rebuttal to Hegel's objection. To do this, I will commence by elucidating Hegel's concept of "abstract thinking." Subsequently, I will delineate how Kant's CI differentiates between moral and immoral actions. Following this, I will expound upon Hegel's rationale for accusing the CI of being an abstract ethical philosophy. Proceeding with an examination of Korsgaard's defense against Hegel's critique, I will subsequently offer a counter-response to Korsgaard's arguments to underscore and reinforce Hegel's critique. Finally, I will draw upon these analyses to conclude the validity of Hegel's critique, and the adverse repercussions of relying on ethical philosophies that commit abstract thinking.

## 2 Hegel's Notion of Abstract Thinking

Peter Osborne observes that in its Latin root form, "to abstract" means "to draw away or remove (something from something else)." In the case of ethics, this extraction is a betrayal of the holistic truth present in the concrete, as an aspect of the ethical truth inevitably gets left out during the abstraction from the concrete.[6] For instance, in Hegel's example, the man's description as a murderer is considered to be abstract since a single fact about him is used to subsume his particularity under a limited description. Abstract thinking, however, is not limited to merely descriptive cases, where the object of judgment (e.g., the deemed murderer) has their particularity (e.g., their history) subsumed under abstract concepts; one can also commit abstract thinking in normative cases (e.g., ethical decisions).

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[5]Georg Wilhelm Friedrich Hegel, T. M. Knox, and Stephen Houlgate, *Outlines of the Philosophy of Right* (Oxford University Press, 2008), 131.

[6]Peter Osborne, "The reproach of abstraction" *Radical Philosophy* 127, (Oct 2004).

Consider an irritating basketball player on your team who adheres to an abstract rule that states: "whenever you receive the ball inside the 3-point zone, shoot it." They also consider anyone not following this rule to be a poor player. Yet, a competent coach understands that such an abstract metric is insufficient for accurately assessing a player. This is because every player has their own abilities that operate differently in various situations, and the optimal move always depends on the particular situation; therefore, an abstract formal tactic cannot always provide an absolute judgment for every particular case, yet every particular case (i.e., the concrete content) can be used to evaluate the formal tactic (e.g., whether the tactic works well in that case, why or why not, etc.). When the content is prioritized, formalities can be helpful in understanding the truth (e.g., tactics can help show what works better in different positions). However, if formalities are considered to be absolute and given priority over the content, further development regarding the truth becomes unattainable. Thus, although it is hard to give an absolute definition of abstract thinking, for the purposes of this paper it may be helpful to define abstract ethical thinking as "an attitude taken towards ethical cases where judgments dismiss the primacy of the situated concrete content in favor of a presupposed formality." Philosophical systems that engage in the error of abstract thinking depend on static formalities to pass judgment on content without regard for its contextual circumstances. Instead of synthesizing their abstract formalities with concrete content to achieve a more precise understanding of things (for instance, recognizing that their formalities are not absolute and may have limitations in specific situations), they neglect the need for such a synthesis. Hegel argues that "grounding knowledge on the limited principle of finite understanding" in such a way is "deserting the philosophical task" of reaching the absolute truth.[7] Hegel views absolute truth as "*truth* that only exists in the shape of the whole";[8] hence no actual truth can simply be an abstraction, as that would mean it does not respect the holistic structure of

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[7]Jamila M. H. Mascat, "Hegel and the advent of modernity: A social ontology of abstraction" *Radical Philosophy* 201, (February 2018), 29–46.

[8]Ibid.

the concrete content (i.e., lived worldly experience fully as it is). In Hegelian philosophy, the truth is observed only through actualized worldly experience, as "the owl of Minerva begins its flight only with the falling of the dusk."[9] Any ethical judgment that does not respect the entangled complex nature of the concrete experience misses an aspect of the truth, and this truth can only be retrieved by synthesizing the abstract judgment back with the concrete experience. [10] Therefore, Hegel notes that anyone who does not think abstractly "traces the development of the criminal's mind" when reaching a judgment about them instead of labeling them as a "murderer" due to a single maxim they willed.[11]

In the murderer example, Hegel critiques any ethical system that does not have the concrete worldly experience as its content since such systems are not sensitive to the particularity of situations and the changing nature of history. Any philosopher who tries to universalize an ethical system permanently presupposes that the future will resemble the past and tries to take their particular lived experience as the absolute. Hegel regards this as abstract thinking since they abstract out their ethical truths from the concrete (i.e., the lived experience), and absolutize their particular abstraction as the ethical truth over the concrete reality. Kant is precisely charged with engaging in this form of abstract thinking

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[9]Georg Wilhelm Friedrich Hegel, T. M. Knox, and Stephen Houlgate, *Outlines of the Philosophy of Right* (Oxford University Press, 2008), 16.

[10]This is the step that an ethical formal system with static formulas/rules cannot achieve (e.g., the categorical imperative). There is no inherent issue with an abstract formal system, as long as it approaches ethical situations by recognizing the precedence of the concrete case over its abstract perspective. Every ethical judgment is inherently linked to concrete experience, but in most "formal systems" (including the CI), consideration for the concrete arises solely from a formal perspective. In other words, only the concrete is assessed through its form rather than the formal system also being evaluated in light of the concrete content it is formalizing. While a formal ethical system may prove successful in many concrete cases, as Hegel notes, ethical action always necessitates prioritizing consideration of the concrete case for it to be truly ethical. The primary issue lies not in the existence of formal ethical systems, but rather in their tendency to assert themselves as absolute. Consider an ethical case examined through various abstract "formal systems" (e.g., virtue ethics, Kantian ethics, utilitarianism, etc.); such investigation may indeed lead us closer to the ethical truth concerning the case. Yet, the limitation of all these formal systems becomes apparent, as does each system's contribution to the ethical truth we seek in a given case (this is evident from the numerous ethical scenarios imagined by philosophers to illustrate the limitations/contributions of each). Thus, if at any point, we set aside the primacy of the concrete case itself, and override its ethical truths with the judgment that an ethical system (or a few ethical systems together) provide(s) then I argue we miss an essence of the truth hidden in the concrete case. The synthesis that brings us nearer to ethical truth occurs between a formal system and a concrete case only if the formal system is not regarded as absolute; rather, any formal system serves as a means for us to discern ethical truth, not an end in itself.

