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**National University of Ireland, Cork**



**Territory and History:**  
**The Justification of Detachment from the Land**  
**as a Stage in the Development of Human Agency**

Thesis presented by

**Matteo Toffolutti**

for the degree of

**Doctor of Philosophy**

**University College Cork**

**Department of Philosophy**

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Supervisor: Doctor Cara Nine

2021



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## **Abstract**

The aim of this thesis is to research the ontology of human agency that informs the structure of most contemporary theories of territorial rights. Rather than establishing a new normative approach to the issue of the allocation of territories to subjects, my work focuses on a descriptive conceptual analysis of the origin of our need to normatively justify attachment to the land. The main questions I seek to answer are: why do we feel the need to solve the issue of our relationship with the land from a normative standpoint? Can the very fact that such relationship appears to us as a problem enlighten us as to the (im)possibility of solving it?

My approach to answering these questions moves from an examination of what it means to be agents who are embedded in the outside world and who seek to live through the outside by embedding it in their activity as they gain autonomy from it. I then show that, in their pursuit of autonomy, agents become part of a historical movement away from the outside. They therefore seek to justify not their attachment to the land, but their detachment from it.

As they shift from being creatures shaped by the land to being creators of themselves by shaping the land, agents lose their immediate connection with the outside, which they seek to substitute with normative considerations.

Finally, I develop a philosophy of history to prove the inevitability and necessity of this process of detachment, showing why we cannot reverse it, and arguing that the problem of detachment is not for us to solve, but to contemplate as a fundamental and necessary stage in our development as agents. This makes the field of territorial rights philosophically emblematic in its ontological/historical implications even more than from an immediately practical standpoint.





To my parents, who didn't think my life was over  
when I chose to study Philosophy  
and to Daniel, who tolerated me very philosophically this whole time



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## Introduction

This thesis investigates the ontology of human agency that underpins its relationship with the territory, with special reference to how the literature of territorial rights seeks to apply normative principles to said relationship. A large part of the territorial rights literature is concerned with the normative issues surrounding the question of how to allot a particular territory to a particular (collective) subject, or how different subjects may relate to one another in so far as the territorial dimension of their existence is concerned. This is called the issue of attachment.

My focus, however, is not on how we may solve the issue of attachment, but on why this problem emerges in the first place. Why do we problematize our relationship with the land? We do we feel the need to solve such problem from a normative standpoint? Can the very fact that such relationship appears to us in the form of a normative problem enlighten us on the possibility (or lack thereof) of solving it?

My view is that the problem of the justification and allocation (or reallocation) of territorial rights emerges as a consequence of detachment, that is, it is due to a disconnect or disintermediation between ourselves and our surroundings. This disconnect emerges as a necessary consequence of the dynamic relation we entertain with the outside world. Detachment, I argue, is necessary, and it is also necessary that it increases over time. As our detachment from the land increases, I further show, the need emerges, in us, to justify this detachment in front of other potential claimants.

In order to understand the conceptual genesis of the problem of territorial rights, therefore, we need to study the underlying dynamic that leads to detachment and how this dynamic evolves according to its own inbuilt process. In fact, I show that, once we understand this underlying dynamic, we must realize that a normative justification of

detachment is a faulty one, while an understanding of this dynamic, and its political consequences, in terms of philosophy of history would be more pertinent.

Fleshing out my position is going to require some preliminary set up, which is carried out in the first part of my thesis, Chapters I through IV. In the second part of the thesis, Chapters V through VII, I articulate my view more specifically and systematically.

Chapter I is a literature review of the field of territorial rights. In it, I expose and discuss a preliminary way of categorizing territorial rights theories. This preliminary chapter is important because, in the following chapters, I devote much time to my understanding of the interaction between subjects and territories; and because I understand territorial rights theories as a way to give a prescriptive spin to that interaction by adopting a normative approach that forces other subjects to accept the validity of one's interaction with the territory. As such, it is necessary to give an overview of the area of territorial rights.

My view is founded on my understanding of the idea of interaction between subject and territory. In this chapter, I show that, for the most part, the concept of interaction, while present in the literature on territorial rights, is misunderstood.

I distinguish between action-oriented arguments and reaction-oriented arguments. Action-oriented arguments highlight the import of human action in shaping the territory, and therefore see human action as normatively relevant. The normative element comes into play as "If I do X, Y or Z, the territory is connected to me especially" or, sometimes, "If I do X, Y or Z, I lose at least some of my connection with the territory". Action-oriented arguments highlight the import of human action in shaping the territory and the movement that goes from the subject toward the territory. Reaction-oriented arguments highlight the normative import of the territory in shaping the group's history, culture and, in general, identity. Such arguments privilege the

movement that goes from the territory toward the subject. A theory may contain both action-oriented and reaction-oriented arguments. I also show that both sets of arguments have their own issues.

However, the misunderstanding ensues as soon as we understand interaction between subject and territory as a simple compound of actions and reaction. I argue that this view of interaction still treats action and reaction as two separate types of movement: action-oriented arguments will stress the movement from the inside toward the outside ( $I \rightarrow O$ ); reaction-oriented arguments will stress the movement from the outside toward the inside ( $O \rightarrow I$ ). Either way, primacy is given to either one between the subject or the territory. If a theory contains an action clause and a reaction clause, it is still not interactive, because this theory will be action-oriented in so far as the first clause goes and reaction-oriented in so far as the second is concerned. As such, it compounds the problems of both sets of arguments rather than solving them.

In order for an approach to count as really interactive, primacy must be given to the relationship between subject and territory, i.e., their interaction. Action-oriented and reaction-oriented arguments highlight the formative role that either one between subject and territory has on the other. An interactive approach looks at the interaction itself as that which grounds the existence of both subject and territory as mutually formative of each other. Said relationship grounds the difference between subject and territory without turning this difference into a form of dualism; at the same time it acknowledges their unity, without turning this unity into a form of indifference between them. This mutually formative relationship is not a result of compounding two separate movements, ( $O \rightarrow I$  and  $I \rightarrow O$ ), but the process of interaction articulating itself through and forming the two sides that interact.

In other words, there aren't two directions of movement, because presupposing this would imply a fundamental dualism of Inside and Outside, a dualism which would deny the possibility of interaction. Instead, interaction is a unitary movement that requires the distinction between Inside and Outside as a consequence, for without this distinction, it wouldn't be an interaction.

In the following chapters I pursue this path, showing that the only way to do it is by understanding the subject-territory relationship not as normative, but rather as founded on historical-philosophical presuppositions that unfold over time. In other words, I show that the primacy of interaction over the two interacting sides leads not to normative considerations about who gets what territory, but to a philosophy of history.

In Chapter II, I introduce my conceptualization of individual subjects. Here, I take the notion of interaction introduced in Chapter I and expand upon it. If Inside and Outside represent the duality articulating a unitary interactive process, it follows that neither of them can be discussed without reference to the other. To better live up to this idea, I discuss what I call a sequential understanding of subjects and territories.

On my view, every possible subjective determination is acquired dynamically through the Outside, and every outside point is outside with reference to a subject's ability, or lack thereof, to embody a certain determination by interacting with that point. In short, both subjects and territories are comprised of sequences of Inside-Outside interaction, each sequence corresponding to a possible determination. My understanding of subjectivity is grounded in the idea that every determination of the subject, actual or potential, is obtained through a functionalization of the outside, while the outside must be understood, fundamentally, as that which is open to

functionalization. The subject, in other words, lives through the outside, in active stance toward it.

I thus understand subjects and territories as bundles of sequences, each sequence corresponding to a possible concrete determination of a subject. There are two types of sequences: those that express the active functionalization of the outside to express a subjective determination, which I call subject sequences, and those that express the inability to do so, which I call territory sequences. Subject sequences are Outside-embedding sequences, founded on the ability of the Inside to find expression through the Outside by overcoming the Outside's limiting effect on it, while territory sequences are Inside-embedding sequences, founded on the Inside's inability to do so, and therefore on the Inside's inability to overcome the Outside's limiting effect. By understanding subjects and territory as sequences of mutual embedment, I preserve the conceptual primacy of the relationship between them over either one of them.

The subject-end of the unitary interactive process emerges in the form of aims looking for territory to functionalize to meet those aims. Complementarily, and at the same time, the territory-end of the process emerges in the form of an outside world situationally resisting, in part, the fulfilling of those aims, thus embedding, within it, the subject that embeds it in his or her manifestation of his/her determinations.

In Chapter III, I draw a further conclusion. The interactive process that articulates itself in the duality of subject and territory is, as said, unitary, but this implies that it is also universal. The interaction of particular subjects with a particular outside world that complements their know-how or lack thereof is really the articulation, through particular subject-territory dynamics, of the general act of limit-overcoming that is at the heart of each of these dynamics and finds expression through them.

On my view, therefore, what we call human agency is not a personal faculty of individuals. It is not a faculty that starts in them and allows them to act on the Outside world following an expansive  $I \rightarrow O$  trajectory, as opposed to a different and separate limiting  $O \rightarrow I$  trajectory. Agency is the basic interactive process that always finds expression through a subject harboring plans to partially modify an Outside that embeds them, thus partially limiting them.

In this chapter I also discuss how individual subjects and groups derive their sense of self-consistency as separate actors, despite being part of a universal interactive process (which I call Universal Actor). Each individual is the emerging subject-end of the universal interactive process of agency. Each individual subject-end emerges together with the corresponding particular territory-end of the process. Furthermore, as already said, the corresponding territory complements the subject because it resists the subject's overcoming activity through the subject's partial lack of know-how.

Thus, the particularity of each individual subject, embedded in his or her particular outside world, is a function of the subject's partial ignorance which partially prevents them from living up to the pure limit-overcoming process of agency. As a result, particular subjects emerge, each with his or her individual self-image, as a consequence of the limits that the universal agency is prevented from overcoming by the individual's situational lack of know-how. Our self-image, in brief, is a function of our situational disability, and our situational disability expresses through what remains situationally outside of agency's grasp, thus limiting it and constituting the Outside that complements the Inside.

This view of agency has consequences for my understanding of groups as well. Individuals, we have seen, are characterized by their lack of know-how, which distinguishes them, as particular subjects, from the universal process of agency. As

such, groups can be seen as nothing other than loose collections of individuals who are limited in a similar way, which results in similar determinations. Thus, on my view, groups are not formed of individuals coming together. On the contrary, individuals emerge out of shared disabilities and therefore shared determinations in so far as each individual has disabilities that are uniquely their own and thus is its own unique and unrepeatably constellation of disabilities.

So far, I have shown how my redefinition of the concept of subject-territory interaction leads to reconceptualizing both individuals and groups. More importantly, I have shown that this concept of interaction leads to a universalized notion of agency as limit-overcoming, which finds expression through the duality of mutually dependent sides consisting in an territory-embedded subject seeking to embed the territory in his or her self-expression as subject.

In Chapter IV, I discuss how my view of agency as universal limit-overcoming activity impacts the attempt, by subjects, to introduce normative elements in their interaction with other people. On my view, normativity must be understood in terms of the normative act that establishes it, whether it is a conscious establishment or a subconscious presupposition present in an individual's self-image.

However, because it is a normative act that establishes a norm, norms are a result of the universal process of limit-overcoming of agency. As such, normativity cannot be an attempt at stopping agency, disempowering it, but is itself rather a manifestation of agency's power to overcome limits. Thus, normativity can never truly limit agency, because a normative act always presupposes the universal agency that it tries to limit, and because agency is limit-overcoming, the establishment of limits presupposes their future overcoming. In short, norms emerge together with the subject that consciously or unconsciously upholds them, and stop emerging with him or her when the subject



begins emerging as the subject who doesn't uphold them. Thus, in spite of their apparently limiting quality, norms are a manifestation of agency' limit-overcoming activity.

So far, we have a concept of interaction that required us to reconceptualize the relationship between subject and territory and embrace a particular notion of agency. The subject-end of the interactive process emerges as a situationally limited, situationally embedded group of aims for transformation, and therefore embedment, of the outside world that embeds them, which is the territory-end of the interactive process. This interactive process itself is the constant limit-overcoming that happens within the limited sphere of subjective activity. This limited subjective sphere is a result of the situational lack of ability/know-how that prevents the universal limit-overcoming activity from overcoming all limits at once. As such, certain limits remain more constant in a subjective field, and become the traits that the subject attaches his or her self-image to.

The keyword, here, is attachment. The previous chapters have served as set-up. In Chapter V, I go back to the heart of the problem of territorial rights, which is exactly the issue of attachment. On my view, despite the fact that territorial rights theories expressly or silently presuppose attachment to the territory as their core focus, the problem is best understood as that of detachment. In order for the existence of a theory of territorial rights to make any sense at all, there must be an underlying belief that we are detached from the land: that we don't necessarily, ontologically belong anywhere. We are detached from every place by default, unless an additional effort to create a special bond is made, and a theory of territorial rights is mostly concerned with the normative regulation of that additional effort.

Attachment, I argue, results from subjects' ignorance. This follows automatically from what I have already discussed in Chapters I through IV. Subjects develop their self-image based on the ways in which they are ignorant of how to live up to the pure self-overcoming of agency. This ignorance makes subjects over-attach to certain of their determinations and under-attach to certain other determinations. It follows that the accumulation of know-how reduces subjects' attachment (this is true for both individuals and collectives).

Detachment, that is, the loss of attachment, which is presupposed for the emergence of the problem of territorial rights, comes in a continuum. This is only natural, as ignorance, too, understood as the sum total of all that is possible to know (and therefore ignore) comes in a continuum. The accumulation of knowledge, understood as power to overcome limits, leads to greater detachment from our embedment in specific sets of circumstances. As we overcome limits, and therefore solve problems, other, greater, more complex problems present themselves to our attention, engendered by the expansion of our needs and aims, which was heralded by our overcoming of earlier obstacles to more basic aims.

In this context, theories of territorial rights, understood as theories of attachment, emerge as a way to mimic our earlier attachment, which was the immediate result of our ignorance. Now attachment is no longer immediate and irreflexive, but theoretically mediated, in order to fulfill the intersubjective role of keeping others away from a certain space: it becomes an intersubjective strategy, rather than one to regain one's relationship with a portion of the outside world.

Attachment as a theoretically mediated concept not only presupposes detachment from the land, but contributes to increasing it, because it becomes an instrument in

the hands of subjects who free themselves of limits, rather than being a consequence of those limits.

In Chapter VI, I discuss how come from attachment as a mark of the relationship between subject and territory to attachment as intersubjective strategy, where the outside world plays an increasingly residual role.

We have seen that subjects are defined by the situational limits that embed them in the outside world, partially preventing them from acting, i.e., from living up to the limit-overcoming effects of the agency they embody. The limits that embed them manifest as the determinations to which subjects attach their self-image.

As subjects progress on the continuum of detachment, they seek to introduce a mediated notion of attachment, as discussed in Chapter V. This notion hinges on the attribution of normative relevance either to what subjects do or what the subjects are. Here, I retrieve Avery Kolers' distinction between status theories of territorial rights (based on what subjects are) and achievement theories of territorial rights (based on what subjects do).

I then show how, if we seek to attach relevance to a subject's status, it follows that agency, which, we have seen, overcomes limits, quickly becomes stifled, so that status theories become impracticable. I then show how achievement theories fall into the same problem, in so far as they seek to mediate the relationship between subject and territory: sooner or later they end up stifling agency's relentless limit-overcoming activity. This, on my view, lead territorial rights theories to abandoning the quest for attachment as mediation between subject and territory, and embrace agency's achievements, understood as acts that have intersubjective relevance in front of other claimants, and where territory is attributed less and less importance.

In Chapter VII, finally, I discuss how my view of interaction naturally leads to a philosophy of history, rather than to a normative theory of attachment. We have seen how my understanding of interaction leads to conceptualizing agency as a unitary, global process which articulates through the emergence of dynamic duality of subject and territory. We have also seen how normativity seeks to play a restraining role on agency, but, being itself the product of a normative act, it becomes an expression of agency's unlimitedness, rather than an enforceable set of limits to it.

Detachment from the territory is unavoidable and comes in a continuum (as shown in Chapter V). As we detach through the accumulation of know-how, we upgrade our self-image, it being the result of our ignorance and therefore our attachment. Our self-image provisionally delimits a sphere of possibilities within which the process of limit-overcoming carries itself out. Normativity emerges together with our self-image, as one of the ways in which a subject's self-image distinguishes between what is in accordance with his or her perception of himself or herself and what isn't, thus allowing the subject to judge which limits must be overcome and which limits must be enforced.

My argument is that the fundamental process of limit-overcoming carries itself out through subjects who will foster, in part, the process itself, as long as it accords with the subject's way of interacting with his or her territory. However, once the subject ceases to be a working vessel for this process, instead of stopping it, either the subject is left behind, or he/she upgrades his/her self-image to accommodate more limit-overcoming, for the interactive process itself cannot be stopped.

In this sense, the process of detachment takes on the connotations of a philosophy of history with its own unbending trajectory. This doesn't mean, though, that subjects move toward a predetermined future, but that their detachment from limitation,

which is their liberation from limit, contributes to rendering their historical trajectory unchangeable. On my view, the continuum of detachment unfolds as a trajectory as we constantly overcome limits and new limits present themselves to our attention, and all this is a direct emanation of the process of limit-overcoming that animates agency. Because agency is limit-overcoming, I argue, every limit must present itself to it, expressed in the subject-territory dynamic discussed in the previous chapters. As such, the act of moving forward toward the future is really the act of leaving behind previous self-images as limiting to the process of constant overcoming.

In conclusion, my understanding of the problem of territorial rights differs from most other solutions in that it hinges not on an attempt to solve the problem itself, but on an effort to analyze how the problem presents itself to us as a symptom of detachment and how, since detachment is a relentless universal process, the attempt to solve it on the part of territorial rights theories actually contributes to the carrying out of this process, rather than stopping it or reverting it.





## CHAPTER I - Literature Review

### Introduction

In this chapter, I establish what I see as a basic distinction, within the field of territorial studies, between action-oriented arguments and reaction-oriented arguments. I say “arguments” and not “theories” because theories are usually made of various arguments, and each single theory may include a mix of action-oriented and reaction-oriented arguments. The focus of the chapter is on revealing the ontological commitments shared by some prominent theories that fall in the two categories.

The field of territorial rights is concerned with allotting a right to particular territories to particular (usually collective) subjects by virtue of some type of (usually normative) automatism. As such, a certain argument adopted within the framework of a territorial rights theory will often call for either one of two types of justification: that a subject has acted upon the territory in such a way as to create a normatively relevant bond to it; or that a territory has molded a subject in such a way as to be worthy of protection. I call the former an action-oriented argument, since it is founded on the subject’s action on the territory, and the latter a reaction-oriented argument, because it focuses on the subject’s reaction to a particular territory’s challenges and possibilities.

This distinction between action and reaction is going to be pivotal for my further discussion, in the next chapters, of the agent-territory relationship, as I seek to introduce an interaction-oriented approach. One of the basic tenets that inform my view is the need to merge, as much as conceptually possible, our understanding of agents with our understanding of territories. In fact, I want to reach a point where the distinction between the two. It is therefore necessary for me to distinguish the two main directions on which we may focus in our conceptualization of the agent-territory



relationship: from agent to territory and from territory to agent. In this chapter, I do so by looking at where other theorists have adopted an action-oriented argument and where a reaction-oriented one.

In Section I, I distinguish between two levels at which the basic issue of the agent-territory relation can be understood: an ontological, descriptive level and a normative, political level. I argue that the political level can only be a secondary manifestation of the ontological level. In Section II, I refer to Paulina Ochoa Espejo's reconceptualization of the boundary problem, inherited from democratic theory, as an issue with which territorial rights theorists need to come to terms. I do this because, in her exposition, Ochoa Espejo unveils the existence of a circularity between our definition of the subject and our definition of the territory.

My argument is that this circularity is actually extremely fecund, in that not only it points to an insufficiency in both action and reaction arguments, but it hints at the need to conceptualize the relationship between action and reaction, and between subject and territory, in a more dynamic way. In Sections III and IV, I analyze action-oriented arguments and reaction-oriented arguments respectively, focusing on how they appear in the literature. Finally, in Section V I consider whether an interaction-oriented argument may be possible, and at what condition. I show that an interaction-oriented approach, such as the one I develop in this thesis, cannot result from compounding action-oriented arguments with reaction-oriented arguments, but with prioritizing the interaction itself over both subject and territory.

My argument is that an interactive view cannot simply mix considerations on a subject's activity on the territory with considerations about the territory's formative role on the subject. In my understanding of the word, interaction is the process that encompasses subject and territory in so far as they are taken into account as having a

connection to the other. Interaction is the conceptual foundation of the two sides that interact.

## Section I – Distinguishing the Ontological from the Political

According to many theorists, the basic issue a theory of territorial rights seeks to solve is that of particularity (Simmons, 2001; Kolers, 2012). The question we are looking to answer is whether a particular agent or subject of entitlement may hold a right to a particular territory. The problem can be envisioned in terms of conceptual ropes. I move, while the land doesn't (at least, not at my pace, and not depending on my movement). I can change place, so what is the conceptual origin of particular territorial rights? What is the conceptual rope that links me to one place, regardless of where I am and regardless who currently occupies that place?

There are three blank spaces here that a theorist must fill in. The "by virtue of what" part is the issue of attachment. Attachment is the theoretical mechanism that provides us with the conceptual rope linking someone to somewhere. Implicit in this primary issue are the other two, secondary but essential ones: what's "who" and what's "where", which form the two ends of the connecting rope. We need to define, or at least presuppose a definition of the subject of entitlement to territory on one hand; and a definition of how we identify a chunk of space that relates to the "who" on the other hand. Note that I do not concentrate, for the moment, on any definition of "territory". In fact, I argue in Chapter II that it is impossible to give a definition of it that is different from "the outside", the reason being that what counts as territory is purely relative to the subject's abilities and know-how.

Attachment may be understood either as an ontological or as a political issue, or even both. In other words, attachment has, conceptually speaking, no necessary connection with politics or with the language of rights. We may theorize that animals have rights

concerning their environment, but certainly they could not care less about our political deliberations. This is not to say that animals could not benefit from us endowing them with certain rights, and certainly acknowledging the needs of animals is a sensible thing. However, it is to be demonstrated that an animal's life would be impacted by having a right or not, unless a human acted in conformity with or against that right (similarly, humans wouldn't have invented the language of human rights if they didn't intend this language to guide our concrete actions).

Still, we consider animals to be linked to certain places more than others. In fact, it is especially easy to see ontological attachment at work in animals. An endangered parrot species in the Amazon forest that sees its territory threatened by deforestation and pollution, for instance, cannot simply pack its stuff and leave for Greenland, unless humans act to neutralize those conditions that make the potential new habitat different from the old one.

One distinctive trait of human beings, as a generalist species, seems to be that they are more capable than other species to neutralize the impact of external conditions that they feel are not conducive of how they want to live. Even from an intuitive standpoint, it is immediately evident that, for most of us, the notion of a "habitat" is far less demanding and restrictive than it is for so many species, so much so that it is far too easy to kill them off by tampering with their environment. As such, there is an ontological, pre-political dimension to the notion of attachment.

Besides, even in the case of humans, reducing the issue to a merely political one would be very strange. We are not talking about our relationship with any particular object, but literally with a reality, albeit taken in chunks, wherein we are situated all the times. Politics involves decisions and actionable plans, and so it makes sense only in the realm

of what is possible but not necessary. But our being territorially situated (regardless of our definitions) is apparently necessary, and so it exceeds politics and grounds it.

In other words, we need to distinguish an ontological, or descriptive plane and a political, or normative plane which are like layers of the same onion. The inner ontological side of the issue of territorial entitlement is paramount, and constitutes the backdrop against which assigning the right to have a territory makes sense. The way we understand agents and territory, the way we define them as they are and their interaction as it is nudges us toward preferring certain solutions when we apply normative arguments to select what is to be avoided and what is to be preferred, or it may prevent us from choosing certain solutions. However, sometimes it may happen that we use normative strategies that are not supported by or are in tension with the unspoken ontological definitions or commitments that underpin our view.

Suppose that I, together with my group, get into your land, and shoo your group away. What principle do you appeal to, to show that what I did was an illegitimate breach of a rightful situation? Of course, you show that the situation was rightful in the first place. If we toss aside all justifications based on international laws and agreements, which might be just pieces of paper, what is the philosophical basis for such claim? This is where metaphysics kicks in. Even if we decide that sentimental value is enough to link you to a set of borders and to keep me out, without any other apparent metaphysical justification; even if we decide to be pragmatic and resolve the issue by appealing to “reasonable” considerations, we will be following certain criteria which have certain metaphysical underpinnings. That is, we will be appealing to normative criteria that presuppose certain descriptions of what territories, agents and their connections are.

What many theories of territorial rights try to do is to set forth the metaphysical requirements that would make a certain configuration of the world (e.g., the one where you have a special link to a certain area) valid within the picture of the world that we consider normatively relevant even if it is not true in practice (e.g., if I invade your land and keep you out of it), so that action may be taken to bring the practice. The idea of a conceptual rope linking me more or less stably to a certain set of boundaries is metaphysical exactly because it exists beyond physical reality, which might in fact be very different. It is an alternative version of reality to be used as model for the actual reality.

I could consider myself wrongfully displaced from my territory as I am factually, physically not there and am prevented from coming back, but I believe that, if the world were conformed to how the world ought to be, I could go back. Otherwise, it would be merely an issue of acknowledging the *fait accompli* every time the status quo changes: first I was there, now I am here, and that is about it. The link itself that supposedly ties me to a certain land is not political per se. However, usually, a territorial rights theorist's effort is going to be geared toward translating some of this link's pre-political qualities into worthiness of protection in the political sphere.

Note that this discourse is valid even for theories that do not outwardly depend on a connection between agents and territories, because in not taking into account such connection, they must assume that it is not strong enough to override different types of considerations, and this is itself an ontological commitment, albeit indirect, about the nature of and connection between agents and territories. In Chapter VI, I propose a schematization of various types of theories, where theories that depend outwardly on a subject-territory connection and theories that apparently do not fit together on the same continuum, but are not essentially different.

Most people would agree that our relationship with the land is basic , operating beneath and prior to most other activities we engage in and states of being we experience. This plane transcends politics. In the case of territory, therefore, most political theory tries to manifest pre-political connections that can be made into law.

Political theory seeks to simplify things by telling us which connections between people and territory constitute the grounds for right and which do not. The political side of the issue can be understood as the handling of power so that a single framework of interaction or interrelation between “who” and “where”, among those that are possible, is forced upon a multitude of agents who might otherwise act outside of the view fostered and protected by that framework. Power and coercion are thus relatively justified if they are used to bring the agents into conformity with the framework itself.

## Section II – The Boundary Problem and Territorial Rights

As seen in the previous section, the questions of “who” and “where” are complicated by the ontological problems that arise in their delineation as conceptual entities (i.e., as subject and territory). One problem has been pointed out in how the definitions of territory and subject are usually drawn. This problem is called by Paulina Ochoa Espejo (2014) the “paradox of people and territory.”

The paradox arises essentially due to a circularity in the definition of the subject and the territory. On one hand, Ochoa Espejo argues, we would be led to think that the notion of territory rests on that of an already well- defined collective subject, i.e., a people. On the other hand, the notion of collective subject that is employed, she says, is conceptually dependent on that of a well-defined territory, so that the two sides of the equation constantly refer back to one another in circle.

Ochoa Espejo sees this as a particular application of the boundary problem within democratic theory, as articulated by F. G. Whelan, according to whom democratic procedures cannot decide upon the scope of the “demos”, therefore resting on a predefined notion of it: “It may not be surprising that democracy, which is a method for group decision making or self-governance, cannot be brought to bear on the logically prior matter of the constitution of the group, the existence of which it presupposes.” (Whelan, 1983, p. 40) In other words, democratic action presupposes a democratic agent, who cannot be the consequence of its own actions, for those actions presuppose it.

As applied to the issue of territorial rights, the paradox, according to Ochoa Espejo, is caused by the seeming impossibility to select a “decision- independent criterion” on which one may hang a definition of territory that might then serve to define a collective subject, without incurring paradoxical outcomes from a theoretical perspective. The problem is therefore that each of the concepts hinges on the other, without us being able to determine which should be taken as more fundamental. They are co-relative and co- dependent variables, unless we find a way to keep one of them still and have the other depend on it. I will come back to Ochoa-Espejo’s view in Chapter IV in greater detail.

However, the interdependence of territory and subject does not have to be a problem. If we move from legal/political definitions to the underlying ontology, we can conceptualize this interdependence in acceptable terms. Nor is the idea of bringing in ontology a novel one: almost all territorial rights theories rest on more or less explicit metaphysical and ontological presuppositions. In the next chapters, I will describe this subject-territory interdependence. For the remainder of this chapter, my focus is on fleshing out in some detail the various positions as I seek to show the ontological issues they are, sometimes implicitly, trying to solve.

These presuppositions have to do primarily with the essential relation that links the subject to the territory. We can distinguish three broad classes of arguments. First, we have action-oriented arguments, which understand the subject as the initiator of the relation, the one whose definition is not dependent on the other. Then, we have interaction-oriented arguments, which seek to give a more positive role to the territory itself. On the opposite side of action-oriented arguments, finally, we can distinguish reaction-oriented arguments, on account of which the relevant work in weaving a meaningful subject-territory relation is performed by the territory, in that the territory leaves traces of itself in the subject, and this is what counts.

Each type of argument captures something important. Action-oriented arguments understand the central role of our conduct in shaping the territory the way that it is, in determining the territory's shape, role and theoretical place from the fact that we place ourselves in a certain relation to it. The relevant physical movement happens from the inside toward the outside (I → O). Conceptually, these arguments focus on how we can pinpoint a subset of human actions (out of the sum total of all possible human actions) that inform the territory in a way that is deserving of political protection. Not all the ways in which I manifest my agency on the outside is going to be equally conducive of a special relation with the outside.

Interaction-oriented arguments account for the interdependence of subject and territory: how we define one automatically gives us a hint as to the consistency we are going to have to allot to the other, both in physical terms and in terms of the conceptual relevance that each has in front of the other when we theorize about them. In Section V, which is dedicated to the possibility of fleshing out Interaction-oriented arguments, I point out that interaction is not just a compound of action and reaction arguments, but rather hinges on the coordinated emergence of subject and territory from the natural world.



Finally, Reaction-oriented arguments capture the fact that the subject does not float in empty space. The subject is already shaped in a certain way before shaping the territory. As such, reaction-oriented arguments understand the relevant physical movement to be one that starts outside and goes toward the inside (O → I). Conceptually, these arguments must highlight what are the ways in which the territory informs the subject that form a link between them that ought to be legally enforced.

Action-oriented arguments start from the intuition that the subject creates the territory, at least so far as the territory is theoretically relevant. Locke-inspired theories, such as Cara Nine's (2008) fall neatly into this camp. Their strength is that they recognize that the agent's stance is critical to how the territory is involved in the subject-territory relation. On Nine's account, for instance, a collective (the state) acquires territorial rights if it is capable of changing the land, thereby connecting itself to it, and if this active stance conforms to criteria that make its activity "morally valuable". Alternative Lockean accounts, such as Van der Vossen (2014) also fall in the action camp.

Kant-inspired theories, such as Anna Stilz's (2009) or Ypi's (2012) also set forth requirements and arguments that fall more into the action-side of the barricade, albeit for different reasons than Lockean theories. In Stilz's view, for instance, a clear-cut distinction is made between the people and the state, and the latter's authority has to be legitimate, i.e., it has to act in a certain way. In Ypi's case, instead, action is what needs to be taken to strengthen and legitimize the status quo by committing to certain principles of global justice. In her case, action is especially relevant when it fails to reach a certain aim, thereby loosening the subject's entitlement to a land.

In the case of reaction-oriented arguments, the subject counts as the epiphenomenon of external factors, which leave traces of themselves in a group. In these views, what

the subject does is far less important than what is done to it. Here, the territory creates or “informs” the subject of what the subject is. I do not believe many theories defend such view in its purest form, although it would be difficult to overestimate the intuitive appeal this set of arguments has outside the academia. It is very much the basis of many everyday political intuitions, and many theorists seek to incorporate a diluted or tamer version of reaction arguments in their theories. Chaim Gans’ (2001) description of formative territories is a nice example of a reaction-oriented argument.

Finally, it is hard to consider interaction-oriented arguments or views as a category in themselves. Whether such category can be spelt out clearly or not is more a question than an assertion. Normally, when we press them, we can see most arguments aligning either as action-oriented or reaction-oriented or switching between the two views. For this reason, I will not be classifying any currently available theory under this heading, but rather I will seek to spell out the ontological requirements for such a view to be coherent. I show, in Section V, that my own approach is interactive because it highlights the foundational role of the interaction itself over both the subject and the territory.

I have now broadly presented the three different sets of arguments. In the next three sections I present each of them separately and more thoroughly.

### Section III – Action-oriented Arguments

Action-oriented arguments are those according to which normative relevance should be given to how the subject acts on the territory. Ontologically, these arguments rest on the presupposition that the relevant movement goes from the Inside toward the Outside. In a way, we may even talk about the subject creating or, better, recreating the territory. Clearly, we are not talking about creation from nothing. We are talking about “information” or “shaping/reshaping”. The subject plants, as it were, forms into

the territory by acting on it, thus conferring to it its significance, consistency and character. It is the old idea of beating nature into shape. The subject reshapes its actual circumstances, turning them into circumstances that conform, in one way or another, to the subject's desires, expectations, needs, identity, etc.

The fact of being surrounded by forces that appear alien to the subject's choices or preferences is gradually converted in the fact of being surrounded by the fruits of one's choices. The movement here is from the unchosen to the chosen. Our original condition is (or, at least, appears) unchosen and therefore feels alien to us as agents. We don't want to succumb to a design whose possibly lethal consequences are unforeseeable.