[11]Georg Wilhelm Friedrich Hegel, *Who Thinks Abstractly?* (New York: Anchor Books, 1966).

concerning his ethical system, which results in Hegel deeming the CI an "empty formalism".[12] Abstracted from the concrete experience, the Categorical Imperative (CI) falls short of fully integrating worldly experiences into its ethical judgments (i.e., the abstract idea is not in a dialogue with the concrete). Consequently, all ethical judgments delivered by the CI inherently remain abstract. Hegel argues that taking the *Absolute*[13] as a systemic "organization of propositions and intuitions" without concrete worldly experience makes it a "lost concept."[14] In Hegelian philosophy, the universal ethical truth "consists of the speculative synthesis of speculation with worldly experience," as opposed to "Kant's universal law of moral reason emptied of all content," existing only as an abstract formality.[15]

# 3 Kant's Supreme Principle of Morality

[16] Kant initially defines "the supreme principle of morality" as "act only in accordance with that maxim through which you can at the same time will that it become a universal law".[17] This first formulation of the CI is also known as "Kant's Formula Of Universal Law" (FUL) and it is a purely *formal* principle of ethics, "not a material one".[18] With the FUL, Kant aims to discover "a system of a priori moral principles that apply the CI to human persons in all times and cultures."[19] Kant's *formal* approach to ethics is driven by his aim to "reflect the categorical nature of dutiful moral action" so that the moral agent

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[12]Georg Wilhelm Friedrich Hegel, T. M. Knox, and Stephen Houlgate, *Outlines of the Philosophy of Right* (Oxford University Press, 2008), 131.

[13](i.e., the ultimate reality or truth in the Hegelian framework)

[14]Jamila M. H. Mascat, "Hegel and the advent of modernity: A social ontology of abstraction" *Radical Philosophy* 201, (February 2018), 29–46.

[15]Jamila M. H. Mascat, "Hegel and the advent of modernity: A social ontology of abstraction" *Radical Philosophy* 201, (February 2018), 29–46.

[16]Please note that the description of the CI in this section is limited to the information necessary for the reader to understand the arguments presented in this paper.

[17]Immanuel Kant, *Groundwork of the Metaphysic of Morals* (Cambridge University Press, 2020), 4:420

[18]Robert Stern, "On Hegel's Critique of Kant's Ethics" in Oxford University Press eBooks, 2015, 138–56, https://doi.org/10.1093/acprof:oso/9780198722298.003.0009.

[19]Robert Johnson, and Adam Cureton, "Kant's Moral Philosophy" The Stanford Encyclopedia of Philosophy, September 21, 2022, https://plato.stanford.edu/archives/fall2022/entries/kant-moral/.

never expects to act in an immoral way as long as they act in accordance with the CI.[20] According to Kant, if one acts following the FUL after reasonably assessing their maxim, one would be unable to act immorally since such a maxim would defeat itself before it is acted upon (i.e., it would lead to a contradiction). Kant thought "that what determines the will must be the formal properties of the maxim on which the agent acts," and that if this maxim created a contradiction when it was universalized through the FUL then it would be logically impossible to act on this maxim regardless of time and place.[21] Therefore, the CI operates in purely formal terms, "by trying to determine what is right and wrong by testing to see whether a maxim does or does not lead to a *contradiction* when universalized."[22] Kant's deposit example displays this idea in the following way: if one universalizes the maxim "I shall keep on a deposit entrusted to me whenever the opportunity presents," then nobody would ever entrust their deposits to others, resulting in the maxim undermining itself when acted upon since there will be no deposit for the agent to keep in the first place.[23] The contradiction emerging upon universalizing this maxim reveals its irrationality, rendering it logically impossible to act upon and consequently unethical.

Contrary to Hegel's criticism of Kantian ethics as abstract, it's essential to recognize that Kant's intention was to formulate a concrete and actualized ethical framework. This is more clear in the last formulation of the CI which states that individuals must "act in accordance with the maxims of a member universally legislating for a merely possible kingdom of ends."[24] This might lead one to think Kant formulated the CI in a way where it was meant to be synthesized pragmatically with worldly experience to actualize a concrete

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[20]Robert Stern, "On Hegel's Critique of Kant's Ethics" in Oxford University Press eBooks, 2015, 138–56, https://doi.org/10.1093/acprof:oso/9780198722298.003.0009.

[21]Robert Johnson, and Adam Cureton, "Kant's Moral Philosophy" The Stanford Encyclopedia of Philosophy.

[22]Robert Stern, "On Hegel's Critique of Kant's Ethics" in Oxford University Press eBooks, 2015, 138–56, https://doi.org/10.1093/acprof:oso/9780198722298.003.0009.

[23]Jamila M. H. Mascat, "Hegel and the advent of modernity: A social ontology of abstraction" *Radical Philosophy* 201, (February 2018), 29–46 ; Immanuel Kant, *Critique of Practical Reason* (Library of Liberal Arts, 1956), 26-27.

[24]Immanuel Kant, Groundwork of the Metaphysic of Morals, (Cambridge University Press, 2020), 4:439/50.

ethical utopia in the universe, i.e., the kingdom of ends. However, since Kant viewed all the CI formulations as equivalent, actualizing a concrete kingdom of ends necessitates that one acts according to the FUL. Hence according to Kant, acting as if one is legislating laws in a concrete kingdom of ends is equivalent to obeying abstract duties derived from the other formulations of the CI without exception since they "are fundamentally only so many formulae of the selfsame law."[25] This paper mainly critiques the FUL as Kant himself takes all formulations to be an indispensable part of the same law, thus if acting in accordance with the FUL is deemed to be too abstract, so is the kingdom of ends (and the rest of his ethical law, namely the CI).[26]

# 4   Hegel's Critique of the Categorical Imperative

Hegel critiques the CI for not being able to give "any *content* to morality" since it solely relies on the form of a maxim to provide an ethical judgment.[27] For example, in the deposit case, when stealing is universalized it leads to a contradiction, and the person who gets robbed is treated as a means. Thus the CI determines that stealing is immoral regardless of the situation. Following the logic of the CI, someone who steals is simply a "thief", the same way a "murderer" is simply a murderer in Hegel's example and the act they committed is unethical regardless of their particular situation or history. In this view, the particular is absorbed under a priori concepts and the form precedes content in order to establish an abstract moral judgment. On the contrary, for the murderer example, Hegel argues that one finds the ethical truth regarding this man's case not simply in the maxim he acted on but rather "in his history."[28] This disregard of actualized content by the CI

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[25]Immanuel Kant, *Groundwork of the Metaphysic of Morals* (Cambridge University Press, 2020) 4:436/48.

[26]Kant's Formula Of Humanity is not specifically considered in this paper for the same reason. However, one can easily infer the duty to "never steal" from the Formula Of Humanity, which this paper argues is an abstract ethical duty. Therefore this paper already argues against the Formula Of Humanity since it reveals the abstract nature of the duty to "never steal" with the help of the Hegelian critique.

[27]Robert Stern, "On Hegel's Critique of Kant's Ethics," in Oxford University Press eBooks, 2015, 138–56, https://doi.org/10.1093/acprof:oso/9780198722298.003.0009.

[28]Georg Wilhelm Friedrich Hegel, *Who Thinks Abstractly?* (New York: Anchor Books, 1966).

when reaching an ethical judgment regarding a situation is the "empty formalism" critique that Hegel raises against Kant. The CI's inability to give any *content* to morality is further displayed in worldly examples Hegel/Hegelians came up with where the FUL is conditioned to require further *content* to have any normative legitimacy. In these examples, the FUL either delivers a confusing conclusion or an ethically mistaken result due to its insensitivity to the particularity of situations that are present in worldly experience.

Firstly, Hegel critiques Kant's own 'deposit example' to show that the FUL is empty. In this case, the FUL is useless because "it cannot determine whether or not property or a social system without property is a morally good thing."[29] In a world where property is necessarily established as an ethical content, the FUL would indeed prohibit theft since when stealing is universalized, property loses its place as a necessary content, causing a contradiction.[30] However, the FUL does not say anything about "whether it is right or wrong for people to possess private property" in the first place, hence it is restricted when it comes to making a complex concrete ethical judgment.[31] Hegel stresses the fact that to demonstrate the inconsistency or immorality of a maxim of this nature, "one would have to admit that a particular content like property has taken on, contingently, a necessary and universal legitimacy such as to make its negation contradictory."[32] By disregarding an action's content (what it presupposes to be necessary, contingent, etc.) and only focusing on the maxim's form, the CI delivers abstract and superficial results that neglect the actual ethical truth of a situation. For instance, the CI can lead one to think that it is unethical for a starving kid to steal bread because if theft is universalized this leads to a contradiction. However, this judgment would not consider the possible unethical distribution of property or the ethical validity of property existing in the first place. This is

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[29]Robert Stern, "On Hegel's Critique of Kant's Ethics" in Oxford University Press eBooks, 2015, 138–56, https://doi.org/10.1093/acprof:oso/9780198722298.003.0009.

[30]If everything is stolen then there is no longer any property left to steal since the concept of property is destroyed due to everything being stolen.

[31]Robert Stern, "On Hegel's Critique of Kant's Ethics" in Oxford University Press eBooks, 2015, 138–56, https://doi.org/10.1093/acprof:oso/9780198722298.003.0009.

[32]Jamila M. H. Mascat, "Hegel and the advent of modernity: A social ontology of abstraction" Radical Philosophy 201, (February 2018), 29–46.

because the CI only takes an agent's maxim's form into account, and their particularity is disregarded, since if their particularity is taken into consideration the CI is unable to attain its goal to be a universal practical philosophy. Hegel thinks that the CI disregards the concrete content that is present in all particular situations, which is also required to make a non-abstract ethical judgment of a situation. There can be no single abstract 'supreme principle of morality' because a moral judgment *demands* particular content and the method of judgment is formed through its synthesis with the concrete content.

The second problem of the FUL is that it falsely detects contradictions in some moral acts that are widely considered reasonably ethical. Hegel gives the example: "succor the poor", which when universalized leaves nobody poor (i.e., no poor person to succor), thus the maxim "succor the poor" becomes impossible to act on.[33] Therefore the CI would have to conclude that "succor the poor" is an unethical maxim through the use of so-called "reason", even though it does not sufficiently explain why helping the poor is considered unethical, other than it being a "contradictory" maxim.

# 5 Korsgaard's Defense of the Categorical Imperative and My Response

In her paper "Kant's Formula Of Universal Law", Korsgaard attempts to defend the CI against objections raised by Hegel. She argues that the FUL is not an abstract formula and that if understood correctly, it can provide useful results to concrete Hegelian cases. In this section, I analyze her responses to the Hegelian objections and provide my own objections to her responses.[34] As Korsgaard notes, Kant thought that some actions universalized by

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[33]Christine M. Korsgaard, "Kant's formula of universal law" *Pacific Philosophical Quarterly* 66, no. 1-2 (1985): 24-47. http://nrs.harvard.edu/urn-3:HUL.InstRepos:3201869.