Despite this process not being one of creation from nothing, it is interesting to note that the broadly Christian attitude toward nature (Attfield, 1983) can be understood as an action-oriented model. In the Christian view, we are first and foremost children of God, and therefore our essential nature does not depend on where we are situated or where we are from. Owing to this view, we are not informed in any essential way of who we are by the particular land under our feet, but by the revelation of an a-spatial entity that breaks through the myriad particulars of time, space, physical qualities etc. to announce a universal truth. Humans are stewards of God's rule on the "lower" plane of nature (White, 1967). No action nor reaction can ever change their fundamental constitution, which is eternal and beyond choice.

In fact, human action is only validated as moral, or righteous, or virtuous etc. in so far as it effectively "informs" the realm of nature with an eternal and a-spatial truth, leading the former to conformity with the latter. Differently put, human actions are acceptable, normatively speaking, only in so far as they conform to certain absolute

criteria that validate those actions' relative creativity by measuring their conformity to God's status as original and only real or absolute creator.

The Christian model makes clear one important aspect of action-oriented arguments, most of which are today not theological in nature, and generally unrelated to theological arguments: the need for a space-independent criterion for judging whether an action is meaningful in carving a territory out of space. God, in the theological view of reality, is an a-spatial criterion for us to conform our actions to. Without an a-spatial agent whose code of ethics pierces through the clouds and makes itself known indisputably, we are left to our own devices in the selection of which criteria to follow. But, exactly because we select the criteria, they are not decision-independent.

The implication is that there is nothing inherently meaningful in nature, that might guide us in the discovery of such criteria. No fact jumps at us so clearly from nature that we might elevate it to norm for guiding action without this elevation being an arbitrary decision. Sure, nature is supposedly the second book written by God, so it should contain certain indications.

Yet, a book is a book only if it has an author. Once we seek to understand it as a book while doing away with the author, the idea that something might express more than its physical qualities becomes dubious. If nature is a book, it is either self-written or it is one we write ourselves (Drenthen, 2011). If we choose the first option, then nature writes all its facts equally, so that no fact is more normatively important than the others; if we choose the second option, i.e., that we write it, then our choosing certain facts as important rests on a blind decision.

So, in the religious view, which is very similar to contemporary action-oriented arguments, nature has no natural territorial joints at which we may carve it, or rather,

it has no point which is, in principle, not a carvable joint, depending on our point of view. Therefore, normative criteria may be applied only by human action. But this is a problem, because human action is the exactly the outstanding factor which, exactly because of its unpredictability, needs to be normatively regulated and reined in.

I say that actions are outstanding because, in our case, they are not theoretically relevant to us in the same way as nature is. Of course, we can study territory-related actions, for instance cultivating the land, founding cities and so on, from a neuroscientific perspective, as facts of nature, but this perspective is entirely useless here: from a neuroscientific, or anyway naturalistic perspective, invasion is just as much a fact as peaceful international cooperation.

One could argue that we might try to substitute normative statements with scientifically informed, descriptive ones. For instance, we might try to prove that invading another's land is the result of neurological disorders, or traumas, etc. But this would be playing with words. Once we kick normative principles out of the door, we cannot let them back in from the window by turning psychopathology into a moral guide: a disorder is just as much a fact as an "order", only it stands out to us because we don't like it or its consequences. Hence, in our case actions stand out from nature and require, or so we think, particular criteria that divide them in conducive and not conducive of a normatively relevant link with a certain portion of the outside world.

In the Christian vision, actions are outstanding because humans are outstanding. Humans, by virtue of their ontologically supernatural "core", can never be reduced to their temporal and spatial circumstances. As a result, humans who conform to their true a-spatial nature (and therefore to their Creator's will) act rightfully, including when they carve territories out of nature. But the possibility of their actions being outstanding, which is the presupposition for their actions being meaningfully divided

into immaterial classes (right or wrong, legitimate or illegitimate, conducive or not conducive, etc.) is grounded in the view that humans are ultimately ontologically distinct from nature. Humans may be temporarily engrossed in the materiality of natural manifestation, but they ultimately don't belong there.

In the religious worldview, we have three conceptual planes: the divine, the human and the mundane. God plays the role of absolute creator, who creates nature and humans, but he creates them as ontologically separated, or at least separated enough for humans to inherit some kind of spiritual characteristic that sets them aside from the rest of creation. Humans are capable of being creators, just like God: they can reshape reality in an almost infinite variety of ways. The catch, however, is that not all ways in which humans can reshape reality are legitimate. They can be good or bad creators, depending on whether their actions conform to God's will, which is the criterion for goodness, the aspatial criterion that doesn't require to be selected because its existence doesn't depend on our choice.

Today, our opinion of humanity has somewhat deflated. We understand humans as being just as natural as animals and plants. This means that we no longer have three distinct ontological planes, but one: nature. We no longer look to please some deity by avoiding certain actions and doubling down on others. Once, we believed that there was an ontological plane of existence above our own from which we received, through revelation, criteria of right action that didn't depend on our own active decisions: the decision-independent criteria that informed our actions on the plane below came to us from above our heads, being securely tucked away in a different ontological plane than our own. To sum up, we are attempting to do with just one conceptual plane what was once believed to require three.

Having done away with this threefold distinction of Above- Human-Below, if we are to have a way to distinguish our actions in different sets (e.g., good or bad, conducive of a special relationship with a territory or not, etc.), we are required to choose those criteria ourselves. In other words, the decision that demarcates our actions by dividing them into different sets comes from the same plane as those actions, which means that our decision is itself an action among other actions, i.e., it is not decision-independent.

This is very liberating as it frees us from being subject to Divine will, but also very problematic. We are no longer outstanding in any essential way from the rest of nature. In a religious framework, we stand out from nature because we are the holders of a divine spark that tells us we ultimately don't belong anywhere in nature, that our true nature is beyond space-time, and that by acting in conformity with certain absolute (and therefore a-spatial) moral criteria which are independent from our decisions, we can be good agents even as we reshape nature and carve out a territory for our people.

The question, however, is whether a decision-independent, immaterial distinction between actions can be accomplished once the underlying ontology has been simplified from a more or less defined dualism to an uncompromising monism.

To replace the Divine Will as an ontological organizer, secular action-oriented arguments seek to show how human actions can be classified in different sets that rest on more than our simple decisions, even though humans no longer have objective criteria given to them from above and therefore from beyond their arbitrary choices. In order for this to be possible, action-oriented arguments need to show that it is possible to do with one plane (nature, which comprises everything, including humans)

what once required three, hierarchically layered planes to pull off (divine and mundane plane, with the human plane sandwiched in between).

An example of how actions may be distinguished is given in Lockean theories, which are normally founded on the ability to change the land. Exactly because of this, such theories need a criterion of demarcation of meaningful actions (this was clear, on the plane of property rights, to Locke himself). Cara Nine (2008), for instance, argues that certain actions do not generate any special link, between a subject and a territory, which may be considered worthy of protection in that they are morally relevant.

In her paper, she defends the possibility of taking Locke's understanding of the generation of property rights and applying it in an analogical manner to the creation of territorial rights. Although property rights and territorial rights travel, as it were, parallel to each other, as it is hard to derive the latter from the former, it is possible, according to Nine, to use Locke's view of value-creation through action, which was intended originally to explain how individuals create their properties, applying it to how groups create value by acting on the land. This doesn't mean that in this paper Nine defends the idea of deriving territorial rights from property rights, which is a frequently criticized trait of Lockean views (see Anna Stilz's example below); she simply suggests an analogy.

To do so, Nine needs to find a way to distinguish actions in two sets: those that create value and those that do not create value (or even destroy it). She retrieves Robert Nozick's example of throwing a can of juice in the sea: no value is generated this way. This is perfectly sensible, from an intuitive perspective. Yet, we may wonder if our simplified ontology of only one plane can live up to the apparent plausibility of our intuitions, or if we can't afford such intuitions anymore. Her view qualifies as action-oriented because of her attempt to show how human agents can form links with



certain territories based on the type of actions that they perform on those territories, thereby shaping them.

If we move from a “standard” reading of Locke to the one given by Van der Vossen (2014), we find that, albeit different, it still counts as an action-oriented theory. Van der Vossen argues that Locke’s philosophy is generally misunderstood by territorial rights theorists. He disagrees that Locke’s view about territorial rights was derivative with respect to his theory of property, and believes his understanding of a state’s territorial sovereignty was actually largely independent of his conceptualization of property.

According to Van der Vossen’s reading of Locke, the justification of territorial rights happens in two steps: internally, a state’s territorial rights are justified by the inhabitants’ consent, tacit or explicit, while externally it is justified by mutual recognition as codified in international treaties. Thus, “[t]he picture that arises is of states slowly and organically developing while obtaining the tacit consent of the people by their continued residence, acquiescence and approval” (ibid.) on one hand; on the other hand, “through entering into [international] treaties, sovereigns obligate themselves to refrain from exercising political power within each other’s territories” (ibid.)

Clearly, this type of reading of Locke’s philosophy makes territorial justification independent of any consideration regarding the formative role of agents on the land. The formative role of action is left to individuals, while territorial rights emerge with the emergence of legitimate governments that are bound internally by people accepting their authority and externally by other governments entering into friendly agreements with them. Still, even if we accept Van der Vossen’s reading of Locke, a Lockean justification of territorial rights remains primarily a question of action rather

than reaction, for ultimately, it may be said, governments exert power if citizens let them, that is, if they do not take action against the government. Not taking action is an active stance. The difference between this view and Nine's one, of course, is that action is not seen as being directly aimed at shaping the land. I will come back to this distinction in Chapter VI, where I distinguish between intrinsic and extrinsic achievement/action views.

Kantian accounts such as Ypi's (2012) and Stilz's (2009, 2011) fall into the action-oriented camp. Lea Ypi's permissive view, as she calls it, is founded on the idea that territorial rights fall into the Kantian category of permissive laws, or, in this case, permissive rights. This implies, according to Ypi, that territorial rights are granted only provisionally and conditionally. They are not the result of the subject's action on the territory *per se*, but of the subject's action on the territory in conformity with the Kantian need to establish universal principles of justice. My right to this or that piece of land is grounded in my commitment to global justice and the establishment of a global political authority whose aim is the implementation of the principles of global justice.

I spend more time on Ypi's theory in Chapter VI. However, it is important to explain why her view falls in the action-oriented camp. Unlike in the example of Nine's earlier view, discussed above, and like in Van der Vossen's case, Ypi's theory does not hinge on the formative action of individuals on territories. Still, it is an action-oriented view because it seeks to distinguish between different sets of actions: those that are conducive of attachment, or something that is as good as attachment, to a territory; and those that are not. I say "something as good as attachment" because, in her case, it is not so much a matter of recognizing a particular link between a certain collective and a certain territory by virtue of the importance that one has for the other.

This is not to say that Ypi necessarily dismisses the idea that a particular territory may be more important for a certain collective for a number of reasons. However, her view shifts the weight of normativity toward what a certain collective does from a global/systemic justice standpoint once they are granted a certain territory. The particular territory becomes a particular mean that a particular group uses for a global end. The fact that the particular relationship between a certain subject and a certain territory no longer be the decisive factor makes Ypi's view fall into a different type of action-oriented views, but it is still an action-oriented view nonetheless.

Anna Stilz (2012) is also a Kantian theorist, but she takes a different route from Ypi. Unlike Ypi, she doesn't make territorial rights something that we have provisionally depending on our ability to uphold principles of global justice, but she seeks to use Kant's theory of property rights, which is different from Locke's. Owing to her interpretation of Kant's principles, a state needs to be established in order to move beyond unilateral appropriation and get to a point where property can be coordinated with other considerations (such as other people's rights) and rendered interpersonally binding. In creating a state that is legitimate and that is capable of exerting jurisdiction on a territory (while keeping it separate from the concept of property) we can legitimately claim a right to a certain territory.

Stilz is another theorist who rejects the idea that we can derive territorial rights from property rights, since various problems emerge in the process of deriving the one from the other. In her view, the fundamental task of a territorial rights theory is to show how a particular state is entitled to a particular territory, which is what we already know as the problem of particularity. According to her, deriving a state's right over a certain territory from its citizens' property rights is problematic because it does not guarantee nor guarantees territorial integrity (a state's map would end up being quite spotty) nor does it explain why individual property owners can't secede.

Stilz's Kantian approach does not build from the bottom up, but descends from the top to the bottom. The reason for this approach is that, on a Kantian view, there is no such thing as property rights until the phase of unilateral acquisition is overcome by the birth of a state that implements a system of property laws. Until a public sphere emerges there is no way to break out of the phase of unilateralism, which invests both appropriation and the interpretation of moral authority.

A Kantian view, Stilz argues, is therefore better equipped, among other things, to make sense of the distinction between jurisdiction and property, which Lockean theories don't seem to be able to do, and to show why a state has an interest in establishing territorially homogeneous states, since the state is what binds together individuals subtracting them to their unilateral phase of acquisition. Stilz's Kantian view is action-oriented for a series of reasons. Firstly, because while jurisdiction is conceptually primitive and not derived from property, it has its origin in human action rather than in human reaction to a territory's activity. The state emerges because individuals recognize the need to willingly enter into a legal state. Secondly, because a state's exertion of jurisdiction in a lawful way (that is, by respecting certain criteria of justice) is what makes that state the one that legally exerts jurisdiction over the land.

As argued by Margaret Moore (2015), Kantian theories do a poor job of articulating particularity requirements for attachment, exactly because they hinge on Kant's universalistic defense of the need of states, and of the need of rightful states. This is not a problem for Nine, for human action, as considered in her view, is taken in its particular results (I modify this land, not this other one), while universal principles intervene later to justify this particularity. In Kantian theories, action is taken in its universal import of being rightfully or wrongfully exerted, regardless of where. Still, Kantian theories, and this is particularly evident in Ypi's permissive defense, rely on the fact of sharing universal principles, which therefore seek to fulfill the role that, in

the old religious view, was fulfilled the divine constitution of humanity, i.e., the role of a-spatial backdrop for action, which is valid everywhere exactly because it is not located somewhere in particular. Moore develops a view based on the concept of “heartlands”, which means that her method is not capable of pinpointing exactly the where a state’s border may lay, but at least it gives us a good idea of what constitutes a kernel of popular self-determination through a specific territory.

Although Moore (1998) rejects performance criteria and her identification of “heartlands” of self-determination before and as a condition prior to the establishment of well-defined borders (2015) goes in the direction of acknowledging the role of territory for a subject, the fact that her account is grounded in the concept of self-determination makes her view rather more action-oriented than reaction-oriented.

According to Moore, “[t]he jointly necessary and sufficient conditions for to be the territorial right-holder is that the group seeks or aspires to be collectively self-determining as a group” (ibid.) She assumes self-determination as her guiding principle, applying it not to the state or government but to the people. “Institutions of political self-determination gives expression to the communities in which people live; they express people’s identities; and they are an important forum in which collective autonomy can be expressed, and people can shape the context in which they live, and realize their political aspirations, free of external domination.” (ibid.) Thus, Moore shies away from objectivist or global accounts of justice (such as Stilz’s Kantian account) and insists that the self-determination itself is morally valuable, that is, the act of taking part in the co-creation of the rules that one lives by. Moore couples the concept of self-determination with that of non-domination by others or toward others, and explains that self-determination is important within the group, while non-domination is an intersubjective value. A heartland, in this sense, is a territorially (more

or less) cohesive stretch of land where the people's self-determination is situated, although Moore (2017) believes that her view may find application in granting some form of non-state-like political self-determination even, for instance, to diaspora people.

If we simplify our conceptual frame of reference from the threefold distinction typical of older approaches (divine/human/mundane) to the unified framework presupposed by the action-oriented theories I have discussed, the question is how we can ground any distinction of human actions in different sets in anything other than our own momentary decisions. This is a challenge, since we can no longer "outsource" the creation of the values we use to guide our decisions to a plane we deem independent of the decisions that enforce those values. This is not to say that it is an impossible challenge, but it is one to keep in mind. A kind of circle is engendered between values and agency, whereby agency and values feed off each other, and, as I discuss in Chapter IV, results in values emerging with the action that enforce them, but not prior to them nor after (as they would if they were deemed independent of our decisions). An important part of my thesis is concerned with articulating a possible approach that renders this circle acceptable in philosophical terms.

#### Section IV – Reaction-oriented Arguments

Reaction-oriented arguments seek to explain who the subject is by showing that their constitution is determined by something outside of their grasp. They trace some characteristics of the subject back to the territory, and therefore to action not undertaken by the subject itself.

A reaction-oriented argument will seek to highlight a certain respect in which the subject is the result of a certain territory. Here the territory creates the subject, and it

informs them of who they are. Below and beyond the subject's power of choice is a substratum that makes them who they are and is presupposed by their identity.

In an action-oriented argument, I am not inherently attached to any land, so that my territory-carving activities are validated by their conformity to an a-spatial criterion. But what if it is space itself to be considered a criterion for who the subject is? What if a particular territory plays an irreplaceable role in the subject's identity? This criterion is extremely intuitive: our pre-philosophical intuitions are often inscribed in a traditionalist, past-oriented view of how our identity is, in fact, interwoven with a particular place, or by an aspirational, future-oriented view of how our identity requires, in order to be fulfilled, just that land.

In a letter dated 22 June 1930, C.S. Lewis described how, according to Tolkien, being at home was a very different matter in the past from what it is nowadays. For Tolkien, Lewis says, people who had lived for generations in the same few miles of country could see the supernatural qualities of those places, like dryads and nymphs (we philosophers might say the metaphysical qualities). Those qualities made the particular place irreducible to empty universals (like "nature"): this place is not that place, and it will force me to adapt to it in a different way than a different place. Tolkien, Lewis goes on, saw today's people as "synthetic" because they live a standardized life that has lost its connection to its roots in the land under one's feet (Lewis, 1986). This is no claim about territorial rights, but it highlights a certain ( ) conception of human beings as viscerally and irreplaceably connected to a certain place, a view that is very well in tune with reaction-oriented arguments.

I show, in Chapters V, that there is nothing artificial about who we are today, contrary to what Tolkien might have thought. This visceral connection that Tolkien talks about is an illusion that humanity necessarily overcomes over time, not because we become

“synthetic”, but because we are historically compelled to upgrade our identity and therefore our sense of attachment to the world outside of us. There is nothing unshakably true or primeval in this connection to places, nor is there anything noble in pining about losing it. If the ties that bind us to places were so fundamental, they wouldn’t let themselves be cut.

Tolkien’s intuition is powerful, but his is only the poetic side of the story. Then there is the ugly side. Newspapers offer no shortage of examples: with mass migrations becoming more common, and with strong national identities dissolving as the younger generations move from country to country with the breeze, we frequently hear politicians of a certain political creed complain about evil invaders and emasculated, globalized youths. Similarly, albeit more rarely, we have groups that believe in the absolute irreplaceability of a land for their culture, even though they have never set foot in it, or have not done so in a very long time.

I do not believe there is such a thing as a contemporary articulation of a reaction-oriented theory that is defended, philosophically, in its entirety. Such full articulation would imply the idea that a group is, essentially, the pure, passive consequence of a single place, a vision so simplistic that only a politician could try to peddle it. Plato, in the Republic, already knew we would be lying to people if we told them that they sprouted up from the earth of their land and were therefore bound to it (2001, 414e-15c).

In a sense, the “noble lie” represents this argument in one of its purest forms, but, exactly because Socrates acknowledges it as a lie, he shows us why it is impossible. Still, some contemporary theorists seek to take the basic intuition behind this view seriously, and to incorporate it in a more sophisticated (and often progressive) account. There are, in other words, accounts, or rather arguments within accounts,



which give a nod at the idea that the territory plays an active role in shaping our identity. This is not to say that the active involvement of the group is not required, but that it is supplemented by reactive considerations.

The formative role of the territory is especially important for nationalists, although not necessarily only for them. This “conception of historical rights shifts the emphasis from a people’s primacy in a certain territory to the primacy of a territory for a given people” (Gans, 2001). Interestingly, Gans resorts to the metaphor of parental ties to explain a subject’s belief in her connection to its “fatherland”. In this sense, the formative role of a territory for the identity of a group can give rise to a claim that conflicts with another claim, founded on first occupancy, lodged by someone else.

Concerning first occupancy claims, it may appear as though they are themselves a reaction-oriented argument. After all, one could say that it is a matter of historical truth, and our actions can do very little, apparently, to alter the truth: it either is true or it isn’t that my group was the first to settle somewhere, and I do not need to actively do anything in order to strengthen that truth. Yet, first occupancy may also be understood as a past-looking action-oriented argument: I do not need to act because I share in the same identity of someone who acted previously, and so through them I have acted.

On the other hand, arguments that hinge on the formativeness of the territory are more definitely reaction-oriented. “If the events thought to have formed the historical identity of a national group took place in specific territories, it seems likely that these territories will be perceived by the members of that group as bearing deep and significant ties to their national identity” (ibid., 66) Of course the formative events may be actions just as well as reactions. However, even if they are actions that the group

carried out, they are seen now as, as it were, the historical genes to which I can trace back some apparently non-trivial trait I embody.

Some authors explicitly acknowledge the chains of actions and reactions that happen between the subject and the territory (which do not count as “interaction”, as I shall point out in the next Section). In so far as I am looking to flesh out two different sets of arguments, and not two sets of theoretical packages, each monolithically grounded in one camp, it is acceptable to introduce these views here. We could summarize these views as “you influence me a little bit, I influence you a little bit”.

According to Miller (2007, p. 217-18), “The culture must adapt to the territory if the people are to prosper [...]. But equally the territory will in nearly every case be shaped over time according to the cultural priorities of the people [...]”. Miller’s view is one he would later describe as quasi- Lockean (2012), in that he acknowledges the people’s entitlement to the value they create in and from the land.

Miller takes into account the distinction between universal values and culturally specific values. In acting on the territory, most groups add or create value that is specific to their own culture. However, Miller argues that the importance of those values can be acknowledged even from outside agents or observers, as long as the shaping of the land in accordance to culturally specific values does not destroy universal values: “groups that lay waste to land in the pursuit of some culturally specific project do not deserve territorial rights, whereas groups that simply add cultural value but without reducing universal value can claim such rights” (ibid.)

Additionally, he lays out a double claim that the people has shaped the land so as to fit its needs and absorb its values, so that its continuing existence in the same form is made harder or impossible by taking the territory away from it: “Since land has been

shaped in a way that reflects the group's distinctive culture, continued occupancy of that land becomes essential if the group is to live a flourishing life" (ibid.)

In other words, groups add values to the land that are specific to their cultural views, and this is acceptable in so far as this value-creation process does not diminish or destroy universal values. But in so doing, groups create the conditions for future generations to be entitled to that specific territory because their culture and way of life can really flourish and play out at its best only there. Thus, territorial agents (that is, agents who are the recipients of territorial rights) acquire the character of "transhistorical agents", and territorial rights are passed down across generations.

So even though Miller would probably see his view as characterized by action arguments, he actually makes explicit reference to certain reactive requirements, in part because of his acknowledgement of the need of people to adapt to the territory, which implies a territory's active role, in part because territories resulting from the culturally specific transformational process initiated by the agent become active part of the shaping of the specificity of future generations.

I now discuss Avery Kolers' view, which I shall discuss at greater length in later chapters. However, explaining why I discuss his view here, among the reaction-oriented views, requires some previous explanation of his view, which centers around the concept of "plenitude". He believes entitlement to territory is derived by a (collective) subject having achieved or achieving plenitude with a certain territory. The idea of "achieving plenitude" with the land would appear to anchor Kolers' view solidly in the action-oriented camp. He himself describes his view as an "achievement" oriented one, and because achievement entails the importance of human action and its ability meet certain criteria, or lack thereof, it would seem that his view should have been described in the previous section.

I do not deny that Kolers' view has its action-oriented aspects, and that perhaps these aspects are prevalent. What I want to show is that his theory has a reactive argument in it. So long as a single reaction-oriented argument is present in a theory, the question remains open as to how to conceptualize the connection between territory and agent.

Plenitude is what subjects achieve when they "fill" a territory. A territory may be full and yet not be at the receiving end of a subject's attempt to achieve plenitude with it. Kolers (2012) makes the example of a vacant lot, which may be full of garbage that I have thrown out, but this doesn't automatically make me the filler of that lot, because my usage of it is not built around a long-term plan of enhancing that lot's internal diversity and external distinctiveness. The lot's internal diversity is enhanced by me tending to it, turning this area into something and that area into something else according to the lot's structure, which becomes enhanced and not suffocated by my action on it. The lot's external distinctiveness, which goes hand in hand with its internal diversity, is improved when the lot becomes its own irreplaceable thing, distinct from all other lots.

There could be, for instance, five different lots of different shapes and built on different terrains, and all of them can be indifferently covered with garbage, but each of them can be enhanced in different ways by working on its particularities. As with lots, so with territories. A subject achieves plenitude with a territory by enhancing, in harmony with her own needs and culture, its distinctiveness and diversity rather than suffocating it. Thus, we create an "ethnogeographic" community, i.e., a group that shares a view on what it means for the territory's distinctiveness and diversity to be improved.

As we can see, plenitude can only be achieved if we preliminarily acknowledge that our action of filling the land is oriented by how the land presents itself to us, by how

the outside conditions force us to react, or at least by the kind of suggestions it gives us. The idea that what is created is an ethnogeographic community entails Kolers' recognition of the active role of the land, otherwise it would be just an ethnic community. Plenitude, he says, is a quality of places, rather than of states. Because plenitude hinges on the perception of "internal diversity and external distinctiveness" (ibid., p. 121), the presence of a human perspective is required, as explicitly acknowledged by Kolers: plenitude is, in fact, a matter of perspective and of subjective action which is informed by that perspective.

However, this can only be one half of the story: the "ethno-" part. The "-geographic" part entails a certain self-consistency on the part of the territory, or at least the potential presence of multiple ways, within the same land, in which a subject's perspective may fill it. In this sense, the reactive argument slipped in by Kolers is very gentle, because it does not make the subject a puppet in the hands of territorial forces. It is rather a cue that the subject (and ought to) can follow.

In the theory of plenitude, the territory is used as a sort of springboard for the subject's ability to first see, and later enhance, the internal diversity and external distinctiveness. Yet exactly because this diversity must first be seen, it has to be picked up from the outside, meaning that it has to show itself to the subject and, albeit minimally, impose itself to their attention.

The ontological problem at the heart of reaction arguments, both in their stronger and in their more nuanced and reasonable variants, is entirely specular to the one of action views. Both seek to select something to elevate to the rank of norm. Action views strive to rationalize the elevation of certain types of action to the rank of norms, while reaction arguments seek to do the same with a certain way in which the territory has an impact on the subject. The problem is that implicit conceptions of either the agent

or the territory that underpin these views makes it hard to select a set of human actions or a set of territorial traits that can be discretely separated from the rest.

But there is a further problem a reaction view must face. If we are to recognize any active role of the land, we need to be able to show that the land can influence us in certain ways that we are unable to nullify or counteract at will. This can be done in two ways. Either territory-action comes to us from a plane unreachable by us, in which case it cannot influence us for the same reason that we cannot stop it (if it is entirely beyond us, it doesn't connect to us); or it is capable of influencing us because, at the end of the day, we allow it to have that impact on us. If we allow it, then it means that territory-action is actually a sub-group of human actions that we attribute to the territory, i.e., we determine ourselves by letting the territory determine us, so that whenever the territory modifies us against our will, this is due not to territory being ontologically above us, but to a contingent lack of know-how, on our part, on how to avert or neutralize that influence. If we do have that know-how, then the fact that we do not use it and allow the territory to act on us instead, it is our choice and therefore our action.

It seems therefore that a reaction-oriented argument is not, in any straightforward sense, a defensible position. It seems to hinge on pre-philosophical assumptions (or post-philosophical ones) which cease to make sense as soon as we enter the realm of rigorous thinking. In other words, it seems that reaction views fail to carry the enormous strength of our pre-philosophical intuitions over into the philosophical discussion. So my heart skips a beat from the ecstasy of thinking about the land that nurtured and shaped me into who I am, but why should this have objective philosophical consequences?

Even Kolers' very gentle reaction argument is problematic. From an ontological standpoint, it makes no sense to treat a territory's distinctiveness and diversity as something that comes to us from the outside, simply because distinctiveness and diversity are a function of our ability, or lack thereof, to create it. But, if this is the case, then there is no limit to the subject's ability to create and destroy them, as they are not something that presents itself to them for them to protect and enhance it. The very fact that we can destroy this diversity implies that its existence is actually the result of a sub-set of human actions, i.e., the not-destruction of diversity, which is a form of indirect creation of it.

### Section V – The Possibility of an Interaction-oriented Approach

In the previous two sections, I talked about action-oriented arguments and reaction-oriented arguments. In this section, I explore the possibility of an approach based on interaction. I first explain what an interaction-oriented view is not, namely, it is not a view that mixes action and reaction views (so that the subject modifies the land a little, while the land modifies the subject a little). I then show what I understand by interaction-oriented view, i.e., a view that understands the interaction itself as being the conceptual foundation for the two sides that interact. I conclude this section by showing why this approach is worth pursuing and why pursuing it will lead me to developing a philosophy of history, rather than a normative theory.

We have seen that action-oriented views identify the subject of the subject-territory relationship. They also identify certain criteria that may guide the subject's action on the land. Such criteria must be a-spatial and, because the subject always finds itself in space and time, such criteria end up being, as Ochoa-Espejo put it, decision-independent. On the other hand, reaction-oriented views identify mechanisms that are outside of the subject's identity and play an active role in shaping it. We can

simplify both positions by saying that, in the former case, the action follows an Inside→Outside trajectory, that is, the subject “creates” or shapes the territory; in the latter case, the action follows an Outside→Inside trajectory, so that the territory creates or shapes the subject.

An obvious third option would be to acknowledge that creation or formativeness happens both ways, so that the subject forms the territory in certain respects while being informed by it in certain other respects.

I said in Section II that, when pressed, most theories end up aligning with one of the two extremes of action and reaction. The reason for this is that the idea of interaction, understood as “I modify you a little, you modify me a little”, implies the existence of two sides which are autonomous from one another, and, in a second moment, are put in the same room to dialogue. They must be understood as existing apart from their influence on one another. On this view, then, interaction made to happen by mixing together the two trajectories (Inside→Outside and Outside→Inside).

Some theorists, such as Kolars or Miller, would probably be unhappy with being filed under “reaction-oriented”, as I have done in the previous section. They would probably resonate with the idea of interaction between subject and territory. After all, they explicitly acknowledge both sides’ formative import. Miller (2007) clearly acknowledges that the relationship between territory and subject is a two-way street.

This statement appears very sensible and, in a way, very obvious to a commonsense approach. Take, for instance, how a people’s culinary culture is influenced by the climatic zone they live in and the plants and animals that have traditionally been readily available. Baklavas could only have been invented in a very hot place, where foods needed to be generously covered in layers of honey to prevent them from quickly going bad. Consider also, at the same time, how the appearance of Greek



culture has forever changed the appearance of a tiny European region in a way that has gone on to be perfectly embedded in how the whole Western world sees itself today. It would seem crazy not to acknowledge this two-way interaction.

Kolers, for his part, when discussing the meaning of the concept of “resource”, states that “What counts as a resource at all is a variable, not a constant. And it does not vary based on natural factors alone, but also social factors and the interaction of natural and social” (2012, p. 273). The idea of resource is at the heart of the issue of territorial rights, and for a good reason: not only because, in allotting a certain territory to a certain subject, we are potentially excluding other subjects from first-hand access to the resources present on that territory, but especially because, as Kolers rightly points out, the discussion of what a resource is cannot be decoupled from the concrete, particular human element that interacts with it. Even though he doesn’t explicitly talk about a two-way street, Kolers can, in my opinion, be safely attributed an attempt to see past actions and reactions.

However, the problem with the idea of interaction I have described is that it is no interaction at all. If I say that the territory formed me in so far as my determination X is concerned (e.g., skin color, or certain cultural traits), but I formed the territory in so far as the determination Y is concerned (e.g., plowing the land, building castles, etc.), what I am saying is that, in so far as the determination X is concerned, the territory is absolutely independent from my action on it, while in so far as the determination Y is concerned, I am absolutely independent from its action on me. If I am outside of territory’s activity on me enough to inform it in certain respects, and if the territory is outside of my activity on it enough to influence me, the two sides are unable to communicate with one another, being separated and isolated, so that no interaction really happens.

A possible counterargument might be that even the respects in which I form the territory are informed by the territory, or even the respects in which the territory informs me are informed by me. Let's discuss both possibilities in turn.

Let's start with the possible counterargument that even the ways in which I form the territory are a reaction to the territory forming me. But then what distinguishes this interaction argument, understood in this way, from a reaction-oriented argument? The subject ends up being an epiphenomenon of territorial activity even when it informs it, so that the territory simply shapes itself through the intermediation of the subject that it shapes. There is a kernel of truth to this approach, namely, that we must conceptualize a single process that articulates through the duality of subject and territory, but the way this approach goes about it is wrong, because it fails to explain how the subject emerges from the territory as something that looks at it from the outside.

The other side of the counterargument is, I may argue that even the way in which the territory shapes the subject is a byproduct of the subject's activity. I may argue that the way the subject is shaped, and is therefore passive with respect to the territory, is contingent on the subject's inability to counter or neutralize outside influences, so that a subject with the appropriate know-how wouldn't be influenced in that respect, but would rather influence the territory. What counts as a resource and what counts as a limit depends on the concrete subject. But what distinguishes this "interaction-oriented" approach from an action-oriented one? Here the territory is just an epiphenomenon of the subject, which acts on the territory even by being acted on by the territory. Again, there is a kernel of truth to this approach, namely, that the interaction always happens between a concrete subject and a territory that centers around it and its abilities and its disabilities, so that everything outside of the subject is a function of the subject, even the territory that shapes it and resists its will. But,

once again, this approach goes about fleshing out this intuition the wrong way, because it fails to explain how the territory comes into existence as something that doesn't automatically respond to the subject's will.

In short, interaction, understood as "I influence the territory a little, the territory influences me a little" leads to a dilemma whose two horns are both problematic: either the territory and the subject are absolutely distinct from one another, forming a dualism with no reconciliation, but this leads to the problem of how they can interact at all (we have a distinction that precludes unity); or we dissolve this notion of interaction into a mix of action that excludes reaction AND reaction that excludes action together at the same time (we have a unity that precludes distinction). And this in addition to the problems of action views and reaction views I have discussed in the previous sections. So not only are the problems of both sets compounded, but they are also added to. Thus, an interaction-oriented view cannot be simply a mix of action elements and reaction elements.

The problem of such a view of interaction is that it is forced by its own presuppositions to understand the concept of interaction abstractly, as something that happens in a second moment, after subject and territory are already in place as separate things. Therefore, it is unable to create a connection between the two sides, and when it tries to, it reduces subject and territory to a suffocating unity from which the distinction doesn't emerge at all. One might then have to resort to saying that either the distinction or the unity are just an illusion, in order to explain them away. But this is not enough, because even an illusion is something whose existence must be explained. If everything is pure unity, there is no way to explain where the illusion of distinction comes from, without positing a distinction between a part of the unity that is deluded and the rest (unless one posits that everything is illusion, but then how would they be aware of it being an illusion?). If everything is pure distinction, there is no way to

explain where the illusion of unity comes from, without positing a place from where the whole process can be observed in its separation without being deluded about its unity, but if this place exists, it encompasses the separation, reducing it to a unity.

This problem disappears as soon as we understand interaction as the primary element, prioritizing it over the two sides that interact. If we pose either the subject or the territory as the starting point, we never get to the point when the other side emerges, and if we pose them at the same time, we never get to the point where they get to interact. However, if we posit the process of interaction itself as the primary element, we automatically arrive to the subject and the territory. Within the concept of interaction we already have, implicitly, the two sides interacting, otherwise it wouldn't be an interaction at all; we also already have both their unity and their distinction, because the interaction of two elements connects them, but also requires them to be separate.

Prioritizing interaction allows us to avoid simply compounding two separate and opposite movements, one that goes from the outside toward the inside and one that goes from the inside toward the outside. Instead, we begin to understand subject and territory in their concrete existence as the duality of correlative elements that allows the unity of the process to unfold. We thus have a separation that is not dualism articulating a unity that is not a sterile indifference. Furthermore, this idea brings out the good intuitions present in both action and reaction views. From action views it takes the correct notion of the subject's influence on the outside, and that the outside (as shown by Kolers' view of resources); from interaction views it takes the likewise correct notion that this influence is always situated territorially, and therefore their activity is oriented by their embeddedness in an outside world that shapes them.

Giving primacy to the interaction between subject and territory will require, in the next chapters, that I rework the concept of subjectivity and that of agency. Using the interaction of subject and territory as the focal point implies that there is no subject save that which is nestled and embedded in the outside world, and that there is no outside world save that which embeds a subject (which does not imply that the outside world “doesn’t exist” or is “not really there”, it just means that we need to be careful to specify what it means for it to be there). If the duality of subject and territory articulates a unitary process, then it follows that this duality does not exist apart from the unity it expresses, otherwise we are back to square one. Complementarily, the unity of the process cannot express but through said duality of a subject that informs the territory and a territory that embeds the subject.

I show, in Chapter III, that interaction is human agency itself, because it is nothing more than the process through which a situated subject overcomes a limitation present in the territory by reshaping it. As such, a further conclusion is that interaction, i.e., agency, cannot be subjected to normative limitations. If it were possible to subject this process to normative constraints, then the process would not be the primary element: the subject would be. Therefore, my thesis will deviate from what other territorial rights theories have done in that it will not put forth a normative solution to the territorial problem. Rather, it will show how the process of interaction necessary unfolds according to its own rhythm, which will lead to the necessary step of developing a philosophy of history rather than a moral or political philosophy. This does not mean that the normative issues disappear, but that I present a key to understanding why these issues cannot but emerge as a consequence of the process itself, so that rather than solving the problem of territorial rights, the normative approach is a necessary stage in the unfoldment of said process.



## CHAPTER II – Individual Subjects

### Introduction

In this chapter I develop my view concerning individual subjects so that, in Chapter III, I can extend the application of this analysis to collectives. In Chapter I, I concluded my analysis by showing how I understand the concept of “interaction” between subject and territory. For me, an interactive approach implies giving primacy neither to the subject nor to the territory, but to the interaction between them. There is no such thing as a subject who is not embedded in the land and who doesn’t act on it, therefore it makes no sense to postulate subject or territory first, or even both separately from one another, and then let them interact. Instead, interaction is the primitive element of both the subject and the territory.

Properly developed, this view leads to understanding interaction as human agency itself, understood not as a property of individual subjects, but rather as a universal activity from which individual subjects emerge. After all, if subjects are as connected to the territory as the territory is to the subjects, it follows that the subjects’ supposed activity on the territory is the same as the territory’s activity on the subject, that is, activity is neither subjective nor objective, but that from which subjectivity and objectivity emerge as co-relative expressions of it. This is the view that I develop in Chapter III. To get there, I need to further discuss my understanding of subjectivity and its relationship with the outside world.

My view on individual subjects may be summarized as follows: the individuality of particular subjects is grounded not in their absolute separation from the rest of the world, but in their situational emergence from it. Individuals emerge from the outside world as clusters of intentional perspectives on it, guided by the practical presence of

projects, wishes, desires, expectations etc. These seek to realize themselves by acting on outside things. These internal wishes, desires, projects, etc. seek to manifest. Because they seek to manifest, these projects, wishes etc. are momentarily distinct from the Outside and form an Inside perspective. This is the only reason that individual subjects are distinguished from each other and from the Outside.

In Section I, I argue that agent and territory, i.e., Inside and Outside, are circularly defined, and that this is a consequence of the fact that their distinction from one another is not absolute, but contingent. In Section II, I articulate, from a historical perspective, how we came from a dualistic view that seeks to ground Inside and Outside as essentially separated from one another to a view that sees the two realities as closely entwined. In Section III, I outline the main tenets of my own solution, which is that of understanding agent and territory as sequences, each referring back to the other. In Section IV, I add some concluding remarks on the contingently outstanding nature of agents. Finally, in Section V I discuss how my view positions itself with regard to the distinction between substratum theories of the self and bundle theories. I argue that my view fits in neither category, and is rather a non-substratum theory, without being a bundle theory.

## Section I – The Co-Relativity of Inside and Outside

In this section, I present more definitely the problem that I have discussed in the previous chapter, namely that of the definition of subject and territory, two terms which will be synonymous, throughout this work, with Inside and Outside, or Inner and Outer. One may object to my drawing an equivalence between the concepts of “inside and outside” and those of “subject and territory”. I address the issue in Section IV.

The problem of defining subject and territory, which, as we have seen, has been adapted by Paulina Ochoa Espejo from democratic theory, is that it is difficult to define



these two terms in a non-circular way. The main aim of this section is to explain why this circularity is unavoidable from an ontological standpoint. Whenever we attempt to define what subjecthood means, we are forced to select certain traits that inhere to the subject in an essential way, as opposed to those subjective traits that may or may not be present or be expressed. The ancient Aristotelean idea of substances and accidents is based on this concept, just as the religious notion of soul.

We may frame the same idea in different and more revealing terms. We could say that, whenever we attempt to define a subject, we seek to single out traits that do not stand in any causal relation with any particular and contingent set of circumstances external to them. If I am essentially X, my being X cannot be the result of certain formative circumstances as opposed to others, among those that shape me, for otherwise there could be a possibility for me to be myself without being X, which would disprove my being essentially X.

This is not a new way of explaining the issue. One standard criticism of Descartes' dualism is that it makes it very hard for the *res cogitans* to interact with the extended universe, so much so that he has to theorize their "substantial union" within the pineal gland as a sort of third substratum (Berhouma, 2013) based on no other reason than the fact that the pineal gland is the only sub-part of the head that is not double. When he writes that "[...]in as far as I am only a thinking and unextended thing, and as, on the other hand, I possess a distinct idea of body, in as far as it is only an extended and unthinking thing, [...] I [...] am entirely and truly distinct from my body, and may exist without it." (1984, p. 79) he seems to be saying that what essentially characterizes the Self cannot be the causal product of things happening outside of it. If it were, the idea of Self would not be clear and distinct, as it would somehow refer back to something outside of it, and, in conceptualizing itself, the subject would be forced to include that something.

In Descartes' case, the selection of the essential traits as opposed to the unessential ones leads to particularly drastic results. Because of his method of doubt, any trait that may or may not be inherited from my contact with the outside world is discarded, being the potential object of my doubt, which means that I can be Me-thinking-the-candle-I-see-is-real without the candle actually being real. Hence, my physical relation with the candle cannot be essential to my being. Any input coming to me from the outside can be filtered through my ability to doubt its veracity, therefore my causal relation with the (extended) outside cannot be the source of that trait in me that remains constant through every change. Following his method, Descartes is left with only a "Me-thinking-that-", the "I think" which becomes the foundation of his philosophy.

On Descartes' view, I do not just happen to be *res cogitans* all the time and everywhere. The "Me-thinking-that" is the bedrock of my being, exactly because I can separate it conceptually from any contingent outside causation which might cause me to showcase certain contingent traits.

The subject's essence therefore stands out from the web of causes that otherwise embed it and make it display non-necessary attributes. In Descartes' case, the outstanding nature of the subject is essential because it is tied to a trait that is essentially irreducible, i.e., to something that is essentially Inside as opposed to something that remains essentially Outside and extrinsic to it. The extrinsic, contingent nature of the Outside in its relation to the Inside is exactly why Descartes sees every external phenomenon as the possible object of doubt: because we can never be certain of the correspondence between what is Inside and what is Outside, since the two remain absolutely distinct from each other and no *tertium* between them is able to mediate between them.

As we do away with Descartes' dualism, we run into a problem: how do we reimagine the relation between Inside and Outside, and how does it affect our ability to define subjecthood? By this, I do not refer to the idea that the Subject-Object distinction may or may not be illusive, nor am I hinting at any kind of solipsism. My view, as shall become clear in this and the next chapters, is that the Subject-Object connection, or Agent-Territory connection, is absolutely ineliminable, but their connection implies their distinction: if they were a perfect unity without distinction, they would stand in no relation to one another, as they wouldn't exist, and would therefore not be connected.

In Descartes' philosophy, however, the Inside just happens to be living "on" the Outside. Even if the Outside didn't exist, nothing essential about the Inside would change, exactly because its relation to it is not essential. All the traits that the subject acquires dynamically through its interaction with the Outside are inessential, whereas the static principle of subjecthood (the I think, the "Me-thinking-that-") remains unaltered.

As we abandon the idea of this exterior, static principle of subjecthood, we can no longer understand the subject as an Inside living "on" the Outside, but as an Inside living "through" the Outside, that is, acquiring self-determinations, or traits, depending on its stance toward the Outside world. The Outside becomes, rather than a set of loose objects, the subject's territory, a term which I, in fact, prefer to "Object".

The constitutive embeddedness of the subject in the outside world is almost a given in contemporary philosophy, eager as we are to do away with disembodied ghosts. Yet, what does this imply when it comes to defining subjecthood? This will be clear if we turn to the prescriptive side of philosophy, which seeks to tell subjects what they ought to be (e.g., "you ought not to kill", which means "you ought to be You-not-killing-

people”) or to ascribe normative relevance to what is (as it happens when we conceptualize universal human rights), or to a part of it, and is therefore interested in normative descriptions of the subject.

In the field of territorial rights, the focus is on laying out the normative criteria for telling what territory belongs to which subject. My interest, throughout this work, is with clarifying agency and territoriality from a descriptive, ontological and non-normative standpoint. Yet, I must spend a few words on the normative approach to subjectivity, because it informs the majority of the literature on territorial rights, and my aim in the next chapters is going to be that of clarifying the ontological presuppositions of these normative approaches.

The problem of how to define the subject and the territory has been particularly highlighted by Paulina Ochoa Espejo (2014) when she takes the issue of the loop in the definition of people in democratic theory and applies it to the field of territorial rights. Just as in democratic theory the issue was raised of who or what can decide on the limits of the people, so in the field of territorial rights we run into the problem of defining the subject of entitlement without referring to the relevant territory, which is defined with reference to the relevant subject, etc.

The reason, I believe, is that this type of definition is essentially artificial and arbitrary. Ultimately, the process of singling a group out of the all-comprehensive whole of humanity and, complementarily, of singling a territory out of the all-comprehensive whole of nature implies reference to criteria that are not self-evident and beyond doubt.

A group is a group not because it exemplifies an essentially distinct platonic form of itself, but because it was dynamically beaten into shape by extrinsic and contingent factors of history and geography. Therefore, the criteria of selection cannot be

enforced by virtue of their own intrinsic and separate validity or self-evidence, as if they were Descartes' *res cogitans*. They can only be enforced extrinsically, by referring the defined to something outside of it that defines it by virtue of having an effect on it. So, what lies outside of the subject? The territory. And what lies outside of the territory? The subject. Here is our loop.

Let us go back to our problem of defining subjecthood. We are presented, from a descriptive standpoint, with exactly the same issue as that highlighted by Ochoa Espejo from a prescriptive point of view. Description implies selection, and selection can only happen in two ways: either because that selection imposes itself to our attention as a self-evident, self-consistent and self-contained unit, or because something else determines it extrinsically from the outside. In the first case, the definition will mirror a static trait of the defined that essentially stands out, while in the second case it will have to deal with the fact that traits dynamically stand out in a contingent way, thus bearing a connection to the Outside points that determine them.

In order for one's core subjective identity to be statically defined, one needs to appeal to some transcendent trait that is not reducible to the interplay of cause and effect that goes on in the universe. A person who is oblivious to the existence of a supernatural world, where things go as they ought to go, as opposed to the historical plane where this is not always the case, will have a hard time picking out the facts of nature that he or she sees as constituting his or her proper identity, simply because facts don't select themselves: they need to be actively selected by someone. Every time they choose, the subjects are relying on the authority of their own contingent decisions, rather than on the necessity of making those decisions mirror a necessary truth which exists beyond their choice.

Traditionally, to counteract this contingency we used to appeal to religious revelation, which has the advantage that God's commands are valid absolutely, beyond our will, simply because of who utters them: somebody who is outside of nature's contingency. A supernatural agent shows us the only right/true/just key to the interpretation of nature, which is revealed as a ladder made of objectively different ontological steps.

From a philosophical-theological perspective, this conception was influenced by Saint Augustine's appropriation of Neoplatonic elements, especially Plotinus' view that existence was a sort of emanation springing forth from God/Good and diminishing in ontological perfection with the increase in distance from the creator (Plotinus, 2005, I,8,7; Augustine, 1955 I,3-4). Similarly, Saint Bonaventure wrote, in his *Itinerary of the Mind Into God*, that "[...] the university of things is the stairway to ascend into God[...]" (1956, I,2). Nor was this just a peculiarly Christian view. For instance, Medieval Jewish philosopher Ibn Gabirol (sometimes latinized as "Avicebron") wrote, in his *Fountain of Life*, that "[...] the compound physical universe is a reflection of the elemental spiritual universe, and that which is lower in the elemental worlds is a reflection of that which is higher [...]" (2008, IV,16) going then to argue that "[...] at the beginning it [the form of things] is spiritual and perfect but gradually becomes more dense until it reaches the lowest extreme." (Ibid., IV,18)

Whatever the version of this hierarchy or ladder we choose, the steps account for the whole of existence, from the lowest strata of creation to the supreme Being. Nature is interpreted now as a sacred map towards reunion with God, in a sort of geography of salvation, or, if you will, a cross-section of perfection in its various degrees.

Humans are then assigned their proper place and their "true" identity within an order that is pressed onto them, unchosen, from the outside, and against which their volition has no power. One may willfully reject that true place and identity, but such choice is

ultimately an illusion, while only if we choose to accept our true identity are we realized according to our own true nature. As Joseph Ratzinger (2005, p. 17) writes in his encyclical, in doing what God commands, “[...] our will and God's will increasingly coincide: God's will is no longer for me an alien will, something imposed on me from without by the commandments, but it is now my own will, based on the realization that God is in fact more deeply present to me than I am to myself.”

That is, the more we follow the sacred map, the more we coincide with our own principle. We do so by divesting ourselves of those traits that alter our conformity with that principle. In so far as we are not in perfect conformity with this principle, it appears outside of, and extrinsic to us only because we have lapsed away from it, but it still is really the innermost, most unshakable truth about ourselves. Most importantly, this true identity is part of human nature not by virtue of the subject's particular placement within the sphere of nature. Not because of the territory they occupy, but by virtue of their filial relationship with a universal, a-spatial identity-giver. As a sacred map, nature extends vertically, as well as horizontally.

Therefore, on the religious view, humans are essentially beyond the particularity of place: metaphysically speaking, they float mid-air between earth and heaven,<sup>1</sup> and as children and stewards of God's will, they are granted a degree of transhistorical and transgeographical consistency that nature, being the sphere of generation and corruption, does not have.

The true nature that we have been talking about is encapsulated in the idea of the soul, which is also an older term for the mind (although in older metaphysics they don't necessarily coincide). Traditionally, the mind is seen as one's inner side, as opposed to

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<sup>1</sup> This is not to say that the Christian view shuns historical reality: after all, Jesus' coming happened at a certain time in a certain place, to announce a new age, etc. See Ryn (2005) as an example of a Christian scholar who acknowledges the importance of history. Yet, one must concede that although history, being the product of God's fiat, is important, it is important only because there is somebody “above” it who grants it its validity.

the publicly observable body. Indeed, privacy, i.e., the “insideness” of the mind as opposed to the “outsideness” of the body, is a preliminarily intuitive quality of our mental processes even today. The inside is traditionally seen as something that can only be interpreted indirectly, based on the notion of mind “privacy”. The interpreter must interpret indirect signs that remain outside of the sphere of mental activity on which the interpreted is supposed to have direct influence. We are “mind-readers”, but only indirect ones, as we “reliably detect people’s (deepest) beliefs when interpreting their actions, facial expressions, and from what they tell us about what they think and feel” (Lippert-Rasmussen, 2016). In a dualistic framework, no matter how strong or weak, there is a clear and static demarcation line between what is outside and what is inside.

Descartes’ dualism was even stronger than the one generally inherent in the Christian/Platonist doctrine. Descartes’ philosophy is founded on the subject’s self-evidence (as mind-stuff) in front of itself, regardless of the world’s existence, of which it ends up being reassured only by a third party’s benevolence. We are, he says, just thinking things (1984, II) and a means between absolute existence (which inheres to God) and non-existence (1984, IV). Compared to this violent opposition, the Christian view of the subject was extremely prudent. After all, the Christian view seeks out the proofs of the existence of metaphysical entities (God, soul...) in the observation of the outside world.<sup>2</sup>

So far, we have seen that the loop in our definition of Inside and Outside seems unavoidable, unless we adopt dogmatic elements which cannot be reconciled with philosophical reasoning. That is, unless we postulate the existence of a fixed tertium between the two, in whose authority to clearly and definitely distinguish them we

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<sup>2</sup> To this day, the Catholic church maintains, in its Catechism (II.31), that certain metaphysical truths, such as God’s existence can be reasonably proven, but starting “from creation”, rather than in a Cartesian way.



trust, the two sides are necessarily going to blend with each other. The next section describes this process of blending.

## Section II – Rejoining the World

Descartes' ideas were, in more than one sense, revolutionary. Yet, after him (and, in Renaissance Italy, even before him) a philosophical process would take place to make sure the two res he had postulated would be able to communicate with each other, a process which would gradually lead to abandoning his dualistic views, and all variants of dualism in general.

As a matter of fact, contemporary scholarship has tended to reevaluate the views of Descartes himself, showing that what we traditionally understand as Cartesian dualism is possibly an exaggerated interpretation of his positions. Some believe that dualism is either not present in Descartes or it is not metaphysical in nature (Christofidou, 2001) or a myth altogether (Baker and Morris, 1996). Be it as it may, the "myth", if a myth it is, seems to have possibly originated with Descartes' pupil Regius, and from there it conquered philosophical circles (Afloroaei, 2010). As this is not a thesis about Descartes, I am content to show that the dualistic interpretation of his work was both influential and widespread.

The process that leads to the subject rejoining the world is not linear. It was in part anticipated by the philosophers of the Renaissance, who wrote before Descartes. The Hermetica, the collection of religious/esoteric Hellenistic writings attributed to Hermes (Mercury), which would greatly influence the Renaissance, was already partly geared in this direction, affirming that creation, and the act of creating, although distinct from God and hierarchically organized, is in a way the body of God (1995, Poimandres, IV,1). Within this conception, God, who is the subject, acts and lives through the world, for "God's energy is then His Will; further His essence is to will the

being of all things.” (Ibid., X,2) The created things are the projection or embodiment into physical, external reality of the subject’s desires.

In the Renaissance, Pico della Mirandola expounds, in his *De Dignitate Hominis*, the doctrine that although the universe is hierarchically well- structured, humans alone have been created, as the mythical Proteus, with no essence:

“Who then will not look with wonder upon man, upon man who, not without reason in the sacred Mosaic and Christian writings, is designated sometimes by the term “all flesh” and sometimes by the term “every creature,” because he molds, fashions and transforms himself into the likeness of all flesh and assumes the characteristic power of every form of life?” (In McIntire, 2009, 117)

That is, humans lack an essence, which is the reason why they can take on traits associated with other manifestations of life.

Even more radical is Giordano Bruno’s view, especially as argued in his dialogue *Concerning Cause, Principle and Unity*. Here, the dualism between intellect and matter is abandoned, for intellect (which is the formal cause of things) is the ability to do things, whereas matter is not mere privation, but the ability of things to be done, and therefore the two aspects must be thought together in their unity (1998, IV). So, for instance, my kicking a rock activates not only my ability to kick, but also the ability of the rock to be kicked. What Descartes would call a *res cogitans* is not a substance, but one of the two polarities of the only substance, i.e., nature or the universe (1998, III).

Classical empiricism would later take important steps in this general direction, albeit within a different frame of reference which had abandoned all mystical and magical implications. David Hume’s desire to really observe what is in front of us, and to analyze what we are allowed to imply from our observations, represents the

culmination of the classical attempt to explain ourselves and the world without referring to an “above” that is reflected on and gives objective consistency to a “below”.

Hume’s epistemological criticism of metaphysical categories ends up with experience, including the experience of the self, being pulverized:

“[...] when I enter most intimately into what I call myself, I always stumble on some particular perception or other [but] I never can catch myself at any time without a perception, and never can observe any thing but the perception. [...] I may venture to affirm of the rest of mankind, that they are nothing but a bundle or collection of different perceptions, which succeed each other with an inconceivable rapidity, and are in a perpetual flux and movement.” (2009, 1,4,5)

If we abandon all metaphysical presuppositions, there is no provable intrinsic unitarity to things, including what we call “I”. If we ignore all voices coming from “above”, telling us “You are defined as X, no matter what you think, want or perceive”, we discover that there is no insurmountable ontological difference between the subject and the world around it: both are “bundles of perceptions”.

Even more groundbreaking, in this respect, is Charles Darwin’s theory of evolution. With evolutionism, it becomes clear that humans are to be understood not in light of what is supposedly “above” humanity, and from which humanity has fallen, but in light of what is “below” it, and from which humanity has emerged. The idea itself of “species”, for Darwin, stands not for a series of fixed and stratified categories of being, but for sets of individuals who happen to resemble each other (1869, Ch. II). And even though “Man may be excused for feeling some pride at having risen, though not

through his own exertions, to the very summit of the organic scale” still he “[...] bears in his bodily frame the indelible stamp of his lowly origin” (1871, Vol II, Ch. XXI).

With evolutionism, we definitively discover the validity of the syllogism that nature has a history, and that humans are natural, therefore human nature has a history: it is not essentially something, but it changes, through random variation and natural selection, like every other species. Transhistorical consistency is not of this world. Consider that even the radical Hume still relied heavily on a universalistic notion of human nature to explain to his baffled readers why we kept believing in all the metaphysical “sophistries and illusions” that he denounced: “Nature may certainly produce whatever can arise from habit: Nay, habit is nothing but one of the principles of nature, and derives all its force from that origin” (2009, I,3,16).

Contemporary philosophy of mind has been quick in dismissing dualism. However, it also slowly rejected, or at least set aside, essentialism, that is, the approach that looks for the “what” rather than for the “how”. This is the core point of functionalism and multiple realizability, i.e., that proposed explanation of the nature of the mind that articulates its answer not in terms of the identity of the “mind-stuff”, whether it be the soul, the brain or something else, but in terms of the particular relations that allow some regions of the universe to operate as a mind, to have qualities that we recognize as mental.

Once the idea of the mind being separate from the body is abandoned, “Mind [...] is not incidentally but intimately embodied and intimately embedded in its world.” (Haugeland, 1998, p. 237) and therefore, as some theorists of the Extended Mind Hypothesis argue, extended. We can see the conceptual development of this progressive embodiment of the concept of mind (and therefore of subject), which is

first held to be completely separate,<sup>3</sup> then confined to certain biological facts, then reinterpreted functionally, and finally made dependent on certain functional requirements which are not, at least in principle, restricted to the physical body, as traditionally understood, in order to be supported.

There are different ways in which the mind may be understood as embodied. Shapiro (2004) offers a threefold classification in Conceptualization, Replacement and Constitution research programs concerning embodiment. Among these, Andy Clark's view, which falls in the Constitution camp, is the one that leads clearly from embodiment to extendedness. Clark's project is Constitution-oriented in the sense, Shapiro explains, that it is concerned with what materially constitutes the mind. His (and Chalmers') answer is that the distinction between mind (or brain), body and world is blurred, and tends to disappear because of how the external world is functionalized to allow cognitive processes to play out in a way comparable to how they would if they happened inside the head.

It seems that the core question behind the Extended Mind Hypothesis is not, per se, how pervasively embedded the mind is, but how special a "container" the body can be. Descartes could have argued that the body only incidentally and partially embeds the mind, which is in principle self-contained outside of the extended universe. This way of approaching the issue may be outdated, but with the idea of multiple realizability in mind we are, as it were, closing the circle: what was once contingently embedded in the body, but in itself a-spatial, may turn out to be always contingently embodied in this or that form, or rather, always contingently emergent from the material configurations of the world.

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<sup>3</sup> As said before, I am not arguing that all ancient philosophers were unabashed dualists: it would be hard to ascribe such view, for instance, to many Pre-Socratics, such as Heraclitus and Parmenides. For the latter, for instance, thinking and being were the same thing.

In this sense, once the mind ceases to be ontologically “special” (dualism), we have two options: either the body is very special, in which case we turn the mind-body dualism into a body-world dualism, following what Clark (2008) calls “principled body-centrism”; or the body is just, and only up until now, the main support for cognitive processes. Once mind, body and world cease to be different planes and are made to collapse on each other, can there be a decisive distinction between them that is not merely contingent, that is, just a dynamic interplay of “outsides” and “insides”? Can there be a sharp and definitive distinction between the “container” and the “contained”? Or isn’t the distinction between what contains and what is contained purely situational?

The concept of extended mind developed by Clark and Chalmers (1998) argues that a new form of active externalism about the mind is required. “The brain (or brain and body) comprises a package of basic, portable, cognitive resources that is of interest in its own right. These resources may incorporate bodily actions into cognitive processes, as when we use our fingers as working memory in a tricky calculation, but they will not encompass the more contingent aspects of our external environment, such as a pocket calculator” (ibid., pp. 10-11)

Yet, according to Clark and Chalmers, the portability criterion does not undermine active externalism, which is founded on what is known as the parity principle: “If, as we confront some task, a part of the world functions as a process which, were it done in the head, we would have no hesitation in recognizing as part of the cognitive process, then that part of the world is (so we claim) part of the cognitive process” (ibid., p. 8)

There doesn’t seem to be any part of the world which may, in principle, be subtracted from the number of “things” that are capable of supporting a cognitive process: every

point in space-time could be adequate support for these processes, it just depends on what process we are interested in initiating.<sup>4</sup>

Were we to ask “What configuration does my cognition have at time t1? And at t2?” we may get different answers, or an all-encompassing “it depends”. If I wanted to map my cognitive process, I would need a map of the whole universe throughout the ages, moment by moment, with the bits and pieces of my cognition highlighted here and there: a brain-scan of sorts that is also a geographic map of a particularly unstable and magmatic archipelago.

Differently put, the distinction between the Inside (the “me” that faces the world, as identified with the mind) and the Outside would be entirely situational, depending on the cognitive process that is being conjured into existence and how it is being conjured. Even that “package of basic, portable, cognitive resources” that is the body is supposed by Clark and Chalmers to have evolved in conjunction with the availability of external supports for cognition, and therefore, we can infer, a different set of circumstances and/or different cognitive needs would give rise to different sets of portable resources as opposed to “less portable”, or more easily decoupled ones. Hence, the boundaries of the body, in the authors’ view, can in no sense constitute the boundaries of cognition: the configuration of the body as a set of portable resources is not a given, regardless of how the world is.

Finally, Clark and Chalmers ask “What [...] of the self? Does the extended mind imply an extended self? It seems so. Most of us already accept that the self outstrips the boundaries of consciousness; my dispositional beliefs, for example, constitute in some deep sense part of who I am. If so, then these boundaries may also fall beyond the skin” (1998, p. 18) As substance-dualism has been abandoned, time and again we find

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<sup>4</sup> Functionalism does not answer the question whether mental faculties may be reduced to one’s organism (Carter and Palermos, 2016).

it impossible to recognize insurmountable boundaries for the areas that support my cognition (and myself) that are not the boundaries of the whole of existence.

With extendedness as a consequence of embeddedness into the world, I would be not a Humean “bundle of perceptions”, but a rather fuzzy bundle of functionalized objects, one of which happens to be my brain/body, but this is not necessary, for only a lack of know-how would separate me from the ability to functionalize certain external objects to support my cognition in the same way as my brain, for now, does.

This excursus into the philosophy of mind has shown us how contemporary approaches to the study of the interrelation between self and world are playing with the idea of the two sides being as conceptually tied together as possible, something which is the culmination of a longer historical process. I should clarify, in ending this section, that I have no interest in the cognitive side of the issue, at least as far as this work is concerned. My approach, defended in the next section, is purely ontological, and my conceptualization of the issue is not confined to the mind as understood in contemporary philosophy of mind. In other words, my analysis of the dynamic interrelation between self and world, or agent and territory, does not hinge on the application of criteria (such as the portability clause) which might be useful in the field of philosophy of mind.

### Section III – The Sequential Subject and Its Territory

So far, we have seen that the definition of our two terms, Inside and Outside, has seen some dramatic shifts over the centuries. This section puts forth my own solution, which I am going to build upon in the next chapters. If we need to abandon Descartes’ dualism, and dualism in general, then it makes no sense to seek out static criteria for the definition of either one between agent and territory. If this is the case, we need to accept that each single subjective trait is dynamically entwined with some



outside/territorial reality. This is the basis of my sequential approach to defining agents and territories.

The status of agent and territory, container and contained, support and supported as definer each of the other implies that the distinction between the two is purely situational and contingent, not dictated by an insurmountable qualitative difference between the two. This does not mean that the distinction between the two is not real, but that it is real only for as long as it lasts, for it is not grounded in any essential distinction: their distinction is not a form of dualism, just as their unity is not a form of indifference.

Augustine could say that the worm the angel were made by the same creator (2015, XIII) only because there were people who, like him, maintained that one of them was essentially excellent and other essentially lowly (Ibid.) But the excellency of the first is cemented, just as the lowliness of the second, in the eternal standpoint of a supernatural agent, who has created them as eternally separate moments in a continuum or ladder. From an evolutionary perspective, the angel, no less than the worm, is the momentary specialization of the same process of expression of natural creativity. The worm has no less being than the angel.

We saw that, in the old Christian perspective, nature was a sort of geographic or geo-metaphysical map towards the eternal truth which is hidden beyond and above its transience (God's second book, as Augustine put it). The subject, in this sense, is a foreigner who wanders on this map, trying to come face to face with its author. Following my line of reasoning, we are naturally led to thinking the subject itself in geographic terms: to pinpoint their exact whereabouts we would need to develop a geography of the "soul" which maps the position of the subject all throughout the universe from moment to moment.

From a (classically interpreted) Cartesian standpoint, the innermost source of selfhood is self-contained outside of extension, and therefore the subject exists apart from their concrete, momentary determinations. As the subject becomes less and less distinguishable from the *res extensa*, we must welcome the idea that the distinction between the Inside and the Outside be situational, always changing and never categorical. This distinction cannot be founded on some subject-independent ontological criterion, but rather on the subject's ability or inability to support themselves through the Outside, and I do not mean this in merely cognitive terms, such as would be suggested by the parity principle in Clark's and Chalmers' theory. We must think of the subject as an impermanent and changing region of the natural world that is functionalized to express subjecthood, i.e., the type of "insideness" that emerges out of the "outsideness", thereby momentarily grounding the outside as outside and the inside as inside.

Abandoning all dualism implies accepting that the embedded subject be in immediate constitutive/causal relation with every point in space and time, that is, the fact that every point in space-time is equally liable to be constitutive of my subjectivity. If this weren't the case, we would be pressed to show how a certain point in space-time *X* is essentially extrinsic from our constitution. This, however, would imply, in turn, the defining of subjectivity as essentially  $\neg X$ , which would reestablish dualism anew, with the additional problem that, exactly because I am supposedly essentially defined as  $\neg X$ , *X* is part of my essential definition, albeit as negation, so that the dualism destroys itself. Because I have no essential core that is separate from my living through the outside, and because every configuration of my being is entirely contingent on my relationship with the outside, no outside point is irrelevant to my definition as subject.

Descartes' *res cogitans* was distinct from everything else and therefore was relatively static in its constitution. Whatever constitutive determinations made it up cannot be

traced back to its dynamic relation with the outside. A subject that is intrinsically and completely embedded in the world must necessarily derive all its determinations dynamically through its relation with the outside: as Pico's Proteus, it must be "all flesh" and "every creature", albeit not all at once. This is the view that I pursue in this chapter, and that I will be fleshing out for the rest of this thesis.