[34]Although there is a wealth of literature discussing Hegel's criticisms of Kant, this paper narrows its focus to Korsgaard's defense of Kant against Hegelian objections. She is considered to be one of the most influential living philosophers that deals with Kantian ethics and the aim of this paper is to defend Hegel's objection through a unique perspective against her in order to display the contemporary legitimacy of Hegel's objection against Kant.

the FUL become inconceivably contradictory (e.g., the deposit example) and these actions are the ones investigated by Hegel. According to Kant, these actions are simply impossible to universalize through the FUL (i.e., they lead to a *contradiction*) and are thus unethical regardless of the particular situation. Korsgaard notes that Kant explains these actions as follows:

> Some actions are of such a nature that their maxim cannot even be thought as a universal law of nature without contradiction, far from it being possible that one could will that it should be such.[35]

To make her defense of Kant clearer, Korsgaard analyzes the sense in which the word "contradiction" is used in the statement above. She identifies three ways in "which there is a 'contradiction' in willing the universalization of an immoral maxim" when the FUL is used and responds to the Hegelian objection through two of the three interpretations she provides.[36] These two interpretations are explained as follows by Korsgaard:

1) The Logical Contradiction Interpretation: On this interpretation, there is something like a logical impossibility in the universalization of the maxim, or in the system of nature in which the maxim is a natural law: if the maxim were universalized, the action or policy that it proposes would be inconceivable.[37]

2) The Practical Contradiction Interpretation: On this interpretation, the contradiction is that your maxim would be self-defeating if universalized: your action would become ineffectual for the achievement of your purpose if everyone (tried to) use it for that purpose. Since you propose to use that action for that

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[35]Immanuel Kant, *Groundwork of the Metaphysic of Morals* (Cambridge University Press, 2020), 4:424/36; Christine M. Korsgaard, "Kant's formula of universal law" *Pacific Philosophical Quarterly* 66, no. 1-2 (1985): 24-47. http://nrs.harvard.edu/urn-3:HUL.InstRepos:3201869.

[36]To clarify, Korsgaard basically describes three different interpretations of the word 'contradiction' that can be found in the definition of the FUL. Out of these three interpretations, she only considers the Hegelian objection with regards to two of the three possible interpretations and this paper responds to those considerations.

[37]Christine M. Korsgaard, "Kant's formula of universal law" *Pacific Philosophical Quarterly* 66, no. 1-2 (1985): 24-47. http://nrs.harvard.edu/urn-3:HUL.InstRepos:3201869.

purpose at the same time as you propose to universalize the maxim, you in effect will the thwarting of your own purpose.[38]

After defining these interpretations of the FUL, Korsgaard considers Hegel's objection to each interpretation separately. For Hegel's deposit critique considered in light of the first interpretation (1), Korsgaard replies:

> 'On the Logical Contradiction interpretation, the contradiction lies not in envisioning a society in which there are no deposits, but in envisioning a society in which the agent and others with his purpose are making use of the deposit system even though there is no such thing. The contradiction is generated when the agent tries to will his maxim and the universalization of his maxim *at the same time* or tries to will it for a system of which he is to be a part. The nonexistence of the practice that results from universalization is contradicted by the existence of it presupposed in the individual maxim.[39]'

In my view, this reply by Korsgaard does not respond to Hegel's critique adequately and rather supports it. The Hegelian critique already acknowledges that the contradiction solely has to do with the maxim upon which a person acts. It is not contested that there is a contradiction that arises when the maxim is universalized, as this would undermine the trust necessary to maintain the institution of deposit, thereby nullifying the practical basis for the agent's maxim. However, the concept of property/deposit being contradictory/unethical in some way is not something that the FUL takes into account in the deposit example when it concludes stealing is always unethical. The FUL functions without such information as it only considers the properties of the maxim's form rather than its content. This is the limitation the FUL faces when it provides a judgment on worldly cases, which is what Hegel critiques as "abstract thinking" in the first place. The

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[38]Christine M. Korsgaard, "Kant's formula of universal law" *Pacific Philosophical Quarterly* 66, no. 1-2 (1985): 24-47. http://nrs.harvard.edu/urn-3:HUL.InstRepos:3201869.

[39]Christine M. Korsgaard, "Kant's formula of universal law" *Pacific Philosophical Quarterly* 66, no. 1-2 (1985): 24-47. http://nrs.harvard.edu/urn-3:HUL.InstRepos:3201869.

FUL is not a formula that can give a clear judgment on whether it is ethical for people to have the ability to possess private property or not. The CI would have agents presuppose the necessity of a contingent content like property, leading them to reach an abstract ethical conclusion.

For Hegel's deposit critique that would be considered in light of the second interpretation (2), Korsgaard argues that in this case, the contradiction arises when the agent wills the maxim to "use a false promise to get the money" while they also thereby will that practices like deposits exist in order to use them as a means to their end.[40] However, when the maxim "use a false promise to get the money" is universalized, it leads to practices like deposits no longer existing (i.e., nobody trusts anyone to keep their money for them); therefore willing this maxim causes the agent to thwart their purpose to get money from someone through a false promise. The agent willed a maxim that when universalized cannot be achieved. The "Hegelian objection is that Kant need not be assuming that everyone wants there to be deposits," and in this case, the agent wants the system of deposits to exist since "he proposes to use that system as the means to his end."[41] Here Korsgaard argues that the necessity of the system of deposits is not a prerequisite for the FUL to render a judgment. In this interpretation, the FUL solely focuses on a contradiction that arises when an agent wills something to occur/exist but at the same time wills it through a maxim that hinders the occurrence/existence of that thing when universalized. However, I think the Hegelian objection is misrepresented by Korsgaard in this response. Hegel does not simply argue that the CI presupposes the intention of an agent or that the CI requires the agent to take deposits to be necessarily ethical concepts for it to be able to produce a contradiction. Hegel's true criticism has to do with the fact that the formalism of the CI necessarily relies on contingent content that a particular presupposes to be irrelevant to the ethical judgment. For example, in the deposit

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[40]Christine M. Korsgaard, "Kant's formula of universal law"*Pacific Philosophical Quarterly* 66, no. 1-2 (1985): 24-47. http://nrs.harvard.edu/urn-3:HUL.InstRepos:3201869.