We have seen that my identity cannot be separated from the sum total of all points in space-time from which I emerge. At the same time, though, no point in space-time can be conceptually separated from my emergence through it, otherwise we would divest the subject of its essential exceptionality only to assign this exceptionality to the outside, which would reestablish dualism. As such, the sum total of points in space-time must be understood as the sum total of concrete subjective determinations/traits that can emerge from those points as a result of someone possessing the ability to functionalize them.

Carrying this to its conclusion, the sum total of points in space-time determines in equal measure the subject's current determination as exactly that subject, depending on whether the subject activates themselves in that direction or not, based on their ability (which I call know-how) and desire to do so. The subject's immediate relation with every point in the universe implies that every Outside point immediately embeds me as Inside even if that particular Outside point is normally understood as very distant from me (physically, geographically or temporally) or from my self-perception (psychologically). This does not imply that every subject experiences everything, but that no subject is essentially closed off from experiencing everything that can be experienced if the right conditions arise, and therefore that the sum total of all possible experiences must be counted as part of the subject's definition, depending on the subject's stance toward them.

For instance, the water frozen on Mars already determines me in a number of ways corresponding to every single thing I could do, and therefore every single determination of myself that I could enact, if I were capable of doing it. It determines me mostly negatively (as “Me-not- drinking-that-water”, “Me-not-touching-that-water”, “Me-not-making- sorbet-with-that-water”, etc.), but some positive determinations are already possible (e.g., “Me-studying-that-water-from-a-distance-using-the- appropriate-devices”, or simply “Me-thinking-about-that-water”). Then again, even most things that are much closer at hand still determine me negatively in a huge number of ways, simply because I tend to be myself through them in a very limited amount of respects, often stereotyped and/or acquired through habit.

Abolishing the notion of living “on” the Outside and radically replacing it with the notion of living “through” the Outside leads us to thinking both the subject and its territory as sequences, rather than “things”. No single determination of the subject, actual or potential, hypothetical or certain, past, present or future can be understood “clearly and distinctly” apart from the corresponding relation with the Outside, for no determination of the subject is supported but through the Outside, which therefore acts more as a territory than as a bundle of objects.

Because I do not exist apart from the things I live through, my “insideness” implies the Outside, and the “outsideness” implies me as the agency that can transmute it, as the Inside with respect to whose specific know-how it remains, under certain respects, outside. For instance, the water on Mars will remain outside of me as drinkable, but not as object of study, and, vice versa, Mars already implied me thousands of years ago as one of the “inside” correlatives of its existence.

We will therefore consider each subject sequence as an I-O-I sequence: Inside-without-X – Functionalized Outside – Inside-with-X. Each of us is made of a number of such

sequences equal to the sum total of possible traits he or she can showcase by interacting with the outside. This sequence, which privileges the Inside, must nonetheless refer to the Outside that it functionalizes in order to be an Inside. Each sequence that makes me up corresponds to one of the concrete manifestations of me-ness that emerge at each point. In one such sequence, the Inside envelops, as it were, a particular Outside point, linking it to a (momentary) manifestation of “insideness”. Because of their mutual entailment, a subject sequence could also be called a territory-embedding sequence. For instance, if I grow red beet on this specific plot of land, I embed that outside point to go from Me- not-growing-red-beet-in-this-plot-of-land to Me-growing-red-beet-in-this-plot-of-land. The Outside point, in this case, is the means between Me-not- X-ing and Me-X-ing.

Conversely, we will consider the territory just as much a bundle of sequences, whose component parts are, however, shuffled differently. A territory sequence is O-I-O: Unfunctionalized Outside – Inside with or without X – Unfunctionalized Outside. Each point in space-time implies the Inside that can functionalize it to actualize itself. As such, a territory sequence already contains the word “Inside”. However, the almost infinite potential for Inside-expression is not yet actualized because the Outside remains unfunctionalized. Here, the Outside appears as Outside, as stage within which we “agents” move, rather than as a component part of our concrete determinations. A territory sequence could also be called a subject- embedding sequence. If I don’t know how to cultivate red beet on this plot of land, the Outside embeds me relatively to this trait.

Note that in an O-I-O sequence the first O is the same as the second O. The sequence begins with an O because, due to our ignorance of how to functionalize the Outside to initiate the change that we want to initiate, we attribute this inability not to our shortcomings but to how things objectively are Outside of us and regardless of our

desires, and therefore even before we (as “I”) come into play, and likewise how they remain objectively the same afterward: we think that reality simply is the way it is, regardless of us. The Inside in an O-I-O sequence is with or without X because the subject’s obtaining X is not dependent on the subject’s know-how and ability to functionalize that point in space-time, but on the random interplay of outside conditions (for instance, a caveperson who hadn’t invented fire yet could have benefited from a naturally occurring fire).

#### Section IV – The Situational Emergence of a Contingently Outstanding Subject

However we articulate a dualistic approach, we always end up with the idea of an essentially outstanding subject who is contingently embedded. As we allow the subject to rejoin the world, we discover the exact opposite: an essentially embedded subject that contingently stands out.<sup>5</sup>

On a dualistic approach, a subject that is essentially outstanding does not need to do anything to stand out, as subject, from nature. Its own essence is outstanding, regardless of their concrete determinations, which therefore become unessential. Such essentially separated subject doesn’t need to actively stand out from the rest because the principle of its self-consistency is already inside of it regardless of its specific determinations. The Inside, thus, lives “on” the Outside, but its core is independent from it and therefore static.

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<sup>5</sup> If humans are essentially exceptional, e.g., from a religious perspective, nature, as we saw, is a map or ladder towards God (his second book) or whatever principle lies beyond the map and constitutes the transcendent key to interpreting it. Only when not understood in light of its true origin does nature become a labyrinth of “perdition”. From a philosophical perspective, this idea of perdition is reinterpreted epistemologically: for Descartes, the subject who is tangled in the web of manifestation cannot say if an evil spirit is at work to make them hallucinate. By first proving the I’s self-consistency and exceptionalism and then discovering its origin in God (rationally proven), they can read nature correctly, i.e., assign it its true meaning and place.

In the previous chapter, I discussed how both action and reaction views must end up conceptualizing the Inside and Outside as essentially separated, even when this is not the intention, and therefore their interaction as secondary (again, even when they do end up calling for a more interactive approach). I also showed what I mean by developing an interactive approach. On my view, interaction must be understood as the primary category, on which both the unity and the diversity of Inside and Outside is grounded.

In this chapter I discussed a view of the subject that is consistent with this idea. If we see interaction as the primary element grounding both Inside and Outside, then it follows that I cannot define the Inside but by keeping the reference to the Outside in its definition; likewise, I cannot define the Outside but by keeping the reference to the Inside in its definition. The two modalities of expression of the interaction (I-O-I and O-I-O) are intended to capture the subject (the two I's on both sides of the O) is always the act of using the Outside as a means for self-expression, while the territory (the two O's on both sides of the I) is always the limit to such act, which depends on the absence of know-how. Thus, there never is a subject but that which lives through the territory and there is never a territory but that which delimits a subject, causing attrition against a specific subject's perspective.

The interaction of the two is not a static "thing", or else it would represent a third "substance" between the two, which would thus be no interaction at all. Interaction is the emerging of a subject acting on the territory in some way (I-O-I) while being situated in it (and therefore delimited by it) in other ways (O-I-O), its situatedness and limitedness corresponding to its potential for more embodiment, contingently blocked behind a wall of ignorance (lack of know-how.)

The subject sustains itself through its action on the Outside (it lives not “on” it, but “through” it), thereby coming to coincide with those activities that would be inessential to it, if we took it to be essentially separated from the Outside. As such, the subject stands out from its interactive unity with the territory as “this particular cluster here with its own identity” in so far as it actively seeks to do (and thus be) something, and therefore in so far as it harbors aims, desires or problems it seeks to solve; complementarily, the Outside stands out from its interactive unity with the Inside as “this particular version of the universe” in so far as it opposes aims, desires, solutions.

From this we conclude that, as far as the subject is concerned, each of its determinations is contingent overall and essential so long as it lasts. Each subject is, from moment to moment, a unique constellation of functionalized Outside points which is exactly itself at t1 and exactly itself at t2, but it is different from moment to moment. The same is true for the Outside.

If we consider the sum total of possible self-determinations, each subject will appear different from the others (and from itself over time) in so much as each of them is a sum total of yes’s and no’s, of Me-X-ing and Me-not-X-ing differently shuffled together, and constantly shifting. Still, for every person the sum total of yes’s and no’s that they embody is always the same and corresponds to the sum total of possible I-O-I sequences. If my great-great-great-great-granddaughter will be capable of cooking her spaghetti in another planet’s water, she still won’t have an additional determination compared to me: she will only have a positive determination, whereas I have a negative one.

The “outstandingness” of each subject, in this sense, is grounded not in their partaking, statically, in a separate subjective principle, but in each subject’s dynamic relationship with the whole universe from beginning to end (and beginning and end must be



understood both geographically and temporally), as filtered through the subject's disabilities. The water on Mars contains me in its being undrinkable, i.e., it keeps me outside of its "drinkability" through my inability to turn it into the physical support of my determination "Me-drinking-Martian-water".

Yet, the more I am capable of articulating, down to the most minute detail, why I am unable to activate that specific I-O-I sequence, the closer I get to spelling out the conditions of possibility for turning that which contains me, and which therefore acts as territory, into that which I contain, which is part of me. In other words, that which appears as a limit is not a limit in an essential kind of way, but only in relation to a particular subjectivity's know-how, which thus becomes a key for turning every limit in a potential resource.

The interactive view I have been developing leads to a particular, necessary conclusion. If interaction is taken as the primary element grounding Inside and Outside both in their connection and in their separation, this implies that interaction *must be universal*. There cannot be the interaction that I have with the Outside as opposed to that which you have with it, otherwise we would slip away from the concept of interaction. On the contrary, it's not possible to understand the emergence of separate subjects, each nestled in its own territory, unless we understand the interaction from which they emerge as always the same process or activity, which gets filtered through the lack of ability/know-how giving rise to the distinction between a specific Inside and a specific Outside. This topic forms the subject of the next chapter. In the next and final section of this chapter, I discuss how my view is neither a substratum view of the self nor a simple bundle theory.

## Section V – A non-substratum theory

As articulated in the previous section, my view of subjectivity stems from the idea that subjects simply cannot be understood apart from their concrete presence in a specific set of circumstances. As such, it is impossible to talk about a subject aside from its being embedded in the world in a particular way; complementarily, it is impossible to talk about the world regardless of it being the world that embeds one specific subject, who acts on it, even if just to observe it.

The idea of subjective traits, which I have discussed in the previous section, acknowledges exactly this fact. To deny it is to be hard pressed to find a substratum that operates underneath the various traits that the subject obtains by being embedded in and therefore interacting with the world as it centers around him or her. But the concept of substratum is simply impracticable, because in order for it to exist, it would have to be in no relation whatsoever with the world and with the traits that the subject obtains by, as I put it, “living through” the world.

If a substratum comes into existence by having a dynamic relationship with the outside, it follows that certain conditions need to be met in order for it to emerge. But if such is the case, then knowledge of these conditions would enable us to alter it, which would mean that it is not a substratum at all, because a substratum would exist before any of my manifestations and acts, and so would be immune to agency. For instance, if we understood our genetic make-up as a substratum, but then acknowledged that (as we know) our genetic aspect did not drop from heaven but is a result of specific dynamics, and that by understanding these dynamics we can modify our genetic makeup, then it follows that we can modify the substratum that is theoretically presupposed by our action on our substratum, and this is absurd. Our genetic aspect certainly gives us a certain endurance and consistency through time

(which is one of the aspects that, as we shall see shortly, are appreciated by substratum theories of the self).

However, just because something is de facto enduring doesn't mean that this something falls into a separate ontological category from everything else, as a substratum would have to do. More specifically, the fact that we are still a long way from the ability to (usefully) modify our genetic makeup is purely a function of our lack of know-how, rather than a consequence of this makeup being ontologically special enough to be a substratum. The same is true for any other non-genetic aspect of ourselves that we may consider a substratum. If it comes into being in some dynamic way, this dynamic can be known and therefore modified, which means that the substratum is not a substratum. Even if we understand the concept of substratum as some substratum theories do, that is, as a passive receptacle with no trait or feature to it, it could not come into being through a dynamic interplay with the outside. If a thing has no features, it cannot be part of a dynamic process, since dynamic processes all imply the creation of certain features and the suppression of certain other features (otherwise, what kind of dynamic would it be?)

If, however, the substratum does not come into existence by dynamically interacting with the world; if, in other words, as the literature puts it, the substratum is without properties or features (Benovsky, 2008), then it is a dead thing that it is perfectly fruitless to theorize. Even worse, by theorizing it, I change my relation to it from "Me-not-theorizing-it" to "Me-theorizing-it", which in turn would modify it from "potentially-theorized" to "actually-theorized", but in modifying it I deny it as substratum, while affirming it as something that emerges with me as its "theorizer", as object of my act of theorizing rather than as that which allows my theorization to take place. The same is true for every other action. Does the act of raising a finger change my substratum? If the answer no, we must accept the absurdity of my

substratum being in no relation whatsoever with me, or with existence in general. How else would we explain that the substratum doesn't change despite its relation to something else changing? If the answer is yes, then the substratum is made of parts and therefore has different properties, but then it is just a thing among things, a thing that we can modify, and therefore it is not a substratum.

If subjects, as I showed in the previous section, are completely embedded in the world while acting on it, while the world is that which is acted upon by the subjects that it embeds, then every trait of every subject is a conceptually isolable active manifestation, in the form "Me-X-ing" or "Me-not-X-ing". And if there is no substratum underneath this mass of active manifestations, then my view would seem, at least prima facie, to fall into the category of bundle theories of the self, as opposed to substance/substratum-based theories of the self, especially since I have been using the world "bundle". I find the idea that my view might be a simple bundle theory problematic, but I cannot fully show why until I finish discussing my view of agency in the next chapter. In the meantime, I shall discuss how my view differs from both substratum and bundle theories.

In the philosophical tradition, the two sets of views are generally ascribed to the generally "Cartesian" and the generally "Humean" approaches, at least as Descartes and Hume have been standardly interpreted (Benovsky, 2009). On the standard interpretation of Hume's work, he saw the self as a bundle of perceptions, each perception relating to the content of an experience, whether external (e.g., this flower) or internal (e.g., this mental image or this feeling). I already touched upon Hume's view in the previous sections. On the other hand, on Descartes' view, as traditionally interpreted, he viewed the self as a substance that properties inhere to.

Generally speaking, substratum theories are credited for giving an account of our sense of endurance as single entities, as well as living up to our idea that our self is independent enough from its attributes to be, in fact, a self (ibid.) So, while substratum views see subjects as being made of two things, namely a substance and its properties, bundle views do away with the idea of the underlying substance. My view would seem to clearly fall into the bundle camp, since, on my account, subjects are made of sequences where the Inside and Outside find themselves interwoven, but the subjects do not exist apart from those sequences. Added to this, the fact that I have just criticized the concept of substratum as even impossible to conceptualize would make it seem as though choosing a side (between bundle theories and substratum theories) is a no-brainer for me.

And yet, the distinguishing feature of my view is that I do believe there is, in a sense, something at play “underneath” the various traits that a subject displays, except that this something is not a dead thing, that is, an inert substance with no properties. Rather, it is what I shall call, in the next chapter, the Universal Agent. Exactly because it is an agent, it is not a thing or substance or substratum, but the primordial active movement from one state of being to the next, which implies the two states of being it connects (Me-as-X and Me-as-not-X, and vice versa). In the next chapter, I show that it is exactly the absence of an essence or substance that causes the bundles of traits to constantly shift (and to exist in the first place). For me, the absence of a substratum is not a static, passive absence, where we simply do away with the concept of substance and are left with the various disconnected traits. As I see it, it is an active absence of substance that necessarily expresses itself in the existence and the constant shifting of the traits.

This active absence of traits/properties, the Universal Agent, is propertyless, just as the notion of substratum in substratum theory, but it is an active “propertylessness”.

It is not a lack of properties as opposed to the sum total of all properties; it is lack of properties in the sense of active suppression of all possible properties, which requires those properties to first be called into existence (one cannot suppress a property that doesn't concretely exist). Therefore, the universal agency that is at play within me constantly calls forth new traits by constantly suppressing its current ones. There is nothing underneath the mass of traits that make me up, that much I agree with, but only in the sense that there is *actually, actively nothing* underneath them. On my view, the nothing that exists underneath the various properties is not a dead fact, which would be a reification of nothingness, as happens in bundle theory, where the absence of substratum is thought of as a static state, which, like all static states, is therefore reified, whether willingly or not. On the contrary, when I say "propertylessness" I mean the concrete act of eliminating properties, which in turn implies the creation of these properties. As such, my view is best described not as a bundle theory, but as a non-substratum theory, which only accidentally ends up being similar to bundle theories.

As noted by Jiri Benovsky, substratum theories and bundle theories are actually extremely similar, to the point that one may argue that they simply use different vocabularies to express the same concept. In both instances, the unifier of traits, whether it be the bearer of the attributes in substratum theory or the "relation of compresence" in bundle theory, are taken as "unanalyzable and ontologically primitive. [They] are thus defined and individuated not by [their] nature or intrinsic features of which we are not told much [...], but rather by [their] theoretical role: [they are] unifying devices, devices that take properties to make objects" (ibid.)

As a consequence of this similarity, Benovsky argues, the two sets stumble on the same obstacles that they throw at one another. For instance, it is impossible for a substratum to be distinguished from another substratum, because substrata are supposed to have no features, properties, traits; similarly, a relation of compresence, having no intrinsic

quality, cannot be distinguished from another one. The same goes with James Van Cleve's objection to bundle theory (Van Cleve, 1985) according to which bundles, as conceptualized by bundle theory, are incapable of change, because if an individual consists solely of a bundle of traits, then there is nothing that connects the individual at t1 to the individual at t2, and we must simply accept that one individual has disappeared with one of its qualities, while a new one has sprung into existence with a different quality. The same objection, Benovsky argues, hits substratum theory just as hard: the substratum doesn't change (or else it would have properties), so the bundle of substratum plus the traits it bears is equally incapable of changing (Benovsky, 2009).

Let's go back to my view, to see how it fares when put against these issues. Again, I shall spend more time discussing it in the next chapter, but for now, as I said, my view is better described as a non-substratum view. I understand the absence of properties, traits, qualities underneath the subject not as a reified, passive state of absence, because this passive state is entirely unconceivable, whether we understand it as something that looks like nothing (substratum) or as nothing at all that ends up being reified into something (bundle theory). I understand it as an active absence of traits, that is, the active nullification of traits, which implies the calling forth of those traits in the first place. This is what I shall call, in the next chapter, agency.

The agency, that is, the absence of substratum or any essential trait underneath my momentary manifestations, acts as a unifier of my traits, because it is the active lack of substance from which all my traits are called forth and suppressed. The traits that I exemplify spring into existence and are suppressed because of this central activity. Thus, an immediate difference between my view and a bundle theory is that my view preserves the idea of a central unifying factor. Furthermore, there couldn't be activity without the traits emanating from it and being suppressed by it, because the concept

itself of activity implies the suppression of a state X and the manifestation of a state - X, or vice versa. Simply put, if there is no movement from a state to another one, there is no activity. This activity is the absence of traits or substance between all possible states of being, which, exactly because it's between them, implies them as coming into and out of manifestation.

So, if bundle theory were asked "What's beyond the traits of an individual that unifies them?" the answer would be: nothing, and this creates problems that force it to adopt a vocabulary (like "relation of compresence") that makes it into something similar to substratum theory under a different name. If substratum theory were asked the same question, its answer would be: this mysterious featureless passive, static thing that creates more problems than it solves and that is so unconceivable that it is, basically, nothing under a different name.

If I were asked the same question, my answer would be: nothing is beneath the traits, but nothing as I understand it, that is, the type of nothing from which things necessarily spring into being, that is, the nothing that unfolds through being. As such, my view overcomes the objection from change made by Van Cleve, because the active nothing or absence that is underneath the subject automatically implies the emergence and dissolution of the traits that make the subject up. By contrast, both bundle theory and substratum theory seek to derive change from stasis, and this is impossible. Once we posit change, stasis automatically arises as the sum total of states of being that change needs to connect to one another, for if it didn't do it, it wouldn't be change, as nothing would, in fact, change, and so it would be stasis: change needs stasis in order to be change, so that change always expresses through the succession of states, traits, features, or whatever other name we may choose. But once we posit stasis as a primary element, there is no way to have change follow from it: we only have a series of pictures disconnected from one another.



Introducing the concept of agency, I called it “universal”. This is quickly explained. Just as the substratum in substratum theory, just as the relation of compresence in bundle theory, agency as I conceptualize it is without features or properties, so that there cannot be more than one. The difference is, once again, that agency is not a static thing, but the activity through which traits are called into being and pushed back into nothingness. In this sense, my view embraces the criticism that it is impossible to distinguish between different substrata or different relations of compresence. It is impossible to distinguish between them because there isn’t more than one. What unifies me is what unifies you. It is not at all paradoxical to say that you and I are the same active nothingness manifesting in the suppression of traits and calling forth other traits.

So why aren’t you and I the same subject? Because we aren’t the same bundle of traits emerging from the same central activity. We have already seen that my view makes whole new bundles of traits automatically spring into existence to replace old bundles that have been suppressed, each new bundle being exactly that which suppresses the old one. Here, however, a peculiarity of my view kicks in. As we have seen in the previous section, each possible trait corresponds, on my view, to a specific Inside-Outside relation, that is, to a specific way in which a certain quality can be actively lived by an Inside through the Outside, provided the relevant ability/know-how is present. This means that the sum total of all possible traits is at the disposal of everyone, that is, it is not essentially withheld from anyone save by their lack of know-how, which is contingent. In turn, this means that different individuals are simply different ways of shuffling around the same sum total of all possible traits emanating from the same central, universal activity.

In other words, different individuals are each a complete universe in itself springing into being from the same unifying active nothing. Each bundle of traits is a version of

the universe centering around the same active absence of properties. These bundles do not exist next to one another in a shared, preexisting universe, for a supposed preexisting universe would exist outside of the Inside-Outside dynamic, and would therefore stand in no relation to us. It is therefore an unneeded hypothesis. Rather, on my view, what we call the shared, preexisting universe is actually the partial juxtaposition of these bundles of Inside-Outside interactions centering around the same active lack of properties. This doesn't mean that there is nothing outside of us, but that there is nothing outside of us that we are not in dynamic connection with.

So, my answer to the question "Why aren't you and I the same subject?" is that we are different subjects because we are the same agency, which different alternative universes spring into existence that are made of different constellations of O-I-O and I-O-I sequences that account for our differences both in concrete (outer) and psychological (inner) makeup.



## CHAPTER III – The Universal Agent

### Introduction

In Chapter II, I gave an account of individual subjects as fully embedded and co-emergent with the territory. In the present chapter, I show that this reconceptualization of subjects implies their fundamental unity as agents. We are not disconnected individuals, each with his or her own agency. Instead, we are the same agency finding expression in different circumstances.

This being the case, individuals and the universal agency that they express form, respectively, the outermost (manifesting) and the innermost (guiding) layer of the same phenomenon of agency. Between these two layers there is room for collective subjecthood, which is to be understood not as separate from individual subjecthood and universal agency, but as the way in which the universal layer finds expression through a set of individuals acting out the same aims. This chapter traces the steps that lead us conceptually from individual subjecthood as discussed in Chapter II to the theorization of what I call the Universal Agent and, finally, to an idea of collective subjects that is coherent with these principles.

In Chapter I, I showed what I mean by “interaction”. On my view, interaction is not what happens between subject and territory, Inside and Outside. Interaction, I argued, is the unitary movement that finds expression through the duality of subject and territory, that is, it’s the movement that grounds subject and territory as distinct and connected. This means that the subject always emerges as that which acts on the territory and expresses itself through it while being embedded in it and thus shaped by it, while the territory emerges as that which embeds and shapes the subject while being acted on by it. The two cannot be conceptualized separately. The action of the

subject on the territory cannot happen unless the subject is shaped into what it currently is by limits that at least momentarily resist its activity. At the same time, territory cannot exist but as a series of momentary limits to a subject that acts on it and expresses itself through it by overcoming certain of those limits while being shaped by others.

In Chapter II, I showed that the embeddedness of a (single) subject in the world implies that such subject is a bundle of sequences. In brief, any attempt to show that I am essentially X, regardless of any particular concrete manifestation of myself, leads to conceptualizing X as essentially outstanding from the world, which leads to an untenable dualism. But, if there is nothing that I essentially am, then each trait I have, either potentially or actually, is derived from my dynamic interaction with the world at every given moment, and is just as essential to my being as any other trait. The distinction of Inside and Outside is, in this way, not abolished, but turned into an expression of their co-relative, dynamic interplay, their interaction.

Back in Chapter II, I discussed how this view is not properly a bundle theory as much as it is a non-substratum theory, in that for me the lack of substratum is not a fact, as it is in bundle theory, but an action, i.e., the activity that eliminates traits and properties of a subject while manifesting other traits and properties. In other words, the “propertylessness” that pertains to both the concept of substratum in substratum theory and the concept of lack of substratum in bundle theory becomes, on my view, a dynamic process rather than a static fact.

In this chapter, I draw the appropriate logical consequences from my view of individual subjects, fleshing out more precisely my view on agency, which I have introduced at the end of the previous chapter. Because individuals exist through their concrete determinations (that is, properties/traits), acquired interactively through the Outside,

individuals are bundles of constantly shifting traits acquired dynamically. Each bundle, i.e., each subject, is made up of the sum of positive (Me-X-ing) and negative (Me-not-X-ing) traits that the subject showcases, depending on how he or she concretely interacts, from moment to moment, with the Outside. Therefore, what is constantly shifting is not the number of traits a subject has, because the subject, being fully embedded, is always interacting with the Outside in all its points. What shifts is the ratio between positive and negative traits, depending on the subject's ability. This is true for every individual subject: every subject is made up of the same sum total of traits, just differently switched.

This implies that nothing essential separates an individual from another except their situational difference in ability to embody certain traits. In principle, if individuals lack a fixed essence X that cannot be modified through action, then my lack of a fixed essence X equals another individual's lack of a fixed essence X. It is the same "essencelessness" (a term which I use instead of "lack of properties" or "propertylessness") or essential emptiness which is open to the sum total of possible traits that may be embodied by actively embedding the Outside, depending on the concrete ability of someone to embody them. As such, individuals are characterized not by their active agency, which is the same, as it results from an absence of fixed traits, an absence that can be cultivated in any direction for the activation of any possible trait. What characterizes individuals is their passivity, and therefore their impotence. Not what we can do, but what we cannot do is the mark of our individuality, while agency is necessarily universal.

We are all the same agency, the same Universal Agent, at work in different fields. The fields are different because they are delimited by different disabilities: what we experience is not the result of a different agency, but of different limitations applied to the same agency. As individuals, we are characterized more by the territory that

embeds us than by how we embed it. This consideration has direct bearing on my view of groups, which I consider to be forms of shared inability.

In Section I, I discuss part of the literature of territorial rights to show that, according to most theorists, human agency serves to particularize and personalize the Outside. In Section II, I challenge this view. Here, I articulate my understanding of human action as “universal solvent”, and the idea that human agency is universal, that is, that we are all the same agency, which I call the Universal Agent.

What results from my brief exposition is that individuality is the result not of activity, but of passivity and impotence. It results from the inability to overcome a set of specific limits, to solve specific problems that would allow us to embed a certain Outside point in a manifestation of Inside-expression. Conversely, agency, being the ability to actively embed an Outside point in a certain manifestation of Inside-expression, is the ability to overcome limits by solving problems. Individuality is the particular field of disabilities wherein agency, i.e., the “essenceless” ability to overcome limits, acts itself out, without originating in individuality, which is made of those limits. Agency, that is, is the same agency across all individual subjects.

But this implies that action is not geared to the creation of results that distinguish individuals from each other. It also implies that action is not geared toward the creation of circumstances that particularize individual or group attachments to particular things or places, but the overcoming of limits that cause the emergence of particularity. As such, action cannot be understood as the means for solving the problem of particularity which is central to all territorial rights theories. Particularity is not created by action. Instead it is dissolved by it, because it stands as a limit for it to overcome.

In Section III, I introduce the concept of collective subjects. As anticipated, individuals are characterized not by their agency, but by their relative impotence. This view must necessarily inform my take on collectives. In so far as a group is comprised of individuals, it must share in the nature of individuals. As such, I see groups not as forms of collective agency, but as forms of collective disability which channel the universal agency in similar ways, without needing to be grounded in shared rationality or shared agreement.

In Section IV, finally, I answer some implications of and some objections to my view of the Universal Agent.

### Section I – Agency as the Cause of Particularity in the Territorial Rights Literature

This section discusses how agency is understood as a means for the creation of particularity in the literature of territorial rights. My view, as anticipated in the introduction, is that agency is actually what dissolves particularity, while particularity is the result of the individual's relative impotence and therefore inability to act. Showing that agency dissolves problems and overcomes limits will bear on my understanding of individuals and, consequently, of groups. On my view, just as individuals are not characterized by individual agency, but individual disabilities filtering the manifestation of the same agency, groups are collections of individuals sharing comparable disabilities through which they filter the manifestation of the Universal Agent. This suffices to conclude that collectives are made up of individuals acting in similar ways as a result of sharing similar limitations. In this section I focus on the territorial rights literature, while in the next section I provide my own view which assigns agency the role of solvent rather than creator of particularity.



The concept of action plays a pivotal role in most theories of territorial rights. The reason for giving action the central spot is that, usually, a theory of territorial rights seeks to link together two elements, a territory and a subject. One of the most intuitive ways of highlighting a link between them is to find traces of either one of them in the other, as a result of some kind of molding activity that either one of them exerted on the other.

As argued in Chapter I, Section III, an action-oriented view will emphasize how certain actions I perform modify a certain territory, while a reaction-oriented view will focus on how a certain territory actively informed a certain subject. Either way, we have the idea of a particular link between two sides that is created by one of them acting on the other. The implication is that action has a particularizing and defining effect on that which is acted upon.

We divide reality into two sides, i.e., subjects and territories or Inside and Outside, which face each other. Particularization is the act of projecting specific characteristics on the side of reality that faces us. For the territory, particularizing means informing the subject. For the subject, particularizing means informing the territory. Because these characteristics emerge in one side of reality and end up affecting the other, particularization seems to be a straightforward way of linking a collective subject to a territory. By comparing the two, we can see whether they match in some notable respect and pair them together from a normative standpoint.

The action that particularizes the territory also personalizes it. The particular territory, informed with the subject's action, becomes its home. I use the term "home" loosely here, in the sense of projection on the outside of how the subject wants her needs, desires, aims, interests met. As Thomas Christiano (2006, p. 84) puts it, "Each person has an interest in making the world, at least to some extent, a home for himself. Only

in this way can he make sure that the world is responsive to his interests and concerns.” Being at home is perceived as the result of an effort, of a series of actions that bridge the gap between a subject that comes to the territory from outside of it and a territory that would otherwise remain alien to her needs or aims.

The initial premise, here, is that humans don’t feel automatically at home, i.e., they don’t feel that their “interests and concerns” (or, in my language, aims and needs) automatically correspond with what is offered to them on the Outside. The Outside’s “un-hominess” is caused by the world not being otherwise “responsive to [the subject’s] interests and concerns”.

Wishes, desires, needs etc. are realized through the Outside by being projected there by human action, which follows an Inside → Outside trajectory. This implies that human action is needed to act out the needs and desires to make a home. Much of the world where we live our everyday life is a projection of ourselves and an expression of our needs, resulting from our attempts to make an otherwise unresponsive environment responsive to our commands, or, in Christiano’s terms, an attempt to make this environment a home for ourselves.

However, the projection of Subject-expression toward the Outside is not the molding in our image of some alien substance. As argued in the previous chapter, individual subjects need to be understood not as essentially separate from the Outside, but in their concrete determinations, acquired through their concrete interaction with the Outside. But this also implies that the Outside cannot be understood as essentially separate from the Inside that expresses through it. Therefore, when we act on the world and we make it responsive to our needs and wishes, we actually unearth and activate a latent potential for self-expression that is already there in the dynamic ontology of sequences. The “I” that is hidden in the O-I-O sequence, i.e., in the

apparently unresponsive objectivity of the world, which only appears unresponsive because we lack the know-how or ability that would allow us to see it as a resource in fulfilling our needs.

Unmet needs momentarily stand out as something in themselves, as opposed to an unresponsive environment. By working out solutions, we mold the Outside by unlocking the potential for an I-O-I sequence, that is, potential for self-expression. When needs, aims etc. are perceived as unmet, we believe they exist only in us, without an immediate or obvious answer on the Outside. That need/aim feels itself momentarily isolated from the rest of the universe. It exists as a dynamic tendency to look toward the Outside for a solution. Meeting an unmet need, realizing an unrealized wish, that is, switching on a sequence that is switched off, means making the Outside responsive to us in a certain respect, thereby making our isolation from the Outside, in that respect, subside.

No matter how much we believe we were prey to our environment in the past, how much we think it has molded us, something emerged in us as humans: an awareness of the possibility of doing more with the Outside than the Outside could ever do to us, an awareness that eventually led to reversing the flow of action from Outside → Inside to Inside → Outside. What exactly this “something” is that made us emerge is a question that must remain unanswered for now, as I will only be able to explain my full view concerning it in Chapter VII, after developing my philosophy of history.

So far, we have seen that unmet needs, aims and wishes seek self-fulfillment,<sup>6</sup> thereby making us feel that we need to do something in order to feel at home. Likewise, forced or sudden displacement may seem to disrupt the subject’s continuity with its close

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<sup>6</sup> Nine does not focus exclusively on actions which results from plans, desires, etc. but also on sentimental value, memories, etc. I am focusing only on the action-oriented aspect.

environment, making it forcibly stand out, making its met needs, expectations, etc. be suddenly pushed back into the separated realm of unmet wishes, desires etc. where they will be part of the subject without being exteriorized. That is, they will be pushed back into the Inside that opposes an Outside.

Cara Nine (2018) develops this line of argument in her analysis of the cognitive distress resulting from displacement from home. She argues that being displaced from the home destroys the cognitively functional relationships the subject has woven with that place. This is true in situations, as those mostly analyzed in Nine's paper, where people are evicted or forcefully displaced from their actual, literal homes. Nine argues that the distress can be partly attributed to the disruption of the relations of extended cognition that the person has woven with their house: the house becomes part of the person's extended mind, following Clark's and Chalmer's account that an individual's cognitive functions can be outsourced to outside objects.

The phenomenon highlighted by Nine is the complement of that highlighted by Christiano, although Christiano does not address the issue of extended cognition. According to Christiano, subjects seek to make themselves at home by molding the world around them. We have two opposite movements: one from the Inside to the Outside and one, in Nine's analysis, from the Outside to the Inside, where external factors 'retake' the home spaces that individuals had built, and individuals can no longer use those spaces as expressions of self-fulfillment. Either way, Christiano's and Nine's analyses depend on the idea of a particular and personal relationship with the environment created by action. Thus, in both cases the idea of a particularizing effect of agency is preserved.

Other theorists of territorial rights establish aspects of their view on the fact that the subject has certain plans and those plans are realized, or are to be realized, somewhere

specific. Anna Stilz (2013) has developed a view that individual agents have what she calls “situated goals” or “located life plans”. These, in her view, are hierarchically structured systems of aims which give meaning to life, owing to which many “lower” aims are functional to the realization of more comprehensive plans. On Stilz’s view, the located quality of the results of human action is spelt out clearly, in that they are they are features of individual plans acted out in specific places. By acting, now or in the future, the value of the land for the individual agent is realized through their actions.

Similarly, Kim Angell specifies that life plans must be political as well as non-political, i.e., they must be supplemented by the subject’s plan to “exercise her democratic autonomy as a citizen of the particular (territorial) polity under which she (or her group) has lived, or is living” (2017, p. 232) The emphasis on a specific territory remains. The subjects who develop Political Life Plans “have organized their lives around their being (or becoming) citizens of their particular state as it is (or was). This includes that state’s physical configuration – the way it is (or was) erected upon, and integrated in, a certain geographical space.” (Ibid., p. 239) David Miller adds a fourth dimension of time to group action: groups must be “transhistorical” agents, “[...] such that the present generation which has inherited rights from its predecessors recognizes reciprocal obligations towards successor generations stretching far into the future” (2012, p. 264) In other words, particularity is something that is created by particular groups acting on particular territories. Action not only creates particularity, but it is capable, under certain conditions, of retaining it for the future generations to enjoy, after having inherited it from past generations. Particularity, understood as the result of human activity, is the result of particular groups preserving a degree of consistency through time in the way they create and maintain value in a specific place. Part of this consistency stems from the ability to create value in a particular place.

To summarize, territorial rights theories focus on the actions that specific agents pursue to make specific places into their home. They presuppose the claim that actions are particularizing—they personalize places, making them distinctly match the agents that acted on them.

## Section II – The Universal Agent: Agency as the Solvent of Particularity

One point emerges so far from the views I have analyzed: the belief that human action particularizes and personalizes the territory. In the present section, I show that the opposite is true. In my view, agency always has a de-particularizing and de-personalizing effect on the Outside. This, I argue, is the consequence of the fact that human agency is not individual, but universal, which means that it cannot conform the Outside to individual values, but only dissolve the Outside's limitative effect on the Inside. In my view, individuals are not different agents, but the same agent, which I call the Universal Agent, acting through different subjects. In turn, individual subjects are characterized by different disabilities/limitations, rather than by a separate agency.

The argument I develop in this section is going to play a central role for the rest of this thesis, and it also allows me to ground my view of collective subjects in the next section. We are all the same agency at work in fields characterized by different limitations. This implies that collectives must be viewed as the same agency expressing in similar ways through different individual outlets that share similar limitations.

The central claim I developed in Chapter II was that subjects must be understood in their full embeddedness in the Outside. There cannot be a single trait X that I have regardless of my interaction with the Outside. If there were such trait X, it would be impossible for it to be in contact with the Outside, but also with the parts of me that are not X as a consequence of coming to be through interaction with the Outside. This

means that no trait X is descriptive of my essence, regardless of my concrete interaction with the Outside from moment to moment, interaction being, as described in Chapter I, the unitary movement that grounds the Inside and the Outside as the duality that expresses it.

If there is nothing that I am essentially, i.e., regardless of how I concretely acquire that trait through the embedment of the Outside, then all my traits, actual or potential, positive and negative, are equally essential and equally inessential to me: all contribute to describing me, but none more than any other.

This leads to what I have called sequential subjecthood. Each sequence corresponds to a trait of the subject, whether positive (in the general form of Me-X-ing, e.g. Me-developing-opposable-thumbs, Me-pointing-my-finger-at-the-Moon, Me-dyeing-my-hair-blue, Me-discovering-America, Me-cultivating-potatoes, Me-having-a-crooked-nose) or negative (in the general form of Me-not-X-ing, e.g. Me-not-using-a-device-that-will-be-invented-in-a-thousand-years, Me-not-having-a-conversation-with-Socrates, Me-not-knowing-the-cure-for-cancer, Me-not-cultivating-soya-beans, etc.)

As can be seen, my definition of a trait is extremely loose, encompassing genetics, biology, physics, everyday actions etc. Any concrete manifestation of any conceivable individual that can be singled out and put in the general Me-X-ing or Me-not-X-ing form is a trait. As anticipated in Chapter II, and as shall become clear in this section, these sequences are not static, but dynamic, that is, they are expressions of the Inside-Outside dynamic interaction.

In envisioning subjects as bundles of sequences, we necessarily merge the realm of human agency and that of ontology. It is all good to say that humans are part of reality or nature (which is something of a platitude), but this is just hot air if we don't draw the necessary consequence: I cannot be fully embedded in the Outside without the

Outside being fully embedded in me. If there is no trait X that I display essentially, regardless of my interaction with the Outside, it must follow that the Outside has no trait X that it displays regardless its interaction with me. If this weren't the case, there would be something, a point X, that positively defines the Outside in an essential way and negatively defines me as essentially -X, once again re-establishing a full dualism between Inside and Outside. This point X that is supposedly absolutely outside of me would also be entirely outside of any sequence revolving around me. This would prompt the question how we can even talk about this X that we can never interact with or speak about, for even speaking about it and conjecturing its nature to be absolutely external to my agency implies the activation of a sequence, i.e., Me-thinking-there-is-something-I- cannot-know-or-interact-with, which is itself contradictory. If I can say that I cannot know it or interact with it, then I do know and interact with it. As such, if there is no point in me that exceeds reality, it must follow that there is no point in reality that exceeds me.

In this sense, the outside world can never be conceived aside from the sum total of subjective aims, guided by know-how/ability, corresponding to the sum total of actions (of Me-X-ing's) that can be performed through it by embedding it. This, in turn, implies that subjective aims are not separable from the ontological fabric of reality, and that the agency that we express pervades the universe as it centers around us, and nothing can be said about what is beyond it.

To sum it up, every self-configuration or subjective sequence corresponds to an active manifestation of a subject, and is therefore also the potential aim for action. In turn, every aim<sup>7</sup> for action corresponds to a bit of know-how or ability to do and to a state of being of a certain point in space-time. As a result, the sum total of possible states of

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<sup>7</sup> In this section I show that reality (and agency, which is the same) is not teleological. The aims I talk about here are those that a subject develops as a consequence of its misreading of the agency that it channels.



being of the sum total of points in space-time corresponds to (and is exactly the same thing as) the sum total of aims for action existing in the sum total of possible subjective trait-sequences. Ontology cannot be conceived apart from agency and is fully reducible to it. Agency, as I shall now go on to argue, is simply another name for the interaction from which the interplay of Inside and Outside stems.

We have seen that individual subjects are completely devoid of any essence that exists apart from their concrete determinations, and that because they are fully embedded in the Outside, their lack of essence corresponds to the Outside's lack of essence. We must now draw a further conclusion. If I had a fixed essence X, no amount of action on my part would be able to modify it, otherwise there would be the possibility of me being myself without being X, so that X could not be my essence.

An essence is always a limit to action. In fact, if I had an essence, I would have no agency. Because agency cannot modify essence, my supposed essence cannot be the result of my agency, which implies that agency does not add anything to the description of my essence: my thinking about it, for instance, does not change it from not-thought-about to thought-about, and this is already absurd, unless we theorize that my essence has its own essence, which only pushes the problem back without solving it. Furthermore, because essence is not modified by agency and cannot come from it, it must exist conceptually prior to it and be presupposed by it, but because essence does nothing, it cannot give rise to it.

If agency derived from something static that exists before it, it could never emerge from it. Thus, my lack of a fixed essence entails the possibility of acting in the sum total of all possible directions, and because my lack of a fixed essence equals the Outside's lack of a fixed essence, my lack of essence implies the impossibility of the Outside offering any type of resistance to my action that doesn't depend on a purely situational

inability, on my part, to activate myself in that direction. Therefore, the sum total of all possible traits, derived from the sum total of all possible interactions with the sum total of all points in space and time always describes me. What accounts for my constantly changing configurations over time is whether a trait is switched on (Me-X-ing) or off (Me-not-X-ing). The sum total, however, remains the same.

The same is true for different individuals. My essential emptiness must be another individual's essential emptiness, otherwise there would have to be some fixed trait X that distinguishes my lack of essence from another individual's, but this would reestablish separate individual essences and therefore the impossibility of agency to emerge from them.

As already discussed in Chapter II, each individual is made up of the same sum total of possible traits, differently switched around, which means that each individual is an alternative configuration of the universe. We don't exist next to each other in a preexisting shared universe that is indifferent to us, for such preexisting universe is contradictory to even think or talk about. What we call our shared universe is not something that precedes us, but the byproduct of a partial overlapping of the various alternative configurations of the universe that are the various individuals.

All individuals are the same emptiness giving birth to an alternative reshuffling of the sum total of possible sequences/traits, that is, all are the same exact openness to the sum total of possible traits. We have seen that essence implies a limitation to action that cannot be overcome. Thus, the absence of a fixed essence implies the lack of insurmountable limits to my (or anyone's) agency. Essential emptiness cannot be a passive state, i.e., a passive lack of traits, otherwise it would become a static trait, and therefore, once again, an essence.

This, as discussed in Chapter II, is the problem with both substratum theories and with bundle theories: they both treat what's underneath the subject as a static fact, whether they end up calling it substratum or "nothing". I showed that the "nothing" of bundle theory must be understood dynamically, that is, as agency. The absence of essence is the absence of limits to agency, therefore it equals unrestricted agency. The two terms are synonyms, so that saying "lack of essence", "nothing", "lack of properties" (in substratum theory), "lack of substratum" (in bundle theory) or saying "agency" is the same thing. I stick with agency through this thesis.

Because my lack of essence is your lack of essence, my unlimited agency is your unlimited agency, and that of every other individual. There can only be one agency, single, indivisible and universal, present as a whole in each of its manifestations, that is, at the center of each alternative configuration of the universe making up individual subjects. I call this the Universal Agent.

We have seen that true essencelessness is active essencelessness and therefore unrestricted agency. Furthermore, we have seen that unrestricted agency implies that no trait X is a limit to it. The Universal Agent's essential emptiness implies, as a result, its openness to the overcoming of the sum total of all possible limits. Pure agency must be pure dissolution of limit, pure limit-overcoming. A limit can only manifest as a specific trait X of a specific subject, that is, a trait that a specific subject is incapable of overcoming and is therefore embedded by as the subject emerges to overcome other limits. If pure agency equals pure dissolution of limit and if limits exist only as concrete traits of concrete individuals, it follows that pure agency must be pure *self-overcoming*, i.e., the overcoming of the possibility of any trait X embodied by someone constituting an essential limit to agency. Therefore, the Universal Agent is pure self-overcoming activity, and this pure self-overcoming activity implies the self-overcoming of the sum

total of all possible limits and therefore the overcoming of the sum total of all possible traits/states of being.

Furthermore, because the emptiness of the Inside is the emptiness of the Outside, both being an expression of the same dynamic interaction, and because essential emptiness implies pure self-overcoming, the self-overcoming of the Inside is the self-overcoming of the Outside. Since self-overcoming implies the overcoming of traits/states of being, the self-overcoming of the Inside corresponds therefore to what we call “change” on the Outside: every change in the universe as it centers around me is the same thing as the self-overcoming that happens in me from second to second, and is connected to it.<sup>8</sup> Self-overcoming and change are synonyms.

I have now established that there is only one, universal agency. The implication is that nothing essential separates an individual from another except their situational difference in the ability to embody certain traits and therefore to overcome certain limits, this situational difference being what grounds them as alternative versions of the universe and therefore alternative individuals rather than the same one. This means, in turn, that what characterizes individuals in their individuality is not their agency, because agency is universal. What distinguishes them is the way in which this universal agency is limited. But because agency implies the overcoming of all limits, the only thing that can situationally limit it is lack of ability, i.e., the not knowing how to overcome certain limits (throughout this work, I use “ability” and “know-how” as synonyms).

In other words, individuals are fields of manifestation of the Universal Agent, i.e., pure self-overcoming, characterized by a know-how that is not fully adequate to the

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<sup>8</sup> This does not imply that individuals are all-powerful, nor that they are morally responsible for all that goes on in the universe, nor that they somehow “deserve” everything that happens to them. Individuals are, in fact, powerless, as it will become clear shortly, in the sense that they are not the source of the change that happens through them.

unobstructed expression of the overcoming of the sum total of all possible limits that follows from the Universal Agent's self-overcoming. Thus, different individuals are characterized by different ways in which human know-how is not adequate to and falls short of the process of self-overcoming that expresses through them, and therefore by different ways of partially obstructing this process. In short, different individuals come into being from different sets of disabilities restricting the same universal agency.

Disabilities are what makes individuals feel embedded in the Outside, because the inability to overcome certain traits makes the subject develop the idea of that trait being more inherent to him or her as a subject than other traits. It follows that we are different individuals exactly because each of us faces a different territory from anyone else. In so far as we are agents, we are the Universal Agent. The agency in us is universal, while the limitations in us are particular. I call individuals "subjects" because in so far as we are individuals, i.e., in so far as our know-how is not adequate to the agency that finds expression through us, we are subjected to particular circumstances (the territory that embeds us) and are incapable of overcoming certain limits and certain traits.

As a result of these situational limitations, we develop our identity as individuals who think they "are" X or Y or Z as opposed to -X, -Y or -Z. But subjecthood stands in opposition to agency: being a subject means lacking know-how, therefore pure subjecthood would mean pure lack of agency. We are subjects because, in lacking some know-how, we attach our self-image/sense of identity to certain traits, not because these traits are truly essential, but because we are unable to overcome all traits.

The Universal Agent is not a subject and does not have an identity. It is, in fact, the negation of subjecthood and identity, because they are all limitations to the activity of

self-overcoming. We can say that each of us is the same agent acting through different subjects.

Agency is universal. It only finds expression through individual subjects, but does not originate in their individual subjectivity, which is a result of their relative impotence, i.e., their relative inability to be agents. As a necessary consequence, I argue, agency cannot have a particularizing or personalizing effect on the Outside. Contrary to most territorial rights theorists, I hold that agency is the universal solvent of particularity. Particularity emerges as a field of limitations caused by a subject's relative inability. Within this particular field, the Universal Agent carries out its agency, albeit partially obstructed.

Agency, we have seen, is limit-overcoming. Particularity, on the other hand, is a result of a subject's limits. Therefore, agency overcomes particularity, in that it dissolves the limits that constitute particularity. Since agency is universal, it cannot bring the Outside into conformity with individual values, that is, it cannot make the Outside correspond to an individual's wish or plan. Individual values, the needs, wishes and projects that the individual subject wants to project on the Outside to make a home for itself, are a result of the subject's self-image, which in turn is a function of the subject's lack of know-how.

Agency is, in itself, not geared toward a specific result or aim or end; it is generally directed towards 'self-overcoming'. As self-overcoming, it overcomes all limits and traits and aims for action. But no limit or aim is intrinsically weighted more heavily than any other. As such, the Universal Agent is not attached to any result, being equally close to and equidistant from all of them, which means that it is a-teleological. Agency is therefore originally and foundationally aimless and meaningless, and, because agency and ontology coincide, the world must be aimless and meaningless.

We can even say that, if agency had a specific, fixed aim X, that aim X would constitute its essence, thereby preventing it from emerging as agency. As shown above, a fixed state of being cannot account for the emergence of agency from it, and the only way for agency to have a fixed aim would be for this aim to not be modifiable by agency (otherwise agency could modify its own aim from X to -X), but this implies that 1) if agency had an aim it could not reach it, because, in reaching it, it would modify it from non-reached to reached; and 2) this aim, in order not to be modifiable by agency, would need to not arise from it, which means that it would need to exist prior to agency, but, being static, it would stop agency from even emerging as the attempt to reach it. Thus, if agency had a meaning or aim it wouldn't exist, and because agency and ontology are the same, if the world had a meaning or aim it wouldn't exist.

Individuals, on the other hand, are characterized by a partial lack of ability/know-how which makes them partly obstruct the universal agency, i.e., the pure self-overcoming, that expresses through them. Individual subjects are the Universal Agent partly falling short of itself. As a result of their partial disability, individuals find themselves in a concrete situation made up of limits that are more or less hard to overcome: they are not equidistant from the overcoming of all possible limits. Since the self-overcoming of the Universal Agent, that is, the overcoming of all limits, finds expression through a field of disabilities where know-how is inadequate, individual subjects overcome certain limits rather than others, are unable to overcome many more (with varying degrees of difficulty) and don't know of the existence of even more limits. Individual subjects thus create a more or less fixed or consistent self-image by attaching more importance to certain traits X, Y or Z as opposed to -X, -Y or -Z, and develop the concept of aim as a practical unfoldment of this view of themselves.

This is how the Universal Agent, which is a-teleological, becomes teleologically inclined and develops specific aims: a blind agency expresses through us and, thanks to our

relative impotence, it becomes slanted in the direction of overcoming certain limits as opposed to certain other limits. But, because agency is necessarily meaningless and aimless, it is open to the pursuit of every meaning and aim, which means that we are capable of creating meanings and aims and to strategize to reach them as opposed to other aims, because our relative impotence channels agency in one direction rather than in another.

As individual subjects, we have a self-image. We therefore elaborate plans and wishes and projects with which we seek to bring reality into conformity with our self-image. We treat certain traits/states of being as aims, some others as means or resources, some others as grave limitations, some as less grave limitations, and some others still as indifferent for our purposes, while ignoring many others. In contrast, the Universal Agent overcomes all traits equally because it is self-overcoming and therefore limit-overcoming, and it is limit-overcoming because it is active essencelessness. The Universal Agent overcomes all traits and therefore all traits that could be the source of a subject's self-image and, having consequently no self-image, it has no specific aim.

As such, the Universal Agent does not seek to conform reality to itself, but rather it suppresses all traits X...Z that could constitute a limit to which it would have to conform and be unable to act against, as though those traits were its unmodifiable essence which would prevent it from existing. Subjects, from their limited perspective, misinterpret the agency that expresses through them as a means to conform reality to their own individual aims: they take self-overcoming and misinterpret it as self-determination. In other words, they see the overcoming of all limits that flows through them and, due to the optical illusion of their limitations, see it as them using agency as a means in the establishing of particular results guided by aims consistent with their particular self-image, which, however, is a result of their individual limits.



This is how we come to believe that agency particularizes the Outside, and why this belief is wrong. Agency, being universal, overcomes all limits. It is not the conforming of reality to specific aims, since aims are the result of limits, not of agency. Agency can only dissolve limits. We, as individual subjects, see the overcoming of all limits that courses through us and interpret it as a means in the establishing of a world consistent with the limits that characterize us and inform our self-image. In so doing, however, our reaching for specific aims becomes itself a means in the carrying out of the aimless universal agency that expresses through us. The agency that we use to overcome the state/trait -X which we see as a limit to reach the state/trait X which we see as an aim is the same agency whose essenceless activity already implies the overcoming of -X and X as limits to its own self-overcoming, which suppresses all traits and therefore all possible self-images derived from being attached to those traits.

In short, agency cannot bring the Outside into conformity with individual values because agency dissolves the limits that form the background against which individual values emerge. For instance, a group that deviates the course of a river in order to bring water to their village and fields may think that they are acting to overcome a certain limit, e.g., lack of water, to reach an aim, e.g., having water to grow their crops. Apparently, they have brought reality into conformity with their aims. But this is not true. On my view, as articulated in this section, all we can say is that agency has overcome a limit/trait/state of being, that where the course of the river hasn't been deviated.

Saying that agency has reached an aim would imply ascribing an essence to agency (and therefore to change, since they are synonyms), thereby making it impossible for it to emerge as agency: if there were an aim, there wouldn't be the movement that leads to it. Agency does not bring reality into conformity with aims. Agency *brings reality out of conformity with itself*. Since self-overcoming is the same as change, each

moment overcomes the previous one as a state of being which, had it remained fixed, would have constituted a limit to its own overcoming. Therefore, each moment, being the self-overcoming of the previous moment, represents something that is irreducible to it, and consequently wholly new and original with respect to it, so much so that it can only manifest when the previous one is no longer there to suffocate its emergence. As such, each passing moment implies reality (which is agency) defying its previous state, transgressing it, refusing to conform to it. Agency may well be described as an uninterrupted and blind act of non-conformism.

Aims, purposes, personal agendas, etc. are only a subjective interpretation of agency/change. They are a subjective interpretation of the fact that agency expresses itself in one direction as opposed to another as a consequence of the obstructions that limit, and therefore chart, its course. This course, however, is not decided by the subject's will, whatever it may be and if it exists at all, but by their limited know-how, which allows the self-overcoming to express in one direction as opposed to all others. Placed in the concrete circumstances of a subject's limitedness and therefore ignorance, the only limit that agency can overcome, from moment to moment, is exactly the one that the concrete subject overcomes from moment to moment, mistaking it for self-determination, that is, for an aim-oriented change. Thus, teleology is only a subjective interpretation of an objectively aimless process.

But the above doesn't mean that we ought not to have aims or that we ought to transcend our being teleological creatures. This would be impossible. Firstly, even transcending our being aim-oriented would be an aim, so that we cannot leave ourselves behind without reestablishing ourselves anew. Even those that try to reach peace of mind, or "Nirvana", or spiritual or psychological evolution are doing so not because they are actually improving or elevating themselves, but because that's the only thing agency can do, placed in the field of these concrete subjects with their

concrete, momentary self-image caused by their particular inabilities at that moment. That is, even the reaching for lofty aims is nothing but a way for further disruption of limits to take place, before this disruption is itself disrupted by its overcoming. Secondly, the various subjects' belief in their own self-determination, while an optical illusion, is a necessary illusion, for without it agency would have no channels for overcoming further limits.

To conclude, I have shown that: 1) agency is universal while subjecthood is individual; 2) agency is essential emptiness and is therefore aimless; 3) aims are the result of individual limitation, which makes individual subjects create a self-image that orients them in the attempt to conform the outside to their plans; 4) agency is not the realization of plans or actualization of self-images, but self-overcoming, which is the overcoming of the sum total of possible limits/traits; 5) the self-overcoming of the Inside is the self-overcoming of the Outside, and self-overcoming is synonymous with change.

### Section III – Collective Subjectivity as Shared Disability

In this section, I present my view of collective subjects, which is consistent with my take on agency. In short, I show that group subjectivity is shared impotence in filtering agency which results in similar actions, regardless of any possible shared rationality or agreement.

In the previous section, I showed that different individuals are not separate agencies, but the same agency at work in different fields characterized by different disabilities. Individual subjects must necessarily be seen as the same agency, which stems from the fact that, in order for agency to be devoid of essence (and we have seen that it must be), it cannot be different in different individuals.

At the same time, the Universal Agent does not exist apart from the individual subjects through which it expresses. In other words, its agency is always at work within a field characterized by disabilities that partially obstruct its self-overcoming. If this weren't the case, the Universal Agent would transcend the various subjects, thus re-establishing individual essences both for the subjects (who would be Non-Universal-Agent) and for the Universal Agent (who would be Non-All-The-Subjects). Also, if we were to consider agency apart from the subjects through which it expresses, agency would find itself without limits to overcome. We have seen that the Universal Agent is equally distant from all possible limits, so that there is no reason for it to overcome X rather than -X. Thus, taken separately from the various subjects, who shape its course through their ignorance (which they mistake for will and aims), agency would find itself in an inert state, which is not agency but essence, and this, we have seen, is impossible.

It is only when at work within a subjective field that is characterized by relative impotence/lack of know-how that agency is slanted toward the overcoming of certain limits as opposed to others. In their state of relative ignorance, subjects attach their self-image to certain traits, interpret certain traits as aims, certain others as limits, ignore many more traits, etc. Thus, they create hierarchies of aims, strategize about their resources, seek to avoid certain situations, etc. The well-rounded personality of a subject is the necessary vessel for the self-overcoming activity of agency. The purposelessness of the Universal Agent must be expressed through the purposefulness and teleological attitude of individual subjects. Its aimlessness perpetuates itself using subjective aims as a means. This means that ignorance, which grounds our existence as individual subjects, exerts a magnetic pull on agency, attracting it toward specific paths of expression that it would otherwise lack. In partially obstructing the full expression of its overcoming activity, subjects give the Universal Agent obstructions to overcome.

Individual subjects are characterized by different ways of being ignorant/impotent applied to the same agency, thus partly obstructing it. Consequently, just as there is no such thing as individual agency, there is also no such thing as group agency, for agency does not belong to individuals, and therefore cannot belong to groups either. No matter how many subjects we put together in one group, the agency that expresses through them is the same as the agency that expresses through the subjects we leave out of the group. In contrast, the fact that agency is universal implies also that different subjects acting similarly slant the Universal Agent's self-overcoming toward a similar path of expression. But this can happen only if these subjects obstruct agency in a similar way. That is, collectives do not emerge as a result of separate agents coming together for an agreed shared purpose, nor by answering requirements concerning shared rationality. Collectives emerge because the agency that they already share is situationally blocked from expressing differently by similar ways of being ignorant.

According to Christian List and Philip Pettit (2006) group agents are characterized by the fact that they mimic the rational way in which individuals act. Furthermore, List (2016, p. 4) writes "A random collective— say the collection of shoppers who happen to be in the supermarket at this moment—lacks the required structure. But a suitably organized collective can in principle meet the conditions [to qualify as a group agent]."

On his definition, therefore, additional steps need to be taken in order for individual agents to come together as a group agent. This is not the case on my view. Each subject is the same essential emptiness which is open to the overcoming of the same sum total of all possible traits, but this same essential emptiness is filtered differently through different fields. What makes the fields different is that each of them is characterized by (partly) different bits of know-how, required to overcome certain traits, being situationally unavailable (in short, ignorance).

Throughout this chapter I have been emphasizing that ignorance/impotence is individual. Each of us is radically different from another individual as a result of being faced with limits that are at least partially different from those faced by any other individual. What makes each of us radically different from other people (and from ourselves across time) is the fact that the set of limitations that shape us only apply to us at that moment. It follows that subjects diverge from one another in so far as their ignorance is different, but in so far as their ignorance coincides, so does subjecthood.

Therefore, it is not so much that individual subjects come together for shared purposes to form a collective subject, but that they emerge as individuals out the shared purposes of collective subjecthood in so far as they are uniquely ignorant/impotent. Therefore, if individual subjecthood is individual impotence, collective subjecthood is collective impotence. This does not imply that the collectivity exists “before” the individual. Just as the forming of a collectivity does not require additional effort from individuals, so individuals do not emerge out of the collectivity through an additional step that presupposes the collectivity, but both exist at the same time and neither is superior or exists hierarchically prior to the other.

No subject shares exactly the same ignorance as any other. However, factors like living in the same age in a similar part of the world, or coming from a similar cultural background, or being from a similar social class often provide enough shared ignorance for forms of collective subjecthood to exist. If we zoom in, more minute factors become relevant and we can be more selective. If we zoom out, factors like having similar physiological functions (or, ultimately, even just being alive) already provide clues of a shared impotence that makes a shared subjecthood emerge.<sup>9</sup>

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<sup>9</sup> Eric Schwitzgebel (2015) makes the example an alien looking at the United States from a great distance and seeing it as a single group entity with shared purposes that make it comparable to an animal. Using the same example, on my own principles, we could say that the alien is capable of seeing the group before the

Certainly, in humans, shared subjecthood can lead to rationality and agreement, as List requires, but rationality does not constitute subjecthood. Rationality implies aims, and aims, as I have shown in the previous section, imply ignorance. Rationality is a reflection of ignorance, because without ignorance we wouldn't need to classify traits as aims or limits or means, etc. Therefore, the primary element in shared subjecthood is shared ignorance. It is the shared ignorance that makes aims emerge out of the aimless universal agency that it channels. It is against the background of this ignorance that individuals form their self-image, created by attaching more importance to certain traits. In so far as ignorance is shared, it is going to inform the various individuals' self-image in similar ways, while in so far as ignorance becomes more and more particular to the specific subject, the self-image is unique, characterizing the individual's irreplaceable struggle in life as a carve-out from the Universal Agent's self-overcoming.

#### Section IV – Objections and Comparisons

The main acquisition of the previous sections is that we are all the same agency playing out through different subjectivities. In this final section, I consider some possible objections to my view on the Universal Agent formulated in Section II. I also compare my theory with that of the Neoplatonist Plotinus and the German Idealist Fichte, whose views are probably the closest to mine.

A possible objection to my view is that my understanding of agency debases our status as human beings, reducing us to a cosmic device whereby limits (and therefore human traits) are blindly and senselessly overcome, whereas we (including many territorial rights theorists, as shown in Section I) understand agency as something that creates value. I do not deny that my view is somewhat iconoclastic with regard to humanity

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individuals that make it up because, being distant, it is capable of abstracting from the various individuals' particular aims. In other words, it is a matter of zooming in or out.

and human agency. However, my view does not detract one bit from the intensity of our experience of agency and the relative validity of our commonsense interpretation of it.

Let's draw a parallel. A biologist saying that love is a chemical reaction takes nothing away from the validity or intensity of the experience of love, but simply looks at love through a lens that allows him or her to unveil a layer of explanation of the phenomenon of love in a wider context. If a chemical reaction can be responsible for what is one of the subjects of the greatest literature and philosophy and the inspiration behind the best (and worst) of our deeds, then this is testament less to the unexceptional nature of love than to the exceptional power of chemical reactions. But the truth of the experience is not altered by the explanation. While saying "chemical reaction" certainly sounds less romantic than "affection of the soul", if love is indeed a chemical reaction, this proves not that there is something unromantic in love, but that there is something romantic in chemistry.

Similarly, saying that we are a set of limits through which change happens, and that it's our limitations that make us interpret this process as a meaningful, aim-oriented, coherent, value-creating process is less a debasement of the value we create than an exaltation of the power of change to allow for our ability to devise aims we feel worth reaching. Again, the truth of the experience is not altered by the explanation. In fact, as already said in Section II, if we weren't teleologically inclined creatures, the a-teleological process that happens through us wouldn't unfold.

Another possible objection might be that I have reified the concept of agency. I counter this objection on the grounds that, on my view, agency is not a "res" or substance. In fact, it is the negation of it. Furthermore, as already shown in the previous section, the Universal Agent is not something that exists outside of the subjects that express its



agency. The concept of Universal Agent is what we get to when we bring the idea of a lack of “res” to its ultimate conclusion. Agency overcomes limits, and limits are traits, therefore agency eliminates anything that might be reified into a substance that prevents change from happening.

Another objection still is that this universal agency does not appear to be human at all. It seems, in fact, to be entirely impersonal. This is true: the Universal Agent is not a subject, a self or an “I”. It is, in fact, the radical negation of selfhood, because, in its activity of self-overcoming, it overcomes all possible traits and therefore all possible props that we may use to pin a sense of self to. Furthermore, we have seen in Chapter II that, on Darwin’s principles, no ontological leap exists between species. Therefore, there is no reason not to consider this same agency to be at work in non-human species.

As for why the Universal Agent does not appear to be human, the question is, evidently, what humanity is. Pico della Mirandola, whose view I have discussed in the previous chapter, held that humanity is without essence, which matches my discussion in Section II. However, I have supported this view within a framework where agency and ontology have been merged and where no ontological difference between species exists, so that it is not just humans that are without essence, but everything. Therefore, it is not so much that the Universal Agent is inhuman: it’s that humanity is the evolutionary stage where the concept of the essence of things, including of humanity, is overcome. In other words, humanity is the stage where the essential emptiness of everything carries itself out actively and consciously.

Of interest, here, is a comparison between my view and that of Plotinus. For him, too, the universal element is beyond essence, just as I discussed the fact that the Universal Agent is beyond essence. Plotinus was mostly preoccupied with the problem of how

multiplicity derives from unity. According to him, God, which he calls One, or Unity, is the source of everything in that the unity that exists in all things is an emanation of the absolute unity of the One.

Plotinus' explanation of how multiplicity derives from unity is usually called "emanationism". For Plotinus, the One produces reality by freely determining itself: it is "[...] lord of its own act" (2005, VI,8,7) that is, in the One "[...] the essential act is identical with the being" (ibid.) In determining itself, in being active self-will, the One gives being to the various ontological strata characterized by increasing levels of multiplicity, until it reaches the point where the single "ones" emerge, that is, the single things which exemplify all the Oneness that is a-temporally within the One.

The One does not seek to create existence: the creation of the universe is a necessary consequence, a reflection or effluence, of the One's own self-creation. This is in contrast with, for instance, Christian creationism, where God directly wants the world to spring into existence. Similarly, on my account, the Universal Agent does not seek to "create" the Outside, it does not seek to act on it, but only to overcome itself.

Because Plotinus lived before Darwin, he believed that the various things had a relatively unchangeable essence. He believed that the further away the emanation got from the One, the less perfect and real it got, until the real world emerges. This is an example of the concept of ladder of being which I have discussed in the previous chapter, according to which existence unfolds in a series of objectively self-consistent and separate degrees of "realness".