[41]Christine M. Korsgaard, "Kant's formula of universal law" *Pacific Philosophical Quarterly* 66, no. 1-2 (1985): 24-47. http://nrs.harvard.edu/urn-3:HUL.InstRepos:3201869.

example, it is irrelevant to the FUL whether the system of deposits is an ethical concept or not since the ethical nature of a maxim is revealed solely by its form. It only questions whether the purpose is thwarted when the maxim is universalized. However, if an ethical system aims to provide a concrete ethical judgment about the deposit situation, i.e., someone stealing the money deposited to them, it must also take into account whether the deposit system in that particular situation is ethical (e.g., how ethical is a deposit system in a state that experiences great wealth inequality?). The greater consideration given to the actuality of a particular situation in arriving at an ethical judgment, the less abstract thinking is involved in it. The CI fails to free itself from the errors of abstract thinking, as it is structured to dismiss the concrete reality of particular situations in order to solely focus on the formal structure of an abstract maxim. In response to the "succor the poor" objection Korsgaard has the following two answers ((i) is for (1) and (ii) is for (2)):

> (i) ... the advocate of Logical Contradiction Interpretation can handle the objection. The maxim is to succor those who need it, and this maxim can be consistently held (and in a degenerate sense acted on) in a world where no one needs help. The policy of succoring those who need it when no one does is not inconceivable. It merely gives one nothing to do.[42]

> (ii) The Practical Contradiction Interpretation answers this objection both readily and, in an obvious way, correctly. One's purpose in succoring the poor is to give them relief. The world of the universalized maxim only contradicts one's will if it thwarts one's purpose. A world without poverty does not contradict this purpose but rather satisfies it in another (better) way, and no contradiction arises.[43]

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[42]Christine M. Korsgaard, "Kant's formula of universal law" *Pacific Philosophical Quarterly* 66, no. 1-2 (1985): 24-47. http://nrs.harvard.edu/urn-3:HUL.InstRepos:3201869.

[43]Christine M. Korsgaard, "Kant's formula of universal law" *Pacific Philosophical Quarterly* 66, no. 1-2 (1985): 24-47. http://nrs.harvard.edu/urn-3:HUL.InstRepos:3201869.

I contend that the representation of the FUL in (i) is inaccurate. If everyone in need is helped, then there is no one left to be helped, hence the maxim "succor the poor," when universalized, leads to a situation where it cannot be logically acted upon any longer. The self-defeating contradiction of the maxim is the sense in which it is *inconceivable.* For example, if the maxim "do not pay your debt back" is universalized, then nobody ever lends money in the first place (so no debt to pay back) which causes the maxim to self-defeat. The universe where this maxim is universalized is not "inconceivable," as you can conceive of a universe where nobody pays their debts and no money is lent anymore, however, the FUL would still find this maxim to be contradictory/self-defeating and thus unethical. In a world where no money is lent, "do not pay your debt back" as a maxim also "gives one nothing to do" because the maxim can no longer be acted upon.[44] Korsgaard assumes "succor the poor" merely "gives one nothing to do," and is not "inconceivable" when universalized, but does not explain why any other contradictory maxim cannot be treated the same way by the FUL (e.g., "do not pay your debt back").[45] The Logical Contradiction Interpretation mentions that if the action or policy that the FUL tests would be inconceivable when universalized (i.e., it becomes a logical impossibility) then it is a contradictory maxim. In a world where no one pays their debt back (i.e., the maxim is universalized) it becomes logically impossible to act on the maxim "do not pay your debt back" since the concept of debt presupposed by the maxim is destroyed once no one pays their debt, making it impossible to conceive a world where the maxim is universalized. Similarly, the maxim "succor the poor" becomes logically inconceivable when attempted to be universalized as an action since the concept of poor presupposed by the maxim is demolished after the maxim gets universalized (i.e., a world where the maxim is universalized becomes inconceivable). The idea behind the FUL is not that it creates a metaphysically inconceivable world when the unethical maxim is

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[44]Christine M. Korsgaard, "Kant's formula of universal law" *Pacific Philosophical Quarterly* 66, no. 1-2 (1985): 24-47. http://nrs.harvard.edu/urn-3:HUL.InstRepos:3201869.

[45]Christine M. Korsgaard, "Kant's formula of universal law," *Pacific Philosophical Quarterly* 66, no. 1-2 (1985): 24-47. http://nrs.harvard.edu/urn-3:HUL.InstRepos:3201869.

universalized but rather a world where if the unethical maxim is acted upon it logically defeats itself, resulting in being inconceivable as a universalized action (i.e., the poor can be no longer succored, one cannot not pay their debt back since debts do not exist).

Then again, if the way the FUL functions under different interpretations is understood differently by me and Korsgaard, this is a good indication of the not-so-categorical nature of Kantian ethics, because the case I am making indicates that the notion of "conceivability" in the FUL can be understood differently. Korsgaard needs to make it clear what she means by "the policy of succoring those who need it when no one does is not inconceivable," in order to save this maxim from being unethical.

Another problem arises when Korsgaard implies in her argument that "in a world where no one needs help" there is no poor to succor but then again this is an abstract definition of the word "poor".[46] Such a definition cannot be universalized, the same way no ethical principle can be universalized without content. Thus, even when Korsgaard attempts to defend the CI, she is required to defend it by providing some particular content (e.g., a particular meaning of a word for her) that cannot be categorically universalized. The word poor is not understood the same way by everyone as it is understood by Korsgaard. Yet, it is already presupposed in the CI that words can universally convey their meaning across multiple cultures, akin to mathematics. However, this presupposition is rather controversial, as demonstrated by Quine's famous gavagai argument.[47] The precise meaning of a certain word cannot be presupposed to be universal, as a word can be inscrutable to different cultures. Even particular people within the same culture could be

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[46]Christine M. Korsgaard, "Kant's formula of universal law" *Pacific Philosophical Quarterly* 66, no. 1-2 (1985): 24-47. http://nrs.harvard.edu/urn-3:HUL.InstRepos:3201869.