In this sense, for Plotinus, while the One is the only thing that really exists, at the same time it is also the great exception, being the only thing beyond essence while the things that flow out of it do have a more fixed essence. The One, in other words, is characterized by Plotinus as the only transcendent Agent. In my view, in contrast, the

Universal Agent is beyond essence and, therefore, everything must be beyond essence. Furthermore, the Universal Agent is not beyond essence because it determines itself to be what it is, as is the case with the One, but because it dynamically eliminates all possibility of an essence determining it. It's self-overcoming, not self-determination. Self-determination emerges only as a subjective interpretation of self-overcoming by individuals. Therefore, Plotinus' One is an anthropomorphic concept, while the Universal Agent isn't.

A further difference between my view and Plotinus' stems from the fact that the One is beyond essence while everything else is not, whereas in my view everything is beyond essence. Because the One is so abstract from reality, and because individuals have lapsed away from it through various stages of degradation of the unity into multiplicity, they need to travel back toward the One. This concept forms the foundation of Plotinus' mystical ethics, whose goal is the reunification of the individual with their universal principle through moral/philosophical practices, i.e., through philosophy as a way of life.

My view is not in the least mystical or ascetic, exactly because, from my perspective, we don't need to be doing anything more than we already are doing. Furthermore, my view is entirely opposed to the idea that individuals must relinquish their irreplaceable particularity in order to embrace the universal, because particular and universal are already the same thing in us, and therefore without our existence as particular individuals, the Universal Agent would be deprived of its agency. In other words, there is nothing to reconcile, no "fall" to make up for, no severed link to mend, no illusion to meditate our way out of, no "ought" to live up to.

Another possible criticism of my view could be that theorizing the Universal Agent introduces a weird metaphysical entity, a god or deity of sorts in the heart of

philosophy. This is not the case. Far from being a deity, the Universal Agent is the explicit negation of it. My view is not agnostic, but atheistic. However we define God, its existence must determine us as subjects who have a certain trait that inheres to us essentially. If God is X, at the very least I must be essentially -X. But, as we have seen in the previous section, essence limits agency. If there is a God, then as soon as I exist, I exist as a fixed, static trait -X, and only in a second moment as agent. The problem for this view becomes, then, how agency, which is active movement, can stem from a static picture: once we posit something that does not change, no change can come from it. Any essence denies me as agent, but because I am an agent who is capable of action, I cannot have a fixed essence that limits me, and therefore nothing can exist that causes me to have a fixed essence.

One could argue that there are other conceptions of deity that are less transcendent and that could apply to the Universal Agent. If we subscribe to pantheism, for instance, then everything is God and God does not exist outside of the universe. But I have shown that nothing, no trait, no state of being exists essentially, therefore nothing "is", which means that nothing is divine. Since we made the Inside and the Outside fully woven one into the other, the Inside's self-overcoming must be the Outside's self-overcoming, and because self-overcoming implies aimlessness and meaninglessness, then the aimlessness and meaninglessness of the Universal Agent are the aimlessness and meaningless of the whole universe. Why, then, call the universe God, if doing so does not add anything to our understanding of it?

Finally, one could argue that the Universal Agent is God in the same sense that the pure subject, which Idealism inherited from Kant's notion of transcendental subject, was explicitly understood as God. To show why this is not the case, I shall now compare my view with that of German Idealist and Kantian philosopher Fichte. Fichte was inspired by Kant's transcendental criticism, but sought to bring it to its extreme

possibilities. The main innovation he added to the system was calling out Kant's notion of noumenon as contradictory. The noumenon is reality as it is, as opposed to reality as it emerges through our projection of categories onto it (from which the phenomenon appears).

According to Fichte (and the Idealists that took the same route, especially Schelling and Hegel), the noumenon is, in fact, a nonsensical concept: if all we have access to is the phenomenon, i.e., what appears to us, then the concept itself of a noumenon is self-contradictory, because we are positing it.

In his *Science of Knowledge*, Fichte explains that the Ego (or I, or Self, etc.) must therefore be the origin of both itself and what is not itself. The self-position of the Ego is, for Fichte, both act and fact, that is, it is the law of identity ( $A = A$ ) in its realization, through which the Ego causes/posits itself. Identity is thus, for Fichte, the foundation of existence and first moment of the dialectical movement. In my theory, this first moment corresponds to the Universal Agent's agency understood abstractly, apart from the individual subjects.

The secondary moment in the dialectical process is, for Fichte, that the Ego posits the Non-Ego in front of itself, which is in analogy with the law of non-contradiction, whereby  $A \neq -A$ . This pure and absolute difference, however, establishes a mutual limitation between Ego and Non-Ego that would re-establish Kant's absolute dualism between noumenon and subject if it were to be left as it is. A third moment of synthesis is required.

For Fichte, this absolute tension is solved by a third step in the process, whereby the Ego (which is not my ego or your ego, but the pure subject) fragments itself into the myriad particular egos (the particular subjects) who posit in front of themselves their world of particular objects of knowledge, their particular Non-Ego. In the constant act

of knowing, the particular selves re-establish themselves through their respective non-Ego, and thus participate in the constant process of rationalization.

Fichte understood that the outside world cannot be conceived as something autonomous from the subjective element, nor does denying the autonomy of the Outside imply that “it doesn’t exist”. Instead, it simply implies that it is futile to try to abstract the subjective element from the outside reality, as if doing so gave us access to reality as it is, as if reality as it is were beyond us and as if, in order to reach it, we had to deny ourselves. Reality as it is can be accessed because we affirm ourselves.

The main difference between my view and Fichte’s is that he understands the process of self-creation of the Ego as one of rationalization. Essentially, he took the idea of God as creator of order and rendered it more dynamic. The creation of order, in his view, becomes a process rather than something that exists *ab aeterno*. Still, it remains order, the constant “*Streben*”, i.e., effort to conquer alterity and bring it under one’s dominion and control. It is constantly rationalized chaos.

The Ego is the law of identity ( $A = A$ ) that constantly re-affirms itself through all differences, but this identity remains the static original moment of the dialectical process, even if Fichte claims that it is just as much an act as it is a fact: its static nature is due to the simple fact that it is the law of identity, and that contradiction happens only in the second step of the process. Once we posit that  $A = A$ , nothing else follows from it. Fichte cannot really derive anything from this basic tautology, let alone the second principle (that of non-contradiction). On Fichte’s principles, we ought to try to understand this identity in a dynamic way, but an identity is either an identity, and therefore it is not dynamic, or it is dynamic, and therefore it is not an identity. A dynamic identity is a square circle. Therefore, while we can appreciate Fichte’s attempt at capturing what he was trying to capture, we must reject his attempt.

Parts of my view stand in contrast to Fichte's. The Universal Agent is not the original identity, the original conformity with itself. The Universal Agent is the original difference and contradiction, the original act of non-conformism. It is the primal disruption, the primal self-overcoming that explodes in the face of every possible semblance of order, identity, system, etc. Its agency does not consist in self-creation or self-understanding, as for the transcendental subject of Idealism, but in self-overcoming, which is self-destruction.<sup>10</sup> It is not the victory of order over chaos, but the negation of the sum total of all possible ways of constructing order. Fichte's Ego is the constant reaffirmation of an identity, while the Universal Agent is the constant negation and suppression of it. As shown in Section II, the Universal Agent does not have an identity and is therefore not a subject or Ego: individual subjects have an identity, or rather, they create it for themselves, through their attachment to some of their limits and therefore to a specific self-image that derives from those limits.

To sum up, the Universal Agent can in no sense be understood as a deity exactly because it is not "something", like a self (or even less a "true self") or subject, or God, which is exactly why it can be an agent. A deity, however understood, must be something fixed or stabilizing, but if agency were something fixed or stable, it would not be agency. Same thing for a self. Furthermore, just as the Universal Agent is not a form of deity or self, it is not a form of transcendental subjectivity, either. If anything, the Universal Agent is the transcendental absence of subjectivity, selfhood, essence or God, that is, the constitutive lack of subject or God or essence or self, etc. that is required for us to be able to conceive the world as it is and our presence in it. It's the

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<sup>10</sup> A possible objection might be that there is no destruction without the creation of something new. I do not deny this. The self-destruction of each moment always gives rise to the next. I only showed that self-destruction, that is, self-overcoming, is the primary motor of reality, and creation/self-creation is its constant byproduct. But asserting that creativity has primacy, or even co-primacy, would imply a teleological view of agency, which would incur the problems I have discussed in the previous two sections. As such, creativity is only how destruction is interpreted by the various subjects.

transcendental absence of transcendentals, if we need to use this language. In other words, the absence of all these things cannot be a chance, as if there happens not to be a God, or a self, or a subject or a substance. Their absence is exactly what allows us to unfold as we are, so it's a transcendental absence. Far from being a strange metaphysical entity, the Universal Agent is nothing more and nothing less than each of us as agent, once we take into consideration what agency entails.



## CHAPTER IV - The Paradox of People and Territory, Revisited

### Introduction

The aim of this chapter is to bring to a close the first part of my thesis by retrieving my earlier discussion, in Chapter I, of Paulina Ochoa Espejo's take on the paradox of popular indeterminacy (which she elaborates into the paradox of people and territory). In doing so, I also take the opportunity to summarize the analytical work done so far to then be able to apply it in the next chapters. Finally, I also show that Ochoa Espejo's paradox does not constitute an issue for my approach.

Section I discusses Ochoa Espejo's take on the paradox. Section II summarizes my own view as developed so far. Section III shows how the ontological underpinnings of the paradox help us understand the problems with finding a normative solution to the paradox. I argue that Ochoa Espejo's paradox of people and territory is but one instance of a more general paradox of normativity, normativity being the phenomenon of human action seeking to delimit the scope of human action itself while forgetting that this act of setting limits is itself the result of an unbounded ability of human action to assert itself. Finally, in Section IV, I discuss how this first part of my thesis must necessarily lead, in the second part, to the elaboration of a philosophy of history.

### Section I – Ochoa Espejo's Take on the Paradox

In this section, I consider Ochoa Espejo's discussion of the paradox of popular indeterminacy. While my view is founded on ontological considerations, Ochoa Espejo's take on the paradox of the indeterminacy is founded on political principles.

I first provide a basic outline of Ochoa Espejo's whole argument, which is a variation on the older paradox of popular indeterminacy, as already discussed in Chapter I. She takes into account two types of democratic theories: cosmopolitanism, which argues against the presumption that demos should be divided into distinct groups; and non-cosmopolitanism, which makes this presumption and is represented by various theories: statist, nationalist, etc. According to Ochoa Espejo, despite their differences, cosmopolitanism and non-cosmopolitanism suffer from similar failings: both sets fail to define the demos by reference to decision-independent criteria, as an entity whose constitution is not the result of a decision, which would presuppose the existence of the demos as that entity that made the decision. She then goes on to argue that, whether tacitly or overtly, both sets rest their concept of demos on that of territory as a reality external to it that delimits it. But, she argues, their tacitly assumed concept of territory is itself a function of the people, because a territory requires a political group to define it as a particular, delimited piece of land. This creates a vicious circle. According to Ochoa Espejo, this circle must be either dissolved, asserted or circumvented.

Ochoa Espejo expands on the classic democratic paradox by adding a twist. She brings in the territorial dimension of democratic agents as a possible "decision-independent criterion". According to Ochoa Espejo, we ought to find a "decision-independent" criterion for delimitating the demos. We need a principle that tells us who the democratic agent is without the need for the same agent having to ratify it. If such criterion were found, there wouldn't be a risk of democratic theory devolving into a regressus ad infinitum, because the constitution of the demos would rest on principles that form the logical background of the demos' activity without resulting from it.

She then describes two kinds of approaches to finding this criterion. First, there is the approach that believes the demos must be bounded by some factor of internal

consistency, as is the case with nationalist theories. Second, there is the approach according to which no boundary exists, in principle, that might separate humanity into discrete groups, typified by cosmopolitanism.

The problem with the internal-consistency set of theories, Ochoa Espejo argues, is that none of them is capable of presenting a credible decision-independent criterion. Suppose we try to argue that culture or nationality have the role of decision-independent criterion for who belongs to the demos. On this view, the various demoi are defined by the fact that each of them has a shared culture or nationality that distinguishes them from the others. She dismisses this solution, as “Culture and nationality are not sufficiently ascriptive because belonging to a cultural group is not a characteristic that is obvious to all” (Ochoa Espejo, 2014, p. 468). For Ochoa Espejo, culture and nationality can only be unequivocally defined through deliberation, and are therefore not decision-independent.

I may add to Ochoa Espejo’s argument that culture and nationality are not obvious when they are challenged. The Europeans who set foot in the “new world” reacted in horror when they discovered that entire civilizations had been capable of existing and even thriving without the Christian revelation, something that had been unthinkable and “obvious” up until then. It was only in the wake of this shocking discovery that philosophers like Montaigne began to question just how obvious and necessary the cultural traits of European people were to defining humanity. The same, of course, applies to national cultures today. All this is to say that the criteria of ‘being obvious’ is precarious. What is obvious today might not be obvious tomorrow. It is always possible to doubt presumptions about things like culture, because doubting a certain assertion will not be intrinsically contradictory. This makes the criteria for defining the demos revisable by human deliberation.

If the theories that seek the traces of a decision-independent demarcation line for the demos fail, how do cosmopolitan theories fare? According to Ochoa Espejo, not much better. Despite apparently doing away with the need for boundaries, cosmopolitans fail to produce a convincing decision-independent mechanism for delimitating who “everybody” is: what about children, the mentally impaired, and what about different definitions of personhood which may be more or less conservative about who or what is considered a person? And even if we settled the issue, a cosmopolitan project requires us to actively decide to enter it and work toward it and subscribe to it being legitimate, Ochoa Espejo argues.<sup>11</sup>

So, either way we are left with a criterion that is not decision-independent and therefore unsatisfactory. According to Ochoa Espejo, the most influential factor in delimiting the demos, tacitly (or, sometimes, overtly) acknowledged both by cosmopolitan and non-cosmopolitan theories is the concept of territory.

As far as non-cosmopolitan theories are concerned, statist views, for instance, explicitly mention the currently existing borders as a way to delimit the demos that inhabits them. Nationalist views, too, presuppose a territory to distinguish national groups from other types of groups that do not enjoy political rights (such as soccer fans, for instance). In fact, Ochoa Espejo shows, the self-determination of a national political group only makes sense as a right over a territory.

Perhaps more startling is Ochoa Espejo’s assertion that even cosmopolitan theories rely on territoriality. This seems intuitively strange, because for cosmopolitans the people consists, at least potentially, of humanity as a whole, regardless of where the different subgroups find themselves. Ochoa Espejo, however, points out various

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<sup>11</sup> This remark by Ochoa Espejo may be taken to undermine positions such as Risse’s (2015) according to whom we ought to theorize territorial rights as if human beings were all “symmetrically positioned” with respect to resources. As a starting point, Risse’s view is abstract because it takes this “original symmetry” to exist before the decision that establishes it, while in fact it is itself the product of a decision.

reasons why this does not do away with decision-dependent criteria for determining the subdivisions of the demos: for instance, if we decide that people can wander freely and become part of other demoi, then we need to have different territories already established to determine who belongs where “originally”; or, even if we decide that we need to articulate our cosmopolitan project in subunits for purposes of administration, based on democratically relevant principles, such as subsidiarity and self-determination, we still require a demos that is bound by a well-defined territory to make the decisions that allow them to determine themselves, that is, we still need to start from a demos that exists somewhere.

To sum up, available accounts that attempt to determine the demos rely, overtly or covertly, on some well-defined notion of territory. Yet, Ochoa Espejo further argues, the territory that is presupposed by such theories in order to bind the demos, presupposes in turn an already well-defined demos to which it corresponds. “Territory is a function of the people because it is defined in terms of people’s rights” (ibid., p. 471) she explains. No territory is a territory but in relation to a group of human beings, and because the various theories seek to have a normative relevance, they connect the territory, explicitly or implicitly, to the people’s rights, that is, to the people in its normative relevance.

Although Ochoa Espejo presents political/normative ways to deal with this paradox, I propose an alternative for understanding the paradox itself by examining its ontological roots. In the next Section I shortly summarize my view, as developed up to this point, so that in Section III I can re-explain Ochoa Espejo’s paradox.

## Section II – A Recap of My View

In this section, I provide a summary of my view, as developed in the previous chapters. The focus, in this exposition, is on the relationship between Inside and Outside, so that I will be able to compare my view with Ochoa Espejo's in the next section.

Every theory of territorial rights seeks to solve the problem of particularity. The issue is how a particular territory and a particular subject may be linked together in a way that is normatively relevant, so that we may assign a subject its legitimate territory and prevent other subjects from unlawfully appropriating it. Before we can solve this problem, however, two questions must be answered: what defines a subject? And what defines a territory?

At first, it might seem as though my equation of territory with "outside" and subject with "inside" is unwarranted. After all, when most territorial rights theorists think about the idea of "territory", they mean only some sections of what is "outside" of us. The problem is that we cannot isolate subjects from the more comprehensive term "inside" or territories from the more comprehensive term "outside" without resorting to giving an essential definition of both that prevents them from interacting with one another. However I choose to define the concept of territory, it must be a definition X that is consistent with itself regardless of a subject's stance toward it. So defined, territory cannot be modified by the subject coming into contact with it, nor is the subject itself modified/actualized by, as I put it in Chapter II, living through it rather than simply on it.

If, however, we renounce (as I suggest) all attempts to carve a definition of "territory" out of the more comprehensive term "outside" and a definition of "subject" out of the more comprehensive term "inside", we end up with two co-relative aspects of a single interactive reality.

This means that defining one without presupposing a definition of the other is impossible. The reason of this impossibility lies in the fact that we can only define a subject in two ways: by appealing to an essential trait that subjects have regardless of any exterior condition; or by having them be defined by something extrinsic to them and that therefore lies outside of them. The same is true for territories: either they are defined essentially, or they are defined extrinsically.

Essentialist definitions are problematic, because they ultimately rely on some version of ontological dualism which then makes it impossible to show how the two sides, subjects and territory, can interact while remaining absolutely separate.

Non-essentialist definitions, however, lead us to an apparent paradox: if all that is outside of humanity is the natural world and all that is outside of the natural world is humanity; and if the distinction between humanity and nature is not grounded in an unbridgeable ontological distinction, it follows that humanity is defined by nature and nature is defined by humanity. If this is the case, the further implication is that any subdivision of humanity and any subdivision of nature (i.e. groups and territories) are interdependent.

I propose that the solution to the paradox can be found by understanding subjects and territories as correlative to one another. This means that no definition of the subject/Inside can be conceptually independent of the territory/Outside, and, vice versa, no definition of the Outside/territory can be conceptually independent of the subject/Inside.

Any attempt to define the Inside as absolutely Inside, i.e., as absolutely distinct from the Outside, necessarily faces the problem of how the two aspects interact while remaining absolutely distinct: the Inside itself cannot be absolutely Inside because, at the very least, it is part of the whole that is made up of Inside plus Outside.

In order for the Inside to be completely distinct from the Outside, it would have to stand in no relation with the Outside, because any relation between them would allow us to see them in conjunction with one another. But completely annulling their reciprocal relations would be even more problematic, because there would be no way in which either can interact with the other. Also, if we, as Inside, are completely distinct from the Outside, why even postulate the existence of the Outside, since we have decided we stand in no relation with it, and therefore we can't even say that it is really there?

If we define the subject as essentially inside, we need to appeal to a trait X that defines the subject regardless of its connection to the territory. But, in order to stand in no relation with the territory, this trait must also stand in no relation with the subject in so far as the subject is in connection with the territory and influenced by it. The same is true if we postulate that the territory is absolutely Outside: there must be a trait X that defines the territory regardless of its interaction with the subject, but in order to keep the territory absolutely outside of the subject, this trait must stand in no relation not only with me, but also with the Outside as it relates to me.

On the other hand, collapsing Inside and Outside together into a proverbial Hegelian night where all the cows are black, i.e., a vast expanse of complete sameness that makes all distinctions disappear, will not do either. If we start from pure indistinction, there is no way for us to get to a point where distinctions do emerge, because we presuppose that their existence as distinctions is secondary to their unity rather than on the same level with it, so that unity and distinction, on this flawed account, would exclude each other.

We find ourselves in an interesting position. How do we do away with dualism while retaining the distinction between subject and territory? This aim, I argued in Chapter



II, can be accomplished by understanding the distinction between subject and territory as functional, rather than essential, and as founded on the idea of interaction. This means that the distinction between subject and territory is understood as the expression of a process, based solely on how one side relates to the other.

No trait of the subject/Inside is statically and absolutely part of it, regardless of how it relates to what is outside of it, i.e., the territory. The subject is intrinsically interwoven with the territory and vice versa, so that, in emerging, the subject acts on the territory that embeds it, and which emerges itself only as that which situationally embeds a subject. In other words, neither subject nor territory, neither inside nor outside, pre-exist their emergence as mutually relative expressions of the same interactive process. It makes no sense to speak of either without reference to the other. Hence, we need to reformulate the two terms as “sequences”, rather than as “things”. A subject is not a subject regardless of its traits, and its traits exist only in relationship with the Outside point with respect to which they appear as “Inside”. Complementarily, the territory is not territory regardless of the outside points that make it up, and these outside points exist only in relationship with the subject with respect to which they remain situationally functionally outside.

As neither term can be defined except through reference to the other, we do not have separate and independent concepts, but complementary functional sequences within the same whole: Subject (or, better, agent) sequences and Territory sequences. A Subject sequence is I-O-I, for Inside-Outside-Inside. Here, the Inside embeds a certain Outside point in the manifestation of some subjective trait. A Territory sequence is O-I-O, for Outside-Inside-Outside. Here, an Outside point embeds a subject in so far as the subject is unable to live a certain subjective trait through that point. Every sequence corresponds to a trait that can be embodied. The term “trait” is used loosely for any determination that may be put in the form Me-X-ing or Me-not-X-ing.

If we understand the relationship between subjects and territories as based on functional sequences, we must also merge ontology and agency. If I am embedded in the Outside, the Outside must be embedded in me. Furthermore, I am without an essence for the same reason that the Outside is without an essence, therefore my essential emptiness is the Outside's essential emptiness.

Essential emptiness implies unbounded agency: an essence is a limit to action, for if I had an essence X, I wouldn't be able to act on it, or it wouldn't be my essence. Furthermore, if I had an essence, that essence would define me in a static way even before I exist as an agent, so that my agency wouldn't manifest. Therefore, essential emptiness is the active overcoming of all possible limits, and because limits can only manifest as traits of individual subjects, the overcoming of all limits is active self-overcoming. If the Inside's emptiness is the Outside's emptiness, and if emptiness implies active self-overcoming, then the Inside's self-overcoming is the Outside's self-overcoming.

The same applies to different individuals: my emptiness is yours, so my agency is yours and that of every other agents. This is what I call the Universal Agent. The Universal Agent is pure self-overcoming, that is, pure limit overcoming and therefore pure trait/state-of-being overcoming. As such, it is a-teleological, it does not have a self-image or selfhood, because a self-image can only be developed by being attached to a certain trait as opposed to another. My view is therefore that there is only one universal agency being channeled through different individual subjects.

Since the Universal Agent is self-overcoming, and therefore the overcoming of all limits, there can be no way to prevent a limit from being overcome except if the relevant know-how/ability to overcome it is missing.

As such, individual subjects are the Universal Agent at work in different fields characterized by relative disability/lack of know-how. Thus, the different individual subjects obstruct the pure self-overcoming of the Universal Agent in different ways. While the Universal Agent is equidistant from all traits/limits, due to their lack of ability, the various subjects are closer to the overcoming of certain limits than to the overcoming of others. That is, an individual's ignorance slants agency toward the overcoming of certain traits as opposed to other traits.

Consequently, each subject develops its own self-image by attaching it to certain traits, elaborate aims that are consistent with that self-image and seek to bring the Outside into conformity with that self-image by fulfilling those aims. It is for this reason that the a-teleological nature of the Universal Agent becomes the teleological attitude of individual subjects. But, in seeking to bring the world into conformity with their own aims, individuals actually channel the same agency whose self-overcoming implies the overcoming of every trait, including the trait that forms the aim of the individual subject.

If individual subjects result from different ways of knowledge not being adequate to the process of self-overcoming, group subjects are founded on the same principle. On my principles, groups are not made of individuals coming together with a shared aim. Every subject, being the same essential emptiness, has at its disposal the same sum total of possible traits to overcome, but falls short of it by lacking some know-how. As such, there are as many ways of falling short as there are individual subjects, and each is therefore unique. However, in so far as ignorance is shared, agency is slanted in the same direction, resulting in similar behaviors.

Therefore, it's not that groups are made of people coming together, but rather individuals emerge in their radical uniqueness in so far as they have their own unique

struggle against their own unique Outside/territory due to their unique ignorance. But in so far as they share ignorance/impotence, they become part of the various groups that share similar activities as a result of interacting similarly with the Outside/territory, some of these groups being consciously recognized and labeled by the subjects. Thus, groups are made up of individuals that act the same way, and acting the same way implies shared impotence. But whether agency finds expression through an individual or through a group of individuals, it does not change the fact that agency always expresses in sequences that weave together Inside and Outside, for Inside and Outside, subject and territory always imply the same self-overcoming happening in two mutually defining regions facing each other.

### Section III – Embracing Ochoa Espejo’s “Vicious Circle”

Both Ochoa Espejo and I criticize the approach that seeks to ground groups in “decision-independent criteria”.

On Ochoa Espejo’s view, it is impossible to ground the identification of a group in anything other than that group’s active self-expression as a group, in the case of democratic theory through the action of democratically voting. On her principles, a democratic demos emerges not because it was previously legitimately bound, but because it emerges by factually acting democratically. But this solution is not democratic, because it implies an unqualified act, which, because unregulated, is also arbitrary and therefore potentially illegitimate or violent, in that it might be founded, for instance, on suppressing the possibility of other potentially legitimate parts of the demos to join the action that defines the demos itself.

On my view, “decision-independent criteria” are what I call essentialist definitions of groups (or territory), defined by features, displayed by them, that can be essentially isolated from the territory and therefore do not depend on their being actively

asserted. As I pointed out, an essentialist definition of humanity, or of a sub-group within humanity, or of an individual, would need to hinge on some kind of quality or trait that such group does not need to actively assert in order for it to define the group. But such trait, in order to be so absolute as to not need to be actively asserted, would have to stand in no relation with both the agent itself and the territory, which would make it impossible for us to even know that such trait exists.

I have shown that we need to distinguish between Inside and Outside not in terms of substances or essence but in terms of function. This automatically implies that distinguishing the agents from their acting would be an undue abstraction: I cannot isolate a “me” that exists apart from my concrete determinations (the sum total of Me-X-ing and Me-not-X-ing that makes me up right now), and my concrete determinations are always actively asserted by interacting with the Outside, which is exactly what grounds me as the Inside that corresponds to the Outside around me.

Just as we cannot speak of something that is essentially inside, we cannot speak of something that is essentially outside. Thus, the Outside is outside only with reference to something that is Inside relative to it, and vice versa, the Inside is only inside relative to something that remains outside of it. Furthermore, because agency is unitary across its manifestations, this principle applies equally to individuals, groups and to humanity as a whole.

This means that, on my view, the paradox is resolved. There is nothing wrong with defining the group in terms of external factors and the external factors in terms of the group. In fact, the group and the outside territory share the same root, being manifestations of the same agency, i.e., the interaction that grounds Inside and Outside as its manifestations. However, the problem remains (and cannot be solved) for theorists seeking to move on the normative plane: because Inside and Outside are

perfectly correlative, no principle may be highlighted that tells us which groupings are (normatively) acceptable and which not, since from an ontological standpoint all groupings are equally acceptable, no matter how outrageous or morally wrong.

The problem is that, when we seek to clarify the foundation for normative principles that might help to justify particular territorial rights, we invariably discover that their only foundation is their being actively asserted by an agent (or group of agents), which makes these principles not “decision-independent”. On my own principles, an individual (or a group of individuals) emerges as long as it emerges, and doesn’t emerge in so far as it doesn’t. This consideration is useless from a normative standpoint, because it cannot be used in guiding action. However, it does account for the emergence of normative actions, that is, of actions seeking to impose limits on agency, and it acknowledges normativity’s inability to stand on its feet.

For instance, the border between Canada and the United States exists, that is, it has some semblance of an objective consistency, because it emerges as a constituent part of the subjects (individual and collective) who, by emerging, allow agency’s unfoldment. It emerges, in other words, because it is either actively asserted or because people accept their situational inability to change it, and, by accepting it, they indirectly want it. As every individual on the planet shifts their O-I-O/I-O-I ratio from moment to moment and reconfigure himself or herself, they keep the Me-accepting-the-existence-of-the-Canada-US-border sequence active, whether consciously or not. But if tomorrow everyone woke up having forgotten that the border exists, it wouldn’t exist.

Seen in this light, Ochoa Espejo’s paradox of people and territory, as she understands it, is but one instance of a more general paradox of normativity. I understand normativity as the phenomenon of human action seeking to delimit its own scope.

Normativity, on my account, emerges when the Universal Agent, channeled through a certain individual or group, who then, in acting, avoid activating certain sequences that they could activate. For instance, “you ought not to X” is the emergence of subjects whose activity includes the sequence Me-believing-I-should-be-me-not-X-ing, a sequence that limits the behavior of the subjects that emerge with that sequence. But, exactly because it is a sequence, normativity is an active expression of agency, rather than of an abstract decision-independent moral code, and so it is a limitation that agency places on itself.

But, in setting its own limits, the normative action forgets that the act of setting limits is itself the result of an unlimited ability of agency to limitlessly assert itself. As I have shown in Chapter III, and summarized in Section II of this chapter, any manifestation of agency implies the complete absence of limits to agency: even the smallest, seemingly most inconsequential limit would behave as a fixed essence that exists before agency and prevents agency from arising at all. As such, the act of trying to impose limits to agency is not only itself a manifestation of agency’s unbound assertive power, but it further implies the necessity of agency overcoming that same limitation.

When a normative act sets a limit X, it does so to tell human agency that its aim ought to be not to overcome that limit: agents ought to use their own agency as a means to reach the aim of behaving in a -X way. For instance, in the example of the US-Canada border, we are taught that, in acting, we ought to behave in such a way as to uphold the border. But, in putting forth rules, the normative act asserts the same agency that overcomes both -X and X as they are equally limits to its self-overcoming. Not only this, but the limits that we are taught to uphold are themselves an expression of our on ability, rather than of an objective limit. This is not to say that norms are a bad thing. In fact, if I emerged as subject without any normative principle, I wouldn’t be able to act, as no action (no X-ing and no non-X-ing, which is also an action) would appear to

me as more desirable than its opposite. The Universal Agent may have no moral compass, but its amoral self-overcoming requires that subjects have it, or they would be able to slant its agency in one direction rather than another.

To conclude, the paradox discussed by Ochoa Espejo exists only in so far as we move on this abstract plane of normativity (and I say “abstract” not to detract from the importance of norms, but to highlight the impossibility of normative principles grounding themselves outside of the action that asserts them). Once we leave the normative plane behind and we look at the issue from an ontological standpoint, asserting the correlativity of Inside and Outside is not at all paradoxical. In fact, the paradox would ensue if we were to say that they are not correlative: say that something is absolutely Outside and you’ll find it impossible to show where it is without showing in what measure it is also Inside, and therefore not absolutely Outside, and vice versa for an absolute Inside.

When Inside and Outside are made to depend on one another, no paradox is generated because neither of them is asked to be anything more than what it is, namely, a momentary configuration of the unitarity of agency, which always expresses itself through the functional distinction of Inside and Outside.

#### Section IV – Toward a Philosophy of History

With the previous sections in mind, I can now show why my understanding of the interplay of subjects and territories necessarily leads to the development of a philosophy of history, which is what I gradually undertake from the next chapter.

We have seen that my understanding of interaction places it conceptually ahead of the two interacting sides. This does not mean that the interaction of subject and territory exists regardless of them. It means that, in interacting, subject and territory do not



create something new that connects them, but rather they exemplify that connection and enact it. A subject emerges as a territory-embedded set of aims which can only subside when one or more Outside limitations have been overcome, i.e., they have been turned from limits into resources for the subject's self-expression. Conversely, territory emerges the set of limits embedding a specific subject who is acting it, limiting it in some ways while giving in to its aims in other ways.

As can be seen, the two definitions depend on one another in a dynamic way. This, in turn, implies that the unity of the interaction always expresses through the subject-territory, Inside-Outside duality, and the Inside-Outside duality always exemplifies a unitary interactive process.

The interaction is what I have called universal agency in Chapter III. Agency always expresses through the duality of a subject living through the territory and a territory containing and limiting that subject. But we have seen that agency must be understood as the pure elimination of limits. This is why, as seen in the previous section, agency cannot limit itself without overcoming, at the same time, the limits that it places upon itself. More broadly, the limits that agency seeks to enforce express agency's power, rather than its limitedness, and as such, they depend on agency: they emerge as long as there are subjects emerging while upholding/accepting them.

Whether subjects uphold limits or not, of course, depends on how consistent these limits are with their self-image, as defined in Chapter III. A subject's self-image develops as a function of the subject's disability, that is, their relative falling short of the agency they embody. In other words, the limits that a subject "chooses" to uphold (consciously or not) are consistent with the limits the subject can, in its current situation, do little about. But these objective limitations are not absolute. Rather, they

depend on the specific subject's lack of know-how. These are the limits among which the subject "chooses" the ones to fight against to overcome them.

In becoming viable "vessels" through which agency can overcome more limitations, subjects become part of a general movement toward the elimination of the sum total of possible limits (which, as already shown in chapters II and III, is the sum total of possible resources for self-expression, disguised by the subject's lack of know-how as limits). This process of elimination is nothing but the unfoldment, through time, of the activity of pure limit-overcoming (and therefore self-overcoming) of Agency. Because the Universal Agent is pure self-overcoming, it is necessary that, over time, the sum total of limits present itself and be overcome.

In turn, this implies that subjects' (collective and individual) self-images upgrade themselves, since self-image are a function of limits. Moreover, it is necessary that our way of justifying our relation toward the Outside in front of other subjects changes as the relationship with the Outside changes from one of preponderance of limits (and thus inability to act) to one of greater ability to act (and thus fewer limits). In other words, the choices we make in justifying our attachment to a specific chunk of the natural world changes with our changing stance toward the Outside. This topic forms the subject of the next two Chapters. In Chapter VII, instead, I will discuss the philosophy of history hinted at here in greater detail.



## CHAPTER V - Attachment, Detachment, Belonging

### Introduction

At the start of his article, Avery Kolers (2012, p. 101) writes that “It is by now widely agreed that a theory of territorial rights must be able to explain attachment or particularity: what can link a particular group to a particular place with the kind of normative force necessary to forbid encroachment or colonization?” We can say that attachment is a particular way in which a certain number of people, a particular collective subject, relates to a particular subdivision of the natural world, i.e., a territory or land.

In this chapter I use the conceptual tools I have developed in the previous chapters to begin my analysis of the concepts of attachment and detachment. The aim of this chapter is to prove that a theory of territorial rights is not engaged in spelling out the conditions for attachment, but rather in justifying our detachment from the territory in front of other potential claimants.

In Section I, I argue that a theory of territorial rights is concerned with the concept of attachment. It is important for me to show this because some leading theories make no apparent use of the concept of attachment. I further argue that without detachment, and therefore without a need for some concept of attachment, the problem that territorial right theories are designed to solve cannot arise.

In Section II, I analyze the concept of attachment by leveraging the distinction between individual subject and Universal Agent developed in previous chapters. On my view, attachment must be understood as a function of an individual subject’s ignorance, which keeps them from seeing themselves overcoming the limitations that bind them

to a place. Limitations cause subjects to over-attach to certain manifestations of themselves and under-attach to certain others.

In Section III, I distinguish between Attachment and Belonging. I understand Belonging as the foundational form of attachment that a theory of territorial rights must presuppose in order to make sense: Belonging is the original attachment that seems to have been lost, and that therefore requires the theorization of attachment.

In Section IV, I argue that Detachment from the territory unfolds as a continuum. Once Belonging is lost, one is immediately detached from the land, but their detachment from it then unfolds progressively as they become more and more self-determined, that is, the more their act of determining themselves has, as consequence, the reshaping of some outside condition.

Finally, in Section V, I draw my conclusions, showing that subjects neither want nor can get rid of their detachment from the land. They cannot, because detachment increases with self-determination, and getting rid of detachment is an act of self-determination. They don't want to, because self-determination allows them to reshape their conditions to better match their self-image. But they want to try to recapture the pre-philosophical certainty of their relationship with the land while keeping the benefits of detachment. Thus, they develop not a roadmap toward belonging, but a concept of Attachment which is a mimicry of Belonging.

### Section I – Attachment as the Constitutive Problem of A Theory of Territorial Rights

In this Section I show that a theory of territorial rights must presuppose a view of the concept of attachment. This is true even of theories that do not explicitly refer to attachment or seem to work without such concept. Secondly, but this shall be clearer at the end of the whole chapter, I show that a theory of territorial rights must be

concerned not with describing how to attain attachment, but with the justification of detachment.

Avery Kolers' account of territorial rights theory has both ontological and normative features. First, he claims that a territorial rights theory must explain the link between a people and a land. Second, he takes us into the normative realm, where territorial rights grant subjects exclusive rights over that piece of land.

Hence, the equivalence between the terms "attachment" and "particularity" in his view: attachment implies a relation between particulars as opposed to universals, so that the relation between one particular, i.e. a land, and another one, i.e., the collective subject, not be automatically equivalent to that between that same land and another collective subject, or the same collective subject with another land.

There is a wide variety of ways in which we connect with certain particular points in space, but a theory of territorial rights seeks to single out, from that wider whole, the particular types of subject-territory relations that enjoy the peculiar quality of bleeding from the realm of facts into that of norms. Once this type of relation obtains, it reassures the subject that such exclusive relation remains true in spirit even when it is not in actual fact (e.g., in case of invasion, deportation, exodus, etc.) A theory of attachment seeks to justify an exclusive right based in this particular empirical relationship between subject and territory.<sup>12</sup>

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<sup>12</sup> The problem, as Kolers' definition implies, lies with the clear definition of a consistent way of being a particular subject, and of a consistent way of being a particular territory. Despite its ebbs and flows, the tide of history seems to be going in the direction of a more and more general -and therefore inclusive and integrated- understanding of human beings, and of a more and more general -and therefore inclusive- understanding of the natural world.

Against this background, the possibility of carving out meaningful particular configurations or modes of human existence and of the natural world becomes a real challenge, if not downright impossible. As a result, we have been losing the sense of irreducibility of what surrounds us to instance of an impersonal, universal law. Consequently, we must necessarily gradually lose the idea of our own irreducibility to personal instance of an impersonal actor - in this direction points my view of the Universal Actor, described in the previous chapters. At this point, every distinction between this group and that group, between this territory and that territory can only create abstractions that simply do not exist, exactly because they are realized more and more clearly for

Certain theories go right after a notion of attachment or particularity, while others seem to have their Achilles' heel right there. For instance, one typical sub-group is that of Locke-inspired approaches, and as Anna Stilz (2009, p. 192) acknowledges "[...] on a Lockean view, we can easily explain how the state gets its special right to a particular territory, thus solving the particularity problem [...]". Lockean and Locke-inspired views (but also some Nationalist views) often make it their explicit aim to highlight how this or that particular subject has earned her right to this or that territory. Views such as Cara Nine's (2009) or David Miller's (2012), which I have described in Chapters I and II, acknowledge the importance of some form of attachment, regardless of how they believe it is or should be brought about. In both views it is clear that a notion of attachment as the special connection between a particular land and a particular territory is what is to be striven for, so much so that they appeal, albeit in different ways, to Lockean principles, and Locke was mostly concerned in the single's exclusive property over this or that land.

On the other hand, there are theories where the notion of particularity/attachment is hardly mentioned. For instance, Thomas Christiano (2006) argues for a democratic theory of territorial rights whereby boundaries (of democratic states) ought to remain as they are unless corrective measures are needed in order to rectify some injustice. One might notice that the issue of territory plays a residual or, at best, supportive role in Christiano's argument, which is mainly about democracy on a global scale. At the bottom of his argument is, apparently, not some conception of attachment, but an ultimately undemonstrated claim about the intrinsic desirability of democracy. Still,

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what they are: abstractions. This is, in my opinion, the reason why the issue of territorial rights has exploded in the literature only relatively recently (despite some illustrious forebearers in the history of philosophy): because there has been more space for us to realize the abstract nature of some previous, often unreflexively held conceptions of what constitutes a single collective or a single land.

while no mention is made of a concept called “attachment”, he gives us an argument about how to regulate a group’s relation with a territory.

Lea Ypi’s view (2013) provides another example. She divides the various theories of territorial rights into acquisition-based, attachment-based and legitimacy-based theories before introducing the main lines of a fourth possible category: a forward-looking justification. Although this classification is accurate for Ypi’s purpose, it may lead us to wrongly assume that attachment is only one possible solution to the issue of territorial rights, and that other solutions can be envisioned.

Ypi (2012) mentions the concept “attachment” only to attribute it to other theories or theorists, as part of a past-oriented approach. Indeed, her own permissive theory seems to be entirely independent of such a concept, being founded on principles of global justice. On her view, justification of one’s exclusive presence on a territory is dependent on one’s commitment to the realization of a degree of global justice. Apparently, this has nothing to do with one’s link to the land.

This is not the case. Both in Christiano’s and Ypi’s theories, the proposed solution presupposes the concept of detachment from the land. In Christiano’s theory, no straightforward mention of the concept of attachment is made, so much so that these theories see the problem of territorial rights more as one of relationships between people rather than between people and territories.

However, Christiano does presuppose that the principle of global democracy has primacy over how groups concretely interact with the land: he must presuppose as much, or else he would be building his theory ignoring a decisive factor. But he must, as a result, also presuppose that a group is not intrinsically attached to any place, or at least not strongly enough to override the a-territorial principles that Christiano defends. In other words, he presupposes that the principle of global democracy



overrides particularity and attachment to a certain land. But, in presupposing this, Christiano presupposes detachment from the land, that is, he presupposes that subjects' attachment either doesn't exist or is not a strong enough consideration. Thus, his is a theory of the negation of attachment, because it is founded (tacitly) on the negation of this concept, but in negating this concept it presupposes it. Similarly, Ypi's view presupposes the principle of global justice to be stronger than any group's attachment to a specific land. Hence, her theory, too, is a theory of the negation of attachment, and therefore presupposes the concept of attachment.

Therefore, both the views that refer to the concept of attachment and those that do not refer to it presuppose the concept of detachment, i.e., lack of attachment, from the land as a problem. My argument is that, no matter what the proposed solution is, theories of territorial rights directly or indirectly attempt to solve the issue of attachment, because the problem lying at the heart of a territorial rights theory is that of detachment, which is lack of attachment. In order for the existence of a theory of territorial rights (even one that doesn't mention the attachment of a subject to a territory) to make any sense at all, there must be an underlying belief that we are detached from the land: that we don't necessarily, ontologically belong anywhere. We are detached from every place by default, unless an additional effort to create a special bond is made, and a theory of territorial rights is mostly concerned with the normative regulation of that additional effort.

That territorial rights theory has mostly taken the form of a search for the criteria of attachment gives us an important clue for how to proceed. What has been lost is the certainty of who we are as particular subjects (and as members of particular groups) and therefore of where we belong, i.e., what our particular place is, the one whose characteristics are consonant with our particular way of being. Considering oneself as a particular subject implies seeing certain determinations of one's being as more

essential than others, and therefore assigning special importance to the Outside factors connected with those determinations. Thus, losing the concept of attachment means losing the idea that we have fixed identity which is determined by factors outside of our agency, such as connection to a specific land.

The issue of territorial rights could never have arisen in all its force in a non-globalized world, and in countries where globalization has had its most important effects on people's self-image. Only when our irreflexive, pre-philosophical certainty about where we belong and who we are is lost are the conditions for the emergence of the issue met.

A theory of territorial rights attempts to recreate the practical results of that pre-philosophical certainty by theorizing certain conditions that need to be met for the issue to be settled. I may no longer be irreflexively sure about my identity and its place, but because I behave in a certain way, i.e., because I abide by certain rules and go through certain motions, I can see myself in my connection with a certain view of myself and of my place, or, at least, I can give myself permission to force others to see and respect me in such connection.

Only, this time the connection between the person and the place is not an irreflexive, pre-philosophical certainty. It is positively mediated by certain clearly spelt-out normative conditions. These rules bring to light and reinforce the existence of the issue itself: attempting to solve the issue of detachment presupposes that detachment be problematic, but cannot solve it, because in devising solutions it reinforces its status as problem, so that the stronger the solution, the sharper the status of detachment as problem. This applies to theories that do not mention attachment too, like Christiano's and Ypi's, because, as I showed, they conceptually presuppose the notion of attachment, albeit as negated.

The fact that we cannot solve the problem of detachment does not imply that we should forget the issue. I will later argue, in Chapters VII and VIII, that the acknowledgment of the existence of this problem is a necessary step in the unfoldment of our relationship with the Outside. Therefore, even if we banged our heads against the wall to forget everything, sooner or later we would face the problem again, for it is a necessary implication of our existence in the world. In this sense, there is no going back to a pre-problematic situation, the only way being forward.

To conclude, in this section I have shown that a theory of territorial rights needs to presuppose a conception of detachment of the subject from the territory, regardless of whether or not the theory overtly refers to the concept of attachment as a solution. As such, even when attachment is not mentioned as the solution, the lack of attachment is presupposed by the existence of the problem that the theory seeks to solve and is therefore constitutive of the problem itself. Therefore, whatever the solution, it is the solution to a perceived lack of attachment.

## Section II – Ignorance as Constitutive of Attachment

In this section, I give a brief overview of what I believe to be the conceptual core of the notion of attachment. In my view, attachment, understood as a quality of individual subjects and of collective subjects, is a function of the limitation of their know-how, which makes them over-attach to certain traits and detach from (or under-attach to) some other traits. As such, they want to transcend certain limits while leaving others intact. This is in contrast to the Universal Agent, which, being self-overcoming, is the aimless overcoming of all possible traits and therefore all possible limits.

In the previous three chapters I have introduced my view concerning the subject in the subject-territory relation. I showed that being different individual subjects means being the same agency filtered through different sets of disabilities. In other words,

we as individual subjects are characterized by what we are unable to do, rather than by what we can do. Each individual subject is the emergence of a momentarily irreducible constellation of aims that seek to fulfill themselves as opposed to other aims, an emergence which is colored by each individual subject's lack of knowledge/inability.

In Chapter II, I argued for a sequential understanding of subjects and territories. On my view, because we cannot essentially distinguish either from the other, we need to understand both in terms of how they interact together, and therefore in terms of the concrete traits that are manifested by the Inside as it manifests through the Outside. Inside and Outside are the same active lack of essence, that is, the same absence of limits. Similarly, the same absence of limits is present in every subject. Therefore, every subject has, at its disposal, the same sum total of all possible acts of self-overcoming, derived from the same sum total of interactions possible with the sum total of all points in space and time.

Every subject is characterized by different limitations from other subjects. The presence of these limitations cannot be anything essential, though, for otherwise they would characterize the various subjects as essentially distinct from one another and essentially separated from the territory. A limit is the result of a particular subject's limited know-how, even though sometimes it appears enshrined into the unchangeable essence of how things are. In other words, a limit is a limit only relative to the individual subject's particular constitution as a carve-out from the Universal Agent that allows the Universal Agent a path of expression.

We have seen in Chapter III that the Universal Agent is pure self-overcoming. From this initial self-overcoming must automatically and immediately derive the overcoming of the sum total of all possible states of being and therefore of all possible traits that a

subject can showcase (because, as I have shown in chapters II and III, there can be no state of being that is not a subject's trait). This implies that no state of being/trait is the final one, nor is any of them essential, each being as fleeting as the previous and the next.

From the standpoint of the Universal Agent, that each trait is overcome implies the ability to overcome it, i.e., the know-how necessary to prevent any such trait from becoming a limit for the Universal Agent's pure self-overcoming activity. Thus, the Universal Agent is like a point that is equidistant from all the points on the circumference surrounding it. This is what differentiates the Universal Agent from the individual subjects: that individual subjects are the Universal Agent at work in a field of relative disability, that is, of relative lack of know-how. In such fields, the self-overcoming activity of the Universal Agent cannot find perfect expression exactly because some know-how is missing and is therefore partially obstructed and polarized toward the overcoming of only certain limits.

From our standpoint as individual subjects, this condition is reflected in the fact of not being equidistant from every possible trait. I, as myself, ignore the vast majority of possible states of being and have no currently feasible strategy for embodying most others. This condition makes me over-attach to certain traits as though they were more constitutive of me than other traits, and this is how I, the Universal Agent, become convinced that I am (just) me writing this chapter.

The lack of equidistance which is caused of my inability to overcome the sum total of all possible traits turns into my belief that certain traits inhere to me more essentially than others, which in turn makes me develop a particular self-image and identity, with its individual agenda of aims, its consideration of means and limitations, etc. This agenda consists of my trying to avoid the overcoming of certain traits (not letting them

go) by conforming reality to them and trying to foster the manifestation of certain other traits (being fixated on certain outcomes as opposed to their opposite). In other words, my agenda turns the pure a-teleological self-overcoming of the Universal Agent, which negates the permanence of every state, into my teleological self-determination as individual, whereby I seek to give meaning and direction to the change that happens through me by making the world around me fall into place with a certain view of myself.

These personal agendas, I argued in the previous chapter, are where normative considerations stem from: in my trying to avoid overcoming certain traits and conforming reality to them, I see the states of being expressing those traits as normatively relevant.

I believe I am something, and therefore seek to act in conformity with who I think I am (consciously or not), strategizing about my aims and seeing other states of being as either a threat or a means to those aims, or, at most, as relatively indifferent. I therefore seek to inform the Outside with my particular agenda of values. My self-image, in other words, becomes a guiding principle, i.e., a normative ideal, in my trying to direct the pure self-overcoming that courses through me in one direction as opposed to another. In being a guiding principle for my efforts, this self-image becomes a norm or rule that I seek to impose on the world, an “ought” that needs to be realized. Conversely, the Universal Agent has no self-image and therefore does not conform to anything, but equally overcomes every possibility: its self-overcoming is not an attempt to bring about results, but a suppression of all possible sources of limitation to its activity, of rules and norms to conform to, and therefore also of all possible results. Therefore, for the Universal Agent no state of being is an end and no state of being is a means, but every state is a limit to overcome.

To conclude, the Universal Agent is equally detached from the sum total of all possible states of being/traits, while individual subjects and group subjects are over-attached to some of them and under-attached to other states of being. This is due to the individual's partial ignorance. Attachment is a consequence of an individual's lack of ability. This, in turn, makes the individual attribute the traits to which they are attached to certain external, apparently unmodifiable conditions, which include the land.

### Section III – Attachment and Belonging

So far, I have shown that a theory of territorial rights must be understood as a theory of attachment, even if it does not mention it. Furthermore, I have shown that attachment must be understood in terms of the over-attachment and the under-attachment that individual subjects display toward the sum total of all possible traits, as a function of their ignorance or lack of know-how, while the Universal Agent is equally attached to and equally detached from everything.

In this Section I introduce a crucial distinction between Attachment and Belonging. Attachment, as commonly understood (and as I understand it), is the result of a process of mediation between the subject and the territory. Belonging, on the other hand, is the sort of attachment that can never be the result of any process, for its existence as a preliminary condition is implied by any action, including those actions aimed at producing attachment between a subject and a territory. The need to theorize attachment arises as a consequence of one's (perceived) loss of one's Belonging.

Belonging is not truly possessed of any kind of ontological "originality". Instead, it is the conceptual possibility of the ineliminable preeminence of the Outside over the Inside. Therefore, Belonging represents the stage of complete subjection of the subject to the territory, of the Inside to the Outside. I argue, in Chapter VII, that Belonging is,

in fact, a false premise: there is no Belonging in a world that is, from the start, fully open to agency. On my principles, Belonging cannot exist because it implies the static presence of the sum total of limits to agency and therefore the total absence of agency itself. But agency cannot derive from a static principle that does not contain agency. Therefore, there is no stage of Belonging. However, I use the concept of Belonging now to show how theories of territorial rights must conceptually presuppose it as the background against which their presupposed concept of Attachment makes sense.

The emergence of the subject, we have seen, is the emergence of an unanswered question or problem that doesn't understand itself as immediately answered before even being raised; it's the emergence of a cluster of aims that seek to lodge themselves into reality, to be heard and considered by the outside world because they do not perceive themselves as being fulfilled even before emerging as aims.

The emergence of the subject as the means through which certain aims fulfill themselves implies two things. Firstly, it presupposes a distinction between what the subject understands as "I am doing X" and what they understand by "The world around me does X", i.e., between the drive toward fulfillment and resistance to that drive. Secondly, it presupposes the idea that what the agent does is understood by the agent as bringing in new conditions on top of those that would naturally produce themselves, i.e., that the foundation of the change created by the agent is not the whole of the universe, but a limited region of it that works in opposition to all the rest and understands itself as self-directed, as principle of itself. We have seen, in the previous section, that this principle is the subject's self-image, taken as a guiding principle to be actively realized or to actively conform the world outside with.

Belonging, as an initial stage, is characterized by the absolute preponderance of O-I-O or territory sequences. As seen previously, a territory sequence is not alien to the



subject, for it does contain an “I”. However, the subject’s involvement in the creation of the traits that inhere to it is unacknowledged, and those traits are actually perceived, reflexively or irreflexively, as being forced onto it from Outside of its plans, wishes etc. and pressed onto it as a definitive fact that it has to accept.

Every bit of know-how conquered by humanity is the direct turning inside out of something that had been previously perceived, or at least that could have been perceived, as a limit that we had to grudgingly accept and remain passive to. Because there cannot be limits that are not construed as limits only due to a lack of know-how that would allow us to overcome them, it follows that every limit is actually a resource in disguise.

With detachment from the stage of Belonging, each of the apparently hard facts that we can’t bring under our direction begins to be reinterpreted not as a limit, but as a malleable resource to be used in fostering one’s own aims and therefore in activating one’s own determinations as a consequence of one’s desire. This is the process of transmutation of O-I-O sequences into I-O-I sequences, which implies the transmutation of limits into resources.

Avery Kolers discusses the relationship between subjects and resources in a somewhat similar fashion to mine, so I adopt part of his account of resources. In his theory, Kolers (2012, p. 275) rightly points out that “[...] resources are not mere things but rather things under a description. Before a thing can be a resource we must adopt a certain stance toward it.” I agree, to an extent, with his point: as our stance towards things shifts, they become not mere “stuff” around us that fills our space and limits us, but a way for us to further embody ourselves, to activate one more of our potential determinations and therefore to emanate the reality around us more and more in accordance with our self-image.

However, I disagree with Kolars' presupposition of a distinction between the thing "not under description" and that same thing as the focus of an intentional act. The idea of having things outside of our intentional act is a pure abstraction. As I have argued in the previous chapters, I am, right now, in connection with even the most distant and obscure phenomena in the universe, and those things already make me up as I am, whether in the form of a limit or of a resource. Still, the mere fact that those things exist simply means that I can relate, somehow, to them, even if just as Me-writing-about-them-without-precisely-knowing-what-they-are-or-if-they-even-exist-or-have-some-use.

I agree with Kolars that resources are "intentional" and not "physical". What I don't agree with is that there is an abstract stage, prior to description, in which the things I then go on to describe are separate from my standing in relation to them. If I can't relate to it, it doesn't exist, and if I relate to it, I always relate to it either as an actual or as a potential resource, but a resource nonetheless.

#### Section IV – The Continuum of Detachment

In the previous section, I distinguished between Belonging and Attachment. In this section, I argue that detachment from the territory comes in different degrees, and therefore constitutes a continuum.

Based on the previously mentioned distinction, we have now two opposite points on which subjects can find themselves. The first is that of Belonging to the territory. The second point is that of complete Detachment from the territory. The stage of Belonging implies the absence, on the part of the subject, of a self-image that potentially clashes with the Outside, and therefore the impossibility of an incongruence between what the subject wishes for themselves and what is coming to them from the Outside. Put in Kolars's terms, the subject's identification with the Outside is not due to the fact

that they are capable of adopting the right stance toward everything, seeing everything as a resource, but because they almost never have the right stance, and almost everything is a limit.

This hypothetical state of affairs is interrupted by the gradual emergence of subjective aims that are not satisfied by the solutions already present on the Outside. Humans have needs, wishes, desires, aims that are not naturally met by their environment. Consequently, they act on the environment to activate solutions by acquiring know-how that allows them to overcome the perceived limits that stand between them and their aims. The question of how the initial aims emerge at all is discussed in Chapter VII.

The finding of solutions to the initial, simple unmet aims does not put an end to human needs, because humanity's ability to develop aims and needs is not essentially limited. Because the aims of individual subjects correspond to traits/states-of-being that are the object of the self-overcoming of the Universal Agent, which has no essence, the agency that overcomes the initial limit necessarily overcomes all possible limits as know-how is acquired by the individual subjects that channel its agency. Therefore, the fulfilling of the first, simple aims is the basis on which progressively bigger, bolder, more complex and more varied needs and aims are developed, more complex know-how is found to overcome more complex limitations, etc.

The theme of the emergence of needs is at least as old as Plato's Republic, where Socrates, in his attempt to think a "city of utmost necessity", that is, a human settlement founded around the satisfaction of only the most basic and natural needs, progressively discovers that this "city of sows", as Glaucon calls it (2001, 372d) escalates naturally into a city of luxury and corruption as new needs are generated.

Later, though from a very different perspective, Rousseau, who was preoccupied with discovering the “natural man” (that is, “human”) hidden under unnatural layers of societal conventions, argued that:

The simplicity and solitude of man's life in [the state of nature], the paucity of his wants, and the implements he had invented to satisfy them, left him a great deal of leisure, which he employed to furnish himself with many conveniences unknown to his fathers: and this was the first yoke he inadvertently imposed on himself, and the first source of the evils he prepared for his descendants. For, besides continuing thus to enervate both body and mind, these conveniences lost with use almost all their power to please, and even degenerated into real needs [...] (Discourse on Inequality, II, 25)

That we have unmet needs and aims means that we are at least partially detached from the territory. It means that the (hypothetical) stage of Belonging is over. Partial detachment from the territory implies a partial tension between what subjects want and what they get. It implies, in other words, that the correspondence between the need present on the Inside and the “solution” present on the Outside cannot be assumed a priori, as, according to Rousseau, it can for the “natural man” in the state of nature.

This is the dynamic tension between Inside and Outside which is constitutive of the situational (but always present) distinction between Inside and Outside, subjects and territories, as expressions of the same agency. The subject is not a fixed and separate, essentially limited “thing”, but a dynamic movement of sequence activation toward self-fulfillment of all emerging aims. Without this dynamic tension or discrepancy between Outside and Inside, which prompts the devising of solutions to emerging problems (which in turn create more problems, which require more solutions, etc.)

there is no telling where the subject begins and where it ends, because each emerging problem is the discrepancy between who I am (e.g., Me-not-drinking) and who I want to be (e.g., Me-drinking), and only in this discrepancy can individual subjecthood emerge: as someone whose self-image is not immediately reality, therefore finding itself situationally confined on the Inside as an ideal to be realized.

There are, of course, various degrees of discrepancy between the Inside and the Outside. This implies that Detachment from the territory is a continuum, rather than a fixed status. Or, to be more precise, it is a status in so far as, as soon as the stage of Belonging is over, one is automatically detached, no matter how much. Still, Detachment emerges in all its consequences over time, rather than all at once. In a way, where the inventor of fire trod, the McDonald brothers were conceptually not far behind, but it is simpler to understand Detachment as a very gradual and drawn-out historical process.

The idea that Detachment be a continuum is a necessary consequence of our abandonment of a fixed notion of subject, which we have replaced with the idea of the subject as extended. Plato and Rousseau, to take our previous examples, could, from their perspective, define the subject without too much trouble, distinguishing individuals from their outside extension. These authors presupposed that humans had a distinct essence, a nature that inhered to them regardless of their interaction with the Outside, so that such interaction could be guided by normative principles aimed at preserving it within the limits that were deemed appropriate for the subject's essential nature. Their dualistic ontology (my nature vs. what is not my nature) is the reason why they could differentiate between natural needs and aims and unnatural needs and aims, and why they could lament humans not abiding by their natural selves. Similarly, many religious doctrines can easily separate natural and unnatural needs/aims, and therefore a natural/good way of being an agent from an unnatural/evil way.

The natural needs are seen as those that inhere to the subject in an essential way, or that do not go against the subject's essential nature, whereas the other needs are added from the outside, and their appropriateness or goodness must be measured against the objective background of that core. But the idea of individuals having a separate nature is untenable, as I have shown in Chapters II and III. Therefore, agency cannot be kept within the limits of a preconceived notion of what is natural for it to be as opposed to what isn't, because, as I said above, the agency that overcomes the first limit is the agency that overcomes them all. As such, saying that subjects ought to stop after fulfilling certain aims is conceptually wrong, because it fails to understand what agency entails.

Humanity is constitutively excessive, that is, it is constitutively geared toward the overcoming of limits. Even the overcoming of the first limit that ended full Belonging was excessive, rather than guided by the fixed principles of an unchanging inner human essence.

Having gotten rid of the idea of individuals having a separate nature which can be conceptually isolated from their Interaction with the Outside, we can no longer differentiate between natural and unnatural needs, because a need can only be unnatural if it corresponds to a corrupted configuration of the subject. But there can only be a corrupted way of being subject if there is an essence of oneself that one's concrete existence may fall short of, which we have already denied. If we have no a priori definition of the subject, there can be no distinction between what is more essential and what is less essential to them, but only different momentary stages in their unfoldment as individuals.

In our anti-essential understanding of ourselves, "following nature" is absurd and contradictory, because, as fields of manifestations of agency's limitless scope, we are

on an unbending trajectory that requires us to desire more and more, to develop more and more aims, to defy any canned understanding of ourselves and act against it. Retreating into a lesser version of ourselves and staying put within its limits will not stop the process of limit-overcoming from happening. Such retreat is, in fact, a manifestation of that process, as I have discussed in Chapter IV: agency's self-limitation implies its overcoming of the limit it imposes on itself, because the normative act, i.e., the act of imposing limits on agency, is itself a product of agency and presupposes agency as originally unbounded. As partial expressions of the Universal Agent, all we do is want to be what we are not, desire to be what we are not already, so the idea of desiring in accordance with a fixed picture of who one supposedly really is or ought to be becomes contradictory: if I have a fixed essence X, I wouldn't be able to act, as I showed in Chapter III, but if I did act, any action would bring me out of conformity with my essence, for agency always brings the present out of conformity with the past, being destructive of limits.

Owing to these considerations, there is no single way in which, for instance, an uncontacted tribe lives a more natural life than the population of London, nor is there anything more natural or genuine in a campfire than in a nuclear power plant, or in an apple picked from a tree than in a genetically modified one grown in a lab.

Rousseau could argue, on his own premises, that:

[...] as long as we are ignorant of the natural man, it is in vain for us to attempt to determine either the law originally prescribed to him, or that which is best adapted to his constitution. All we can know with any certainty respecting this law is that, if it is to be a law, not only the wills of those it obliges must be sensible of their submission to it; but also, to be natural, it must come directly from the voice of nature. (Ibid., Preface)

For Rousseau, the natural human is humanity as it abides by its natural core. But, over the course of time, humanity has outgrown that core and is now corrupted.

Once we dismiss the notion of a natural human being, everything a human being actively does becomes a sign of detachment, and because we have no a priori definition of what constitutes a legitimate subject, at no point can we put our foot down and say, "This is too unnatural".

We must then agree with Bernard Mandeville who, in the Fable of Bees, writes:

The Root of evil Avarice,  
That damn ill-natur'd baneful vice,  
Was slave to Prodigality,  
That Noble Sin; whilst Luxury  
Employ'd a Million of the Poor,  
And odious Pride a Million more.  
Envy it self, and Vanity  
Were Ministers of Industry;  
Their darling Folly, Fickleness  
In Diet, Furniture, and Dress,  
That strange ridic'lous Vice, was made  
The very Wheel, that turn'd the Trade. (2012, Preface)

In other words, there is no sense in trying to pinpoint a distinction between normal needs and accessory or excessive needs. In a view of reality where each moment exceeds the previous one and is incommensurable to it, where our aims and needs



constantly grow, creating more problems, which lead to more solutions, etc., the distinction between vice and virtue becomes ontologically cumbersome, because it tries to force subjects to remain within limits that are necessarily going to be overcome. More specifically, the concept of virtue tries to make agency what it is not: a means in conforming subjects to certain views of subjecthood; which is impossible, because we have seen, in Chapter III, that agency brings reality out of conformity with itself. Agency, which is the source of excess and non-conformity, cannot decide on its own limits without exceeding them, as we saw in Chapter IV.

Indeed, Mandeville himself wrote that “One of the greatest Reasons why so few People understand themselves, is, that most Writers are always teaching Men what they should be, and hardly ever trouble their heads with telling them what they really are.” (Ibid., Introduction) The fact that we have no essential definition of the subject to work with implies that there is no clear, definitive point at which the subject stops being natural and it becomes excessive or corrupted. Nor can we pinpoint a moment where the subject ends and the territory begins: it all comes down to the subject’s ability to activate itself, i.e., the I-O-I sequences that make it up.

The idea of Detachment as a continuum is, in other words, a necessary consequence of the fact that there is not just one way of being a subject, but as many as there are subjects, each being a unique, albeit always shifting, constellation of limits. This is due to there being an unconceivably high amount of possible I-O-I sequences corresponding to an equal amount of possible determinations/traits, and therefore an even larger number of possible constellations of sequences/determinations.

The idea of continuum can also be applied to groups. Even if we agree that the continuum is not about the degree of “naturalness” of one’s way of being and living, the fact remains that Western society, to make an example, is way more obviously

detached from the Outside than an uncontacted tribe. A lesser degree of detachment is reflected in how the tribe is much more obviously “in tune” with their environment and its rhythms and cycles.

Conversely, Western society is entirely devoted to the creation, cultivation and satisfaction of needs whose answer is then imposed onto the Outside, so that the idea of conforming to a rule or rhythm that is external to one’s own wishes is becoming increasingly obsolete. Much more typical of the Western approach is the idea of forcing one’s way onto the Outside, neutralizing any external conditions that might come between ourselves and our wishes, and therefore neutralizing the territory. In reality, this is true of every society that has ever existed or exists now, because it’s true of humanity in its essenceless agency: as said, humanity (and every form of agency) is constitutively excessive. But Western society seems to represent this trend in one of the most unabashed forms yet, so much so that we don’t even try to pretend that it’s not the case.

But if contemporary Western society is not better than other societies (and it isn’t), it is not worse, either. It has simply come to a point where we are losing faith in the idea that humanity must, or even can, conform to external rhythms or greater cycles.

Agency is constitutively offbeat, for it can only fall out of conformity with rhythms. We can recognize an external rhythm only once we have detached from it, that is, only in the process of outgrowing it and leaving it behind as an outworn limit/self-image that we used to “belong” to. Once we can see it objectively, we can see ourselves in opposition to it and we therefore must acknowledge our irreducibility to it. At the point we acquire consciousness of ourselves as outside of it and opposed to it, the idea of giving up whatever part of us exceeds its limits is impossible, because in acting to conform to it we reestablish our difference from it.

We see rhythms and patterns only when we have desynchronized from them and we realize that we can choose to conform to them or not. Here it becomes possible for us to think that we “ought to” conform to such rhythms, that is, only at this point can we ascribe normative relevance to them. But this is a conceptual error, because truly conforming to them would mean giving up the same agency that we are currently using to go back to them. In giving up this agency, we automatically reassert it at an even higher, wider and more excessive level, which is even more detached from those limits and even more irreducible to the rhythms that represent them.