[47]In this argument, Quine questions the process of translating words between languages, highlighting the indeterminacy of translation. Quine imagines the word "gavagai" being used by a native speaker of the Arunta language upon seeing a rabbit. He argues that there are multiple ways to interpret and translate a foreign word like "gavagai" (it can just mean a rabbit or it can mean a rabbit with undetached parts, etc.) because one cannot determine the exact referent or meaning of the word in the absence of a shared language or conceptual framework. This argument challenges the traditional idea of a one-to-one correspondence between words in different languages and emphasizes the inherent ambiguity in cross-linguistic translation (and in some cases even in inter-linguistic expression). Willard Van Orman Quine, *Word and Object* (Mit Press, 1960).

referring to a word in a way that cannot be universalized (e.g., some words carry different emotions for some people than it does for other people). For example, the Greek word 'Logos' cannot be precisely translated into English, and its specific interpretation depends on multiple factors given in a particular situation.

Additionally, in our concrete reality, meanings of words, facts, and duties are all accompanied by the *biases* of the particular individuals that interact with them (e.g., the connotations and feelings they associate with them); this disqualifies them from conveying their meanings as absolute universals.[48] Essentially these biases determine the way in which a particular individual is conscious of things and since understanding conscious experience is crucial in grasping ethical truths, we must incorporate these biases into our ethical considerations rather than disregard their existence in pursuit of abstract understanding.

Alongside linguistic biases, cultural biases are also neglected by the CI, despite their importance in ethical situations. In his article "The Critique of Eurocentrism and the Practice of African Philosophy", Serequeberhan mentions that Eurocentrism is a "pervasive bias located in modernity's self-consciousness of itself."[49] He argues that Eurocentrism involves self-affirming metanarratives in which the European way of being is distinguished as the real as opposed to the non-European, and considers Kant to be one of the most important figures in constructing this pretext of Eurocentrism since Kant states that "the 'others' (non-Europeans) will receive the Law of Reason from Europe."[50] How can then a defender of the CI and its formulations be assured that the FUL, for example, is not feeding into Eurocentrism? Kant wrote that the "[European] continent...will probably give law, eventually, to all the others."[51] The FUL might as well be that law as it purports

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[48]This may be a necessary problem for any ethical system that gets actualized, yet there is no issue as long as an ethical system is aware of this limitation when producing its ethical conclusions.

[49]Serequeberhan, Tsenay. "The Critique of Eurocentrism and the Practice of African Philosophy" in *The African Philosophy Reader*, edited by Pieter Hendrik, Coetzee, 75-93. Psychology Press, 2003.

[50]Serequeberhan, Tsenay. "The Critique of Eurocentrism and the Practice of African Philosophy" in *The African Philosophy Reader*, edited by Pieter Hendrik, Coetzee, 75-93. Psychology Press, 2003.

[51]Serequeberhan, Tsenay. "The Critique of Eurocentrism and the Practice of African Philosophy" in *The African Philosophy Reader*, edited by Pieter Hendrik, Coetzee, 75-93. Psychology Press, 2003.

to be an objective universalizable law of ethics that emerged out of Europe. The CI abstracts things out from actuality through a Eurocentric perspective as it takes its particular "moral" laws to be universally accepted. It sets its own European bias as the absolute bias. For instance, in Japan, slurping while eating is an action performed to tell the host you are enjoying the food whereas in Western cultures it is generally considered rude to slurp while eating. In this case, one cannot simply assume slurping your food is unethical because its universalization would be frowned upon in a European context.

Other European ethical systems that are alternatives to the CI, such as utilitarianism, also often overlook the potential biases within their own frameworks. They simply inherit the abstract thinking that is present in the CI when they come up with their own abstract formulas of ethics. Take, for instance, Jeremy Bentham, a utilitarian philosopher who devised the *felicific calculus.* This method seeks to quantify the maximum pleasure an action can generate through abstract algorithms, guiding agents to determine the ethical nature of their actions depending on these algorithms.[52] Another prominent utilitarian philosopher, J.S. Mill, presupposed a hierarchy between humans and animals when attempting to calculate the overall pleasure produced by an action. This hierarchy influences human agents' calculations aimed at determining the most ethical course of action.[53] If an ethical system, which is supposed to guide us about how we ought to live, is built on top of these biased abstract concepts and presuppositions, then any action we take will simply conform to a static universal formality, missing the hidden aspects of the ethical truth in particular situations. As Hegel writes in *PR*: "Good as a universal is abstract and cannot be accomplished... To be accomplished it must acquire in addition the character of particularity."[54]

Any attempt to disregard the biases of individuals (e.g., their personal connotations, culture, language, etc.) regarding words, facts, and duties, in order to approach an ethical

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[52]Jeremy Bentham, *An Introduction to the Principles of Morals and Legislation* (Courier Corporation, 2007).
[53]John Stuart Mill, *Utilitarianism* (CreateSpace, 2010).
[54]Georg Wilhelm Friedrich Hegel, T. M. Knox, and Stephen Houlgate, *Outlines of the Philosophy of Right* (Oxford University Press, 2008), 130.

situation from a presupposed objective bias inevitably leads to a limited understanding of the ethical nuances present in the concrete situation.[55] On a similar note, Hegel's critique of 'abstract thinking' stems from people's tendencies to understand things abstractly by taking their particular biases as the absolute in a given situation rather than prioritizing the contemplation of the biases of particulars involved in a situation. The CI and Korsgaard's defense of it does not seem to consider the actuality of things but they rather seem to require the presupposition of an abstract universalized bias towards the world.

My response to (ii) is that it presupposes a purpose for "succoring the poor". This is caused by the abstract thinking that the CI requires to fulfill its purpose in the practical contradiction interpretation (2). It is conceivable that one acts on the maxim "succor the poor" for no reason and this does not necessarily mean that the maxim is unethical. The practical contradiction interpretation requiring maxims to have a purpose, only plays into Hegel's point that the CI is an inadequate abstract formula for concrete worldly cases. And if it is presupposed that every maxim must have a purpose to be ethical, consider universalizing the maxim "succor the poor so that there is a fair economic system in the world." In this case, the poor would have enough money to satisfy their needs (or maybe the same money as the "rich" since the rich constantly succors the poor) yet this does not mean that the purpose of the maxim (i.e., a fair economic system) is achieved. I think this universalized maxim could actually thwart its purpose by making the underpaid poor assume they are now finally being fairly paid which could make them more accepting of their unfair exploitation while giving their succorers enough justification to continue exploitation. Consider a scenario where a lazy host manager in an American theater, despite having a less demanding job, earns more than the hosts (i.e., the working class). In the context of the American capitalist economic system, where managers instruct hosts and then relax while the hosts work, even if the hosts earn the same as their managers they are

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[55]This is not to say attempting to take an objective bias is useless. Rather, it is problematic to absolutize the objective bias towards a situation (the same way it is problematic to absolutize a non-objective particular bias). Yet being aware/using these biases to examine the ethical truth in a given situation is quite helpful.

still underpaid. In a world where "succor the poor so that there is a fair economic system in the world" is universalized as a maxim, the managers would have to share their wealth with their host to equalize their pay with all of them. This action could cause hosts to believe that they are now being paid a fair amount or the managers might now feel justified to work less than their hosts. This could thwart the purpose of the maxim (i.e., to create a fair economic system) since the working class/hosts would be manipulated into thinking they have less justification for strikes and protests regarding fair pay, while the managers could feel more justified to continue exploiting their workers.

It is hard to think the maxim "succor the poor so that there is a fair economic system in the world" is unethical just because "it thwarts [its] purpose" as Korsgaard argues.[56] Therefore absurd ethical conclusions are still reached, even if Korsgaard's presupposition that every maxim must have a purpose is accepted. Admittedly my contemplation of the maxim "succor the poor so that there is a fair economic system in the world" getting universalized might be relying too much on potential outcomes. Thus I am not denying the possibility that this maxim when universalized might not thwart its purpose, yet I am not convinced that anyone can predict what their maxim will give birth to without relying on potential outcomes. Korsgaard argues that a maxim's ethical nature is revealed only when one can precisely predict whether it will achieve its purpose without contradiction. However, this is an impossible thing to predict (at least for people of our age). If Korsgaard's interpretation of the CI is accurate then the CI relies on the consequence of a universalized maxim rather than its form to reach an ethical judgment. However, such an interpretation cannot be accurate since this would mean that the CI is not a deontological but rather a consequentialist philosophy. And even if one considers the CI to be a consequentialist view of ethics by going against Kant's account, then one still needs to consider how realistic it is for Korsgaard to require an agent to know whether their maxim will necessitate its purpose when it is universalized. Consequently, Korsgaard's defense of

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[56]Christine M. Korsgaard, "Kant's formula of universal law" *Pacific Philosophical Quarterly* 66, no. 1-2 (1985): 24-47. http://nrs.harvard.edu/urn-3:HUL.InstRepos:3201869.

the CI falls short of effectively countering Hegel's critique of the CI as an impractical and abstract ethical formula.

# 6   Concluding Remarks

Ultimately, there are two major issues present in the CI's commitment to abstract thinking with regard to its absolute judgements of ethical situations. These issues underscore the continuing relevance of Hegel's critique, even in light of Korsgaard's modern rebuttal. First, what I will call the representation error occurs because an unbiased, accurate understanding of an ethical situation is impossible without accounting for all the particular information relevant to it—something which the CI cannot practically accomplish by focusing on the abstracted information instead of the concrete content. The CI requires rational agents that have an accurate representation of the world, yet a concrete world cannot be accurately represented by abstract thinking. The agents are inevitably limited by their situatedness (i.e., their bias) when they interact with a representation of the concrete world. Merleau-Ponty's analogy of the neighboring house is helpful to understand this point. Whenever we see or imagine the neighboring house, we can only perceive it from a particular angle. The house is perceived differently from the garden outside, from the inside of the house, and differently from an aircraft. And yet none of these appearances is the house itself. The house is "the geometrical plan that includes these perspectives and all possible perspectives; that is, the non-perspectival term from which all perspectives can be derived; the house itself is the house seen from nowhere."[57] Analogously, the house seen from nowhere is the ethical situation comprehended perfectly, yet such a view requires that the agent purely understands the concrete without being restricted in a certain formal perspective. This is inherently contradictory since every ethical situation has to appear to a thinking mind through a biased perspective that formally represents the world to them.

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[57]Maurice   Merleau-Ponty,   *Phenomenology   of   Perception*,   Routledge   eBooks,   2013,   69, https://doi.org/10.4324/9780203720714.

As Merleau-Ponty puts it, "to see is to always see from somewhere," and similarly any ethical situation assessed by the CI (or any ethical system) requires an agent who necessarily interacts with their representation of the situation. However, the CI presupposes a house-viewed-from-nowhere-like representation of ethical content, i.e., an absolute and universal view of the ethical content. Yet, when an agent uses the FUL while presupposing their formal representation of the world as the world itself, they do not have an accurate encapsulation of the concrete in the abstract. As Hegelians put it, the ethical content is taken as a necessary and universal form by the CI when instead it is just a particular/contingent representation of the concrete content by an agent.

The CI is a practical impossibility since a formula like the FUL necessitates that the maxim of the agent and the world is formalized according to a necessary universal standard. For instance, when the maxim "never steal a property" is examined, stealing as an act cannot be presupposed to exist as some sort of a universal Platonic form, we rather need to examine each situation acknowledging that our formalization of it is restricted due to the abstract nature of our representation. As discussed in earlier sections, the FUL forces us to formalize situations and assume an abstract universal representation to be the concrete situation itself. In this case, it forces us to necessarily establish property as an ethical content but does not address whether it is morally justified for individuals to possess private property in the first place; this is because if property is presupposed to be a Platonic, i.e., universal and abstract, formal content then it is already necessarily established as an ethical content. Only if the ethical content, i.e., property, is considered a particular/contingent representation by a biased subject then its ethical value comes into question. Hegel displays that Kantians take their particular representation of property as a necessary universal ethical content when it is just a particular/contingent formalization of the concrete content. In the same way that Nietzsche accuses Plato and his followers of "standing truth on its head and disowning even perspectivism," Hegelians accuse Kantians

of perpetuating a similar issue with regard to the representation error.[58] The supporters of the CI have to admit that their view of an ethical situation cannot ever be a house-viewed-from-nowhere-like representation of ethical content but rather a particular restricted representation of the ethical situation viewed through their bias.

The second error, the absolutizing error, can occur even if one does not commit the representation error. As established earlier, whenever we are thinking about an ethical situation we are thinking about a representation of the concrete phenomena that our bias provides, i.e., we always see the house from somewhere. Therefore, it is in a way impossible to not commit to abstract thinking whenever we think of an ethical situation, i.e., to see the house from nowhere. If one avoids the representation error and acknowledges that their representation of the world is limited, then they can still commit the error of absolutizing by taking their ethical judgment as the absolute. In this case, the agent is aware that their representation of circumstances of an ethical situation stems from their contingent particular bias and that as a result they are limited when it comes to their comprehension of the ethical case. Yet, they still take their ethical judgment, which is them assessing their limited representation of the world through the CI, as the absolute. While it might be acceptable to rely on our particular and limited bias in everyday tasks, it should not be acceptable when we are philosophically drawing absolute ethical conclusions, such as when we derive abstract duties. As expressed by Hegel, basing knowledge on the finite understanding of limited principles constitutes abandoning the philosophical task of attaining the absolute truth.[59] Since the representation error is acknowledged as an inherent aspect of abstract thinking, the ethical truth should always be a progressive investigation, rather than a conclusive absolute fact. In all ethical cases, where a judgment is built on abstract thinking, the ethical truth may be far away from being realized due to an inaccurate representation of the world. Consider the ethical definition, "whenever

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[58]Friedrich Wilhelm Nietzsche, *Beyond Good and Evil*, (Cambridge University Press, 2002), 4.

[59]Jamila M. H. Mascat, "Hegel and the advent of modernity: A social ontology of abstraction" *Radical Philosophy* 201, (February 2018), 29–46.

someone kills somebody else that is murder and to murder is unethical." Now imagine particular cases of murder that could be considered justified (e.g., murdering a serial killer to save 100 innocent lives, rebelling against a tyrannical or colonial government, etc.). A Kantian might argue that the issue here lies not with the ethical duty "never murder," but rather with the mistaken interpretation of a particular case as murder when it is not (i.e., a representation error). This in itself poses a practical threat to the CI since every situation involves too many particularities in the concrete reality to be subsumed accurately under a certain formal category. By committing abstract thinking in our absolute ethical judgements, we solely focus on inaccurately assigned representations (e.g., "murderer") rather than prioritizing the concrete particular situation (e.g., what is exactly going on?, What are the circumstances?, etc.). Analogously, in mathematics, we may take an abstract finite value to be pi, yet the value of pi in actuality can never be this finite abstract value. The impossibility of capturing this value is not to say there is no value of pi or that one cannot get closer to it by thinking of new abstract values but rather it suggests that one simply fails to capture the value of pi if they attribute it to an abstract value. This is why the ancient Greeks treated polygons as if they were circles to approximate the value of pi, and they got closer and closer to the value of pi as they represented the circle with more sided polygons. However, such a project was doomed from the start, as the absolute value of pi only lies in a circle and not in a shape that attempts to capture it. Similarly, in ethical cases, the truth cannot be built on abstract conclusions, and the impossibility of capturing the concrete needs to be respected, no matter how disturbing the situation appears. In mathematical calculations, setting an abstract value for pi may be helpful enough without the need for an absolutely accurate value, however, in ethical situations, even such small presuppositions can lead to wrong ethical judgments with horrific conclusions. If at any point, we set aside the primacy of the concrete case itself, and override its ethical truths with the judgment that an ethical system (or a few ethical systems together) provide(s) then we prevent our ability to get closer to an ethical truth. Thus, the CI by not

acknowledging and committing both of these errors of abstract thinking still faces the problems outlined in Hegel's critique, even in light of Korsgaard's modern rebuttal.

The abstract thinking that is present in Kantian ethics, i.e., one of the most influential ethical philosophies of our day, continues to be prevalent even in ethical philosophies that rival it, e.g., utilitarianism, and within our modern ethical discourse. Every ethical judgment on the news or social media is made as if they rely on concrete universal formalities rather than abstract biases. Ultimately, this paper argues that the 'empty formalism' of the CI and other ethical philosophies that commit the same errors of abstract thinking must be acknowledged. The argumentation throughout the paper is handled in quite a formal tone, yet I feel uninterested in concluding this paper with such formality. The true aim of this paper is not to formally establish an abstract truth to the reader but rather to be experienced by them so it can play a role in the concrete dialectic of ethical philosophies. It does not wish to be an abstract collection of formal words on a piece of electronic paper but rather aims to survive in the reader's mind as a piece that helps them investigate the ethical truth with more caution, impervious to eviction by any abstract ethical system.

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