Agency may limit itself to conform to a certain state of being that subjects consider desirable and that they therefore see as a limit not to exceed, and that they may believe does not depend on them. But in doing so, agency upholds that state of being not as an external limit that it is powerless against, but rather as an active expression of itself X which is on the same plane as -X and that therefore implies -X as well: it is a self-limitation that implies the ability to overcome that limitation and even the necessity of it, since the Universal Agent, being self-overcoming, overcomes all limits.

For instance, the Amish people, who live in what, at a superficial glance, looks like the XVIII or XIX century, are actually full members of today’s Western world. Their limitations are self-imposed. Therefore, they are the function of an agency that has already far exceeded those limits and those life patterns and rhythms; an agency that now just goes through the motions, and in going through the motions it keeps overcoming and exceeding itself. This is perfectly legitimate, but they are no less detached from the Outside than Bill Gates or Elon Musk.

With this, I have overcome Tolkien’s argument, mentioned in Chapter II, that today’s people are “synthetic” because they are uprooted, i.e., because they have lost contact with the particularity of the land under their feet. There is nothing artificial about who

we are today. What would be contrived would be to try to seal ourselves back into the empty shell of a life that no longer represents us for who we are now. It would amount to putting on an act, prompted by the desire for life to follow a script instead of being as original and authentic as it is at the time we are alive.

And if, at some point, we decided that, in order to avert an environmental catastrophe, the most readily available solution would be to tweak our lifestyle and go back to a more “natural” way of living, that, too, would be a function of our agency and would bring about an increase in our ability to overcome limits and neutralize the territory. After all, being wiped out of existence would be the greatest limitation, while, with the apocalypse forestalled, we could find new solutions to new problems, which would create new needs and aims, etc. But it wouldn’t be a return. It would be a relentless march forward, where the so-called “protection of the environment” is really a superficial reflection of a “protection of agency”, that is, a reflection of agency overcoming the limits that threaten to annihilate it if they impose themselves as insurmountable by it.

In short, the limits that we conform to are the limits we haven’t overcome yet and we are growing into, while the limits that we try to conform to are those that we have outgrown for good, and no amount of elbow grease will bring back. This idea forms the core my philosophy of history, which I shall discuss in Chapter VII.

The curious outcome of the process of detachment is that, at its extreme, it actually re-establishes a relationship between subject and territory that resembles, in a way, the stage of Belonging. It is, however, a Belonging that is specular to how it was in the beginning. The original Belonging implies the complete “heterodetermination” of the subject, and therefore the complete absence of active I-O-I sequences. The necessary

logical/ontological inference, here, is: this Outside action, therefore this Inside reaction ( $O \rightarrow I$ ).

At the opposite end of the continuum of Detachment, i.e., the point of full detachment, the Outside is finally understood as fully belonging to the subject, as a pure emanation or consequence of the subject's self-determination. The formula is now reversed: this Inside action, therefore this Outside reaction ( $I \rightarrow O$ ). Full Detachment may therefore be understood as the point of Owning the territory. As long as we are on the continuum, the formula is sometimes the one of Belonging, sometimes that of Owning, although the ratio shifts as know-how is developed.

### Section V – Attachment as a Mimicry of Belonging

Let us summarize the argument so far. Subject and territory, being made up of intertwined sequences, are always in a relationship of mutual distinction and, therefore, mutual implication. Because they cannot be conceived separately, their relationship is qualified by the reduction of either one to the other.

The state of initial reduction of the subject to the territory is called Belonging, in so far as all of the determinations of the subject may be attributed to influences external to their ability to determine themselves by having control of those determinations. With the subject becoming more and more in charge of their life, with their increasing ability to put their free decisions between themselves and what is coming to them from the Outside, detachment from the territory starts to unfold.

Detachment unfolds in the form of a continuum, with different subjects, and different groups of subjects, positioned at different points, depending on how much they are free from the special nature of their particular circumstances, thanks to their ability to shape those circumstances regardless of where they happen to be. As we have seen in

the previous chapters, action always implies the dissolution of the particularity of place.

The continuum of detachment is characterized by a constantly shifting ratio of O-I-O to I-O-I sequences. On the extreme of Belonging, O-I-O sequences are (supposedly) all there is. At the other end, which we have called the point of Owning the territory, I-O-I sequences are all there is. We have now two extreme points on our conceptual diagram of the movement of the subject on the territory. The first point is that of Belonging. The second one is that of Owning. Full detachment can also be conceptualized as the Belonging of the territory to the subject. It is therefore the specular image of the first kind of Belonging. When, in the later chapters of this work, I develop my philosophy of history, I will show in more detail the complex relationship between the two points of Belonging and Owning.

In between the two extreme points we have the continuum of detachment already mentioned before. It is while on the continuum of detachment that we theorize attachment. This is only natural. When we are at the point of Belonging, there is not enough self-determining Inside that opposes the territory, seeking to fulfill aims that reflect a self-image that opposes the Outside, so we have an absence of unmet needs and aims. At the point of Owning, on the other hand, there is not enough self-determining Outside that remains unpliant by a subject's display of agency, so that we also have an absence of unmet needs and aims.

Only while we are caught in the middle, i.e., only when the Outside is partly subjecting us but partly amenable to our desires, and only when the Inside is self-determining but not free of the necessity of dealing with alien forces, is the need to theorize attachment felt. In other words, we need to be able to perceive our distance from the territory enough to desire to further some of our aims as opposed to being subjected to an

outside rhythm. But our distance from the territory implies that different subjects are not apartment plants, each planted in its discreet pot. They can “invade” other people’s space, something that could not happen at the point of Belonging. Therefore, we want to keep our distance from the territory because it is the source of forces that might subject us, but we also see enough benefits in perpetuating the special link we believe we used to enjoy with a particular territory when we were subjected to it, that is, when detachment wasn’t a problem on which we could reflect.

Let us now ask ourselves what this Attachment is. My answer is that Attachment has two aspects. As an ontological concept, attachment is a consequence of the individual’s subject ignorance, which leads them to organize their self-image around certain traits that are perceived to be more inherent to them than others. I have discussed this meaning of the word in Chapter III.

As a normative theoretical concept, Attachment is a mimicry of Belonging: an attempt to continue to receive the (perceived) benefits of Belonging while enjoying the increasing freedom that comes from moving in the direction of Owning. A theory of Attachment, i.e., a theory of territorial rights, is an attempt to recreate the benefits of Belonging while allowing the subject to remain detached. In this sense, a theory of Attachment is a theory of justification of one’s detachment.

Alien to a theory of attachment is the idea of getting rid of whatever stands in the way of one’s Belonging, simply because in order to do so we would need to get rid of the benefits that come from not belonging, and we would need to go back to being enslaved to our circumstances. We want to keep our distance from the radical particularity that we detached from, but we want to be the only ones who do it on this or that land, and therefore we need to conjure up a language that allows us to

acknowledge a special relationship with the land, but without the negative effects that come with having that special relationship recognized.

Self-determination, the ability to determine ourselves beyond that power that external impulses have on us, is the cause of detachment, because through our self-determination the self-overcoming of the Universal Agent eliminates limits and therefore particularity, as shown in Chapter III. Self-determination causes detachment, but it is also what we want to avoid losing, hence the need to mimic the pre-philosophical certainty of Belonging as post-philosophical, or political certainty, i.e. Attachment.

Not that it would be possible to go back to the stage of Belonging. As I argue more fully in chapter VII, even if we wanted to, we could not eliminate self-determination, for in order to do so we would have to determine ourselves as non-self-determined, and we would therefore perpetuate and even increase our self-determination. We can never free ourselves of ourselves from within. Detachment is, in this sense, a one-way street.

Still, a theory of Attachment is powerless in its attempt to mediate self-determination with Belonging because, in mediating it, it allows the perpetuation and intensification of the problem, i.e., detachment. In this sense, it is a symptom of Detachment rather than a solution for it.





## CHAPTER VI - A Map of Detachment

### Introduction

In the previous chapter, I have introduced the main lines of what I have described as the subject's movement towards detachment. In this chapter, I build upon the foundations laid out in Chapter V to further conceptualize the always shifting relationship between agent and territory.

My plan is to expand the linear model introduced in Chapter V, so as to turn it into a map of the subject's detachment from the territory. This will allow me to account for, and further reflect on, the distinction, embraced by Avery Kolers, between status and achievement views concerning the justification of territorial rights.

In Section I, I explain why a complication of the model introduced in Chapter V is needed. While the continuum of detachment that we have explored in the previous chapter offers us an adequate model for understanding what subjects do, we need to add a further dimension to it in order to make sense of the justification of detachment which, as we've seen, constitutes the core of a theory of territorial rights.

In Section II, I show how the addition of a second axis to the previous linear model allows us to turn the diagram into a map of detachment, on which we can follow the development of arguments for the justification of detachment while our attitude toward the Outside shifts. Finally, in Sections III and IV I show how our justification of detachment changes as we pass from status theories (Section III) to achievement theories (Section IV).

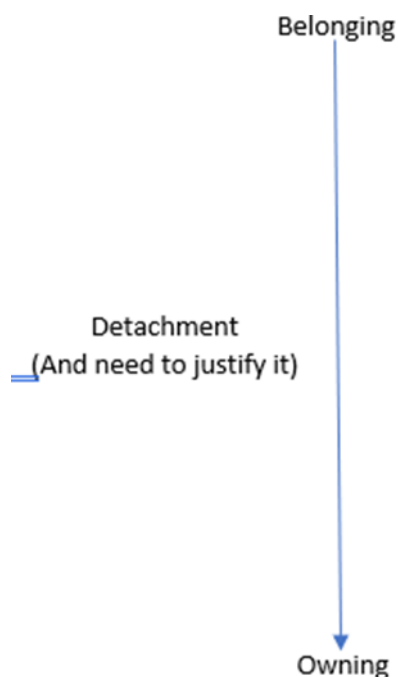
## Section I – The Continuum of Detachment

The distinction between Belonging and Owning, the two points between which the continuum of detachment unfolds, allowed me, in the previous chapter, to spell out the most comprehensive definition of what a territorial rights theory is: a theory of territorial rights seeks to justify detachment from the territory.

A territorial rights theory seeks to mediate between the subject's constant shift towards self-determination from the Outside and their (perceived) need to secure an exclusive relationship with a portion of it. In other words, in explaining why I am the only one who should be entitled to this or that territory, I do not remedy the causes of my detachment from it. Rather, a territorial rights theory seeks to show that one's detachment from the territory abides by certain criteria that justify its protection against other claimants.

This justification does not stop me from continuing in the process that leads me to a fuller and fuller detachment. In fact, as I show in the next chapter, this process is unstoppable. The justification of my detachment is only geared at weeding out the competition that could threaten my being the only one who keeps detaching from the Outside through this or that particular territory: I justify my being the only one with the right to be here, not in order to give up my detachment from here, but so that I can use this place to keep detaching while keeping others away.

As I justify my detachment, I therefore mimic the (perceived) desirable qualities that go with Belonging to the territory, while avoiding the undesirable ones, i.e., the fact that I would have to give up the space for self-determination that I created between myself and the Outside's influence on me, a space which is created by and increased with my detachment. So, we could use a diagram to show the progression from one stage to the other.



The question becomes now: what modalities does the justification of detachment follow? The answer to this question allows us to shed further light on what it means to theorize territorial rights. To answer to this question, I first examine the nature of the subject that exists between Belonging and Owning, in a state of (partial) detachment.

I have shown, in Chapter III, that we are actually the same universal agency, at work through different subjects characterized by different sets of disabilities. If my agency is universal, lacking any essence and therefore limit, by subjecthood is my being situationally limited. At the stage of Belonging, agency is, supposedly, completely absent (I say “supposedly” because, as I anticipated in Chapter V and as I show in Chapter VII, Belonging does not exist). Therefore, at Belonging, we are purely subjects, that is, we are purely heterodetermined. Here, everything is a limit and therefore an ineliminable trait, so that I completely “am”, and have no agency.

At the stage of Owning, conversely, agency is all that appears, so that nothing is a limit.

At Belonging, all we have are O-I-O sequences, while at Owning all we have are I-O-I

sequences. Furthermore, at both stages, no individual subjects are present, because individual subjects are characterized by different combinations of O-I-O and I-O-I sequences, that is, different ways of obstructing the Universal Agent's self-overcoming. Therefore, individuality can only appear in between the two stages, on the continuum of Detachment.

As we are caught between Belonging and Owning, therefore, we partly "are" (as subjects) and we partly "act" (as agents). A subject is characterized by some (supposedly) ineliminable traits, which describe it regardless of what it does or wishes to do. It is Rousseau's "natural man", stifled, but still existing, underneath layers and layers of corrupted behavior, as I have discussed in Chapter V. Being subject implies the apparent inevitability of a trait statically inhering to us rather than its opposite, meaning that such "somethingness" is outside of our agency, not just currently, but essentially, thereby limiting it.

As we develop a know-how whose extension becomes closer and closer to the sum total of all possible bits of know-how required to overcome the sum total of all possible limits, the number of things that we are regardless of our choosing them shrinks, while the number of things that we are depending on our active choice increases. In this sense, the more we grow in understanding, the more we realize that whatever we consider our ineliminable being is actually inactive agency, i.e., agency momentarily kept from fulfilling itself by situational limits based in individuals' ignorance.

The inactivity of individual subjects appears under the guise of static and objective traits that "are" something only due to our relative ignorance of how to activate ourselves in a number of directions through a certain outside point: O-I-O Sequences are inactive I-O-I Sequences. The more we acquire know-how, the more our being must

be reconceptualized as just a reflection of agency, passed through the distorting lens of ignorance.

The distinction between being (subject) and acting (agent) is therefore meaningful only in so far as we find ourselves caught between the extremes of Belonging and Owing, i.e., as long as we are detached, but not fully detached. This framework allows us to characterize the subject in the three stages of Belonging, Detachment and Owing.

At Belonging, we are fully subjects. At Owing, we are fully agents (or, rather, we are fully the Universal Agent). As we are caught in-between, we are partly subjects and partly agents. Our subjecthood is organized around the O-I-O sequences that are, at a certain time, out of our reach and embed us, whereas our agency is expressed in the I-O-I sequences that we embody and Outside points we embed. The state of partial detachment is therefore characterized by a dynamic inconsistency between us as subjects and us as agents, between being and doing.

As we seek to regulate our relationship with the Outside, therefore, we look at ourselves and we see two modalities: we are, but we also act. As a result, we need to operate a choice: what are we going to use to mediate and justify our detachment? Action or being? This is the explanation I offer for the origin of the partition between status and achievement views, which has been thoroughly expounded on by Kolers, and discussed in Section II. According to him, status views believe subjects are attached to the territory because of who they are, while achievement views see attachment to the territory as depending on what the subject does.

Although other ways of distinguishing different categories of territorial rights theories have been devised, I hold the status/achievement one to be more naturally inherent in the concept of what a territorial rights theory does: it is a distinction that is not added from the outside, but that naturally reveals itself as a consequence of what we

do when we justify our detachment. In the next section I explore this distinction more fully.

## Section II – The Map of Detachment

So far, we have a general direction in which subjects go, which is the direction of becoming more unobstructed expressions of the Universal Agent. We also have two possible ways of justifying of detachment: as subjects or as agents, i.e., as beings who are or as agents who do.<sup>13</sup> This distinction corresponds to Kolers' distinction between achievement and status views. In this section I briefly discuss this classification. According to Kolers (2012, p. 102):

An 'achievement' is any demonstrable activity that an agent can now perform or continue performing. In contrast, a 'status' is an ascriptive characteristic that one has or lacks irrespective of anything they might now do, either because what had to be done to get it could only have been done in the past (such as being the first settlers) or because the link is not founded in any action (or at least, any action that the claimant might have taken), but rather in properties such as believing the land to be sacred or having been promised it by a god

This quote provides a description of the status-achievement dichotomy. On the one hand, we have achievement views, which place the responsibility for the subject's linkage to the territory in the subject's hands, and therefore understand the subject as agent. Kolers says that "[...] on an achievement view the group must somehow earn its

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<sup>13</sup> A possible objection might be that agents also "are": they are agents. But this is playing with words. Being implies the impossibility of agency, because agency requires the overcoming of a state-of-being which would otherwise be a limit to it. Saying that an agent "is" an agent would therefore be the same thing as saying that a picture of someone kicking a ball is actually kicking a ball.

state, and hence, the theory requires accounts of a group that can act, and of an act that it can do" (ibid., p. 103)

In my own terminology, on the achievement view, the bundle of sequences that makes up the subject is placed under the burden of political normativity only in so far as the I-O-I sequences are concerned. An achievement view seeks to single out, among all the I-O-I sequences that are available to the (collective) subject, a number of I-O-I sequences that need to be activated or to remain active in order for the subject's entitlement to a number of its O-I-O sequences corresponding to its relationship with a certain territory to be safeguarded against other claimants.

On the other hand, status views add normative relevance to the subject's relationship with a certain trait that is deemed inaccessible to the agent-side of that subject. In other words, it considers the subject primarily as subject. As Kolers puts it "On a status view, groups with status claims to particular places need not actually be able to do anything, because there is nothing they are being asked to do. They just have to be." (ibid., p. 103)

In my own terms, a status view treats one or more O-I-O sequences which embed the subject as normatively relevant. These sequences are held to be (empirically or metaphysically) unmodifiable, appearing as a trait of the subject that remains true regardless of the subject's activity, i.e., regardless of their I-O-I sequences. A status criterion can obtain also as a consequence of a past achievement, as shown by the example of Chaim Gans's historical view, which I discuss in the next Section.

I later show that a status theory's reliance on being over acting is the reason why status views are destined to be abandoned, even though they may actually be prevalent in much extra-academic rhetoric: because, in understanding the subject as subject and not as (current or potential) agent, they are betting on the wrong conceptual horse.



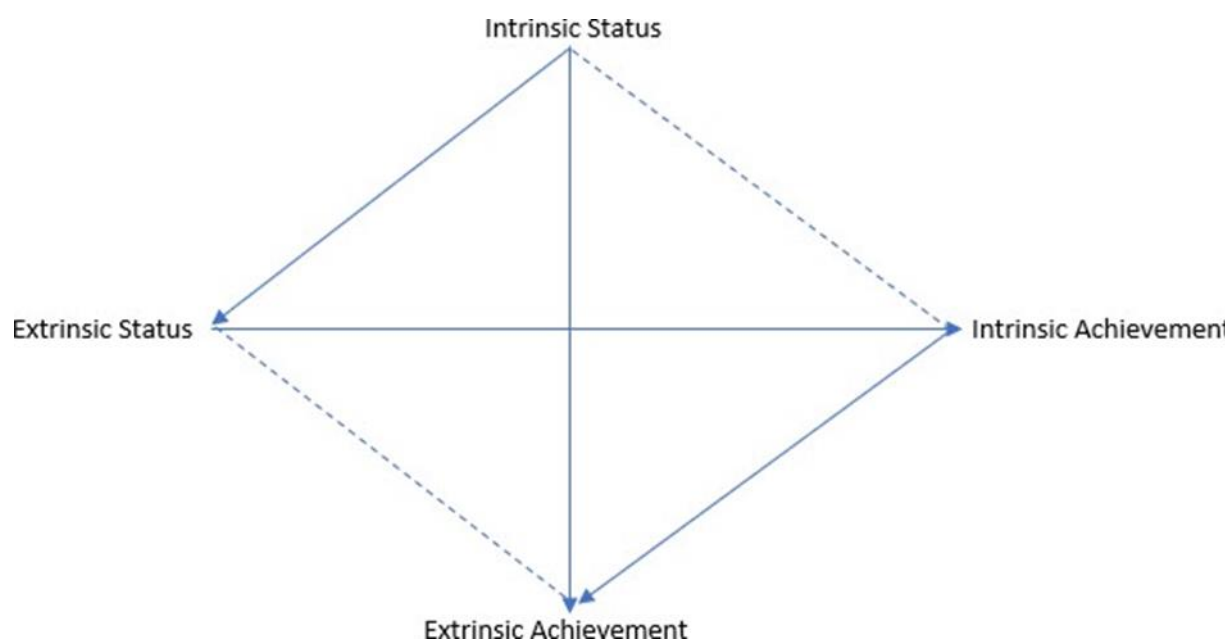
This has nothing to do with the moral desirability of one solution over the other, but with objective ontological and historical considerations.

Finally, Kolers also takes into consideration the concept of “presence”, that is, of continued occupancy. According to him

Presence views are the natural alternative to status views. And presence seems to avoid all these problems. 'Being there' is an achievement, and hence avoids the existential problem. Yet as an achievement it is so minimal that it avoids the risk of ethnocentrism and appears to raise no difficulties of group action. (ibid., p. 105)

As written by Kolers, presence views are actually minimal achievement views, so they do not truly constitute, from a rigorous classificatory perspective, a conceptual tertium between status and achievement. Kolers presents them only to refute them and then argue in favor of an achievement view founded on non-ethnocentric normative standards (more on this in Section IV), so I shall not pursue the concept further.

We now have enough information to extend the previous linear model of detachment into a full map of detachment. The previous model, as described in the previous chapter, consists of a single axis that leads from Belonging to Owning. We now add a second axis intersecting the first one, which accounts for the distinction between being and doing that is relevant while on the continuum, and therefore accounts also for the two possible modes of justification of detachment that are founded on these two modes of existence -as agents and as subjects.



I end this section with a short explanation of the terms “intrinsic” and “extrinsic” as I understand them, while in the next two sections I detail the conceptual unfoldment of the subject/agent’s detachment as it passes through the various stages.

By “intrinsic” I mean internal to the subject’s relationship with the land; by “extrinsic” I mean external to such relationship. As a brief example, which I develop further in Section IV, Lea Ypi’s Kantian cosmopolitan view is an extrinsic achievement view, because she understands attachment, i.e., the justification of detachment, as an achievement, but said achievement is regulated not by the subject’s way of relating to the land, but by criteria external to how the subject-territory relationship develops. On the other hand, Kolers’ own view seems to fall in the intrinsic achievement camp, as his plenitude criterion seeks to regulate the subject’s way of relating to the territory so that it matches a certain morally acceptable blueprint of subject-territory relationship.

### Section III – Status Views (Intrinsic and Extrinsic)

We now have everything in place to start describing the conceptual unfoldment of the justification of detachment which is pictured in the diagram. In doing this, we should keep in mind that this is a conceptual progression, not necessarily a temporal one. Different justifications are offered throughout modern history.<sup>14</sup>

The conceptual unfoldment of the justification of detachment begins with what I have called Intrinsic Status, then it goes through the stages of Extrinsic Status and Intrinsic Achievement and it ends with what I have called Extrinsic Achievement.

The two extreme points, i.e., Intrinsic Status and Extrinsic Achievement, coincide with what I have called Belonging and Owing. The two sets of terms do not mean exactly the same thing: “Belonging” and “Owing” describe the Inside’s relationship with the Outside, whereas “Intrinsic Status” and “Extrinsic Achievement” describe the justificatory structure that becomes available at that point. From now on I shall be concerned primarily with the justificatory structure, but what Belonging and Owing mean must always be kept in mind.

In the previous chapter, I described Belonging as the absence of agency, that is, of I-O-I strings. This means that, at that point, we are exclusively subjects as opposed to agents. As subjects, our identity is perceived as outside of our control and decisions. That identity is a kernel of selfhood which transcends our ability to act on it, and

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<sup>14</sup> Kolers, for instance, states that some of the earlier theories of territorial rights were based on performance (and therefore achievement) criteria, especially those criteria entailed in a Eurocentric worldview. As a reaction to this, some theorists have deemed status views more balanced, as a status theory “[...] avoids what we might call the problem of *ethnocentrism* : the risk, attendant on any achievement view, of smuggling in a culturally particular performance criterion such as the European conception of efficiency” (Kolers, 2012, p. 103) I will come back to the difference between the conceptual and the temporal sides of justification in the next chapter.

therefore it constantly defines us and subjects us to itself without us being able to (re)define it, i.e., making it into a consequence of our active decisions.

The (hypothetical) state of Belonging is not conducive of theorization concerning territorial rights, because, as shown in the previous chapter, theorizing attachment implies detachment and its justification. It implies, furthermore, a sort of “appropriative” stance towards the outside, whereas in so far as we “belong” to the territory, we are, in a sense, owned by it, that is, made passive by its activity on us.<sup>15</sup>

If Belonging is not conducive of theorization, then the set of Intrinsic Status theories is an empty set. Technically, an Intrinsic Status justification would imply the possibility of seeing certain characteristics of the subject (and their Outside territorial correlation) both as factual and as a normatively binding. The problem here is that the very fact of attempting to justify our detachment implies the inability to see this identity of “is” and “ought” which was only possible from a pre-philosophical standpoint.

The closest thing to an Intrinsic Status conception of our relationship with a certain land is given by Plato in the Republic, as I already anticipated in Chapter I. Here I do not mean to push the conceptual vocabulary of territorial rights on Plato, since the Republic deals with other issues. However, when Socrates argues that we should lie to the Guardians of the City to make them believe they were born from the earth and morally bound to it (2001, 415A-C), he is essentially saying that we should sell people the idea of a factually AND normatively binding relationship with the land. But Socrates himself acknowledges that this is a lie. Lying implies convincing someone of something

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<sup>15</sup> By this I do not mean that territorial rights are to be conceptualized as equal to property: as shown by Allen Buchanan (2003), territorial rights are not simply a larger application of the concept of property, because they imply a whole host of prerogatives that no single property owner can straightforwardly claim for her own property, at least under our commonsense understanding of what property is. What I mean, however, is that, no matter how much we try to understand territorial jurisdiction differently from property, the two concepts, while different from a legal standpoint, are necessarily part of the same ontological category of stances that are unlocked and become available as we detach from the Outside.

that is not, in itself, self-evidently true (so much so that it isn't true at all). Lying implies, in other words, the preventing of doubt about something doubtful, and we have seen in the previous Chapter that the problem of territorial rights, i.e., of the justification of detachment, becomes impelling only when we become doubtful of where we belong.

An Intrinsic Status theory would imply not the quenching of doubt by positive proof, but the prevention of doubt, which is not only questionable from a political standpoint (by what means? Within what boundaries? Why can we trust a government with such terrible power?), but, more importantly, merely expediential. Given enough time, the conditions will necessarily produce themselves for doubt to ensue, no matter how much we try to prevent it: something that is intrinsically doubtful will necessarily, in due time, attract doubt.

Understanding our relationship with the land as a status means understanding ourselves primarily as subjects rather than agents. It means believing in an internal core of subjecthood which transcends our ability to act on it, affirming this core's essential relationship with a land. It is a sort of "true self", understood in a geographical/historical sense. This remains true in the following step outlined in the map: that of Extrinsic Status. This set of theories encompasses almost all possible status theories.

The important distinction between Intrinsic and Extrinsic Status theories is that the Extrinsic variety unfolds on the horizontal axis of the diagram. As I have shown above, this implies that there is a distinction between the Inside as Subject and the Inside as Agent, something which was not the case for Intrinsic Status views. Extrinsic Status views, just like Intrinsic Achievement views, seek to reconcile these two manifestations of the Inside, but without being able to fully reduce them to unity.

Chaim Gans' (2001) conception of formative territory is a good example of an Extrinsic Status view. This "conception of historical rights shifts the emphasis from a people's primacy in a certain territory to the primacy of a territory for a given people" (Gans, 2001, p. 60). Gans uses the metaphor of parental ties to explain a subject's belief in its connection to its "fatherland".

Views that hinge on the formative import of the territory are more clearly understandable as Status views. "If the events thought to have formed the historical identity of a national group took place in specific territories, it seems likely that these territories will be perceived by the members of that group as bearing deep and significant ties to their national identity" (ibid., p. 66)

Of course, the formative events may be actions just as well as the passive acceptance of one's identity as pressed onto one from the outside. However, even if they are actions that the group carried out, they are seen now, as it were, as now unmodifiable traits to which I can trace back some of my own identity.

Extrinsic status views seek to hold me as agent accountable to me as subject. We can contrast this with Intrinsic Status, where the agent is fully reduced to the subject. Now, however, the agent has established itself as (at least partially) apart from the subject. However, so much so that its conformity to its subjecthood is seen as an ought, and therefore as something that may fail to be the case.

Yet, here also lies the problem with Extrinsic Status views. They raise a dilemma. On the one hand, they could affirm that there is a normatively relevant factor self-evidently inscribed in the Inside's territorial/ontological subjecthood, but in this case, then, the structure of the theory falls flat as it is founded purely on the attempt to have "ought" follow from "is".

On the other hand, they could turn into an achievement theory if they seek to hold the agent's side of the Inside accountable to the subject's side of the Inside, with failure as a possibility. To go back to the example of the noble lie, Socrates could tell the guardian that they were born from the earth, and that therefore they ought to remain bound to it, but this "ought" does not follow from the "is", nor does it follow that other people ought not to displace them.

If Extrinsic Status theories are actually Achievement theories in disguise, they would be too cumbersome to uphold. Status views seek to hold the group against a certain fixed subjective picture which, given enough time, is necessarily going to get in the way of the subject's agency. The direction in which we are constantly headed is that of the activation or switching on of I-O-I or agent sequences. This process implies the further embodiment of the Universal Agent through increasing ability of the various subjects to overcome limits. This means each subject is going in the direction of being more and more an agent and less and less a subject as the number of O-I-O or territory sequences that make them up shrinks.

The cumbersomeness of status views is not, in the first place, moral: it is ontological, as it seeks to go against the flow of things. If ontology and agency coincide, as shown in Chapter II and III, then Status views seek to keep agency under the yoke of a wrongly understood ontology that is perceived as separated from agency. At this point, a status view can only do two things: it either confesses to its inner nature of strong achievement view, or it limits itself to pointing out certain facts (e.g., "we are the descendants of people X" or "we have the trait Y") without being able to assert their normative relevance. Based on its very own conceptual insufficiency, the notion of status naturally and gradually gives way to that of achievement, in which it is reabsorbed. This is our point of entry into the Achievement camp.

## Section IV – Achievement Views (Intrinsic and Extrinsic)

Achievement views have two subcategories: Intrinsic Achievement and Extrinsic Achievement. Unlike in the case of status views, neither of these sets is empty. Extrinsic Achievement coincides with Owning, a point that is just as unproductive of the theorization of territorial rights as Belonging: at Belonging we have no separate subject, at Owning no separate territory. However, as we shall see shortly, Extrinsic Achievement views approximate this absence of territory by not making reference to it and concentrating solely on agency.

In fact, what distinguishes Intrinsic Achievement views from Extrinsic Achievement views is that the former attempt to guide agency in its weaving of a relationship with the territory by pointing out criteria that are or seem to be intrinsic to the way humans relate to the territory.

By contrast, Extrinsic Achievement views attempt to regulate human agency on its own merits without any primary philosophical reference to how the agent relates to the territory: the territory is thus, in a sense, awarded to the group that complies with these regulations which, in themselves, have nothing to do with their relationship with the land.

This does not imply that, on an Extrinsic Achievement account, everybody is perfectly free to act on the land in whatever way catches their whim. It may well be that the regulation of the subject's behavior has implications on how the subject acts on the land: someone might argue, for instance, that causing excessive pollution or destroying natural resources goes against certain a-territorial rules that the subject needs to abide by.



However, the upholding of certain behaviors towards the land will be seen as a breach of universal rules of good human conduct rather than a falling short from a method of “bonding” with one’s land. This is what makes it Extrinsic Achievement. But remember that the views lie on a continuum, and views towards the middle of this continuum can rely on a mixture of intrinsic and extrinsic ideas. For example, an Intrinsic Achievement account may well attempt to bring in more generic, a- territorial principles while relying mostly on a description of how a politically sound subject-territory relationship obtains.

Let’s begin with Intrinsic Achievement views. These are the accounts that attempt to regulate how we act on the land. While Extrinsic Status views sacrifice the agent to the subject, doing to being, Intrinsic Achievement views sacrifice being to doing, the subject to the agent. Extrinsic Status makes being normatively relevant toward the agent. Intrinsic Achievement makes agency normatively relevant in its action on the territory, and therefore on itself as subject. Yet, both views presuppose an unresolved tension between the two sides, agency and territory, as if they were irreducible to one another, whereas at the point of Belonging the agent is reduced to the subject and at the point of Owning the subject is reduced to the agent. The presence of this unresolved tension in Extrinsic Status views is the cause of their dismissal in favor of Intrinsic Achievement accounts.

Kolers’ concept of plenitude is an excellent example of an Intrinsic Achievement view. According to Kolers “Plenitude holds claimants to a significant achievement criterion by demanding that they empirically justify attachment against competitors and others” (2012, p. 112) In this sense, plenitude is (or ought to be, in Kolers’ plan) a criterion one might fail to live up to. Kolers uses the example of a vacant lot, which may be full of randomly placed objects, litter and weeds. According to Kolers, this lot may not be empty, but it is not “full” in any meaningful sense.

Places become full when we perceive their internal diversity, and we begin to fill them not necessarily by adding stuff but by understanding and enhancing this internal diversity. Thus suppose we began to transform the vacant lot by clearing out the trash, pulling up weeds, setting aside a certain spot for athletics, while finding a sunny spot to grow flowers for sale at the local farmer's market and a shady spot for neighborhood meetings. Now we would refer to part of the lot as 'the court,' part of it as 'the garden,' part of it as 'the patio,' or whatever. (Ibid., p. 113)

The achievement he proposes is founded on the Inside's role as agent, rather than as subject. He therefore acknowledges, albeit implicitly, our shift towards a more active stance. He then seeks to normatively regulate this active stance, and he proposes a criterion that is founded on our agency's impact on the portion of the Outside we concentrate our efforts on, to achieve plenitude. This makes his view an Intrinsic Achievement one.

Kolers distinguishes between Empirical plenitude, which

“[...] begins in the past and continues into the present, and is a feature of the world: the demonstrable internal diversity and external distinctiveness of the place.” (ibid., p. 113) and Intentional plenitude, which “[...]begins in the present and continues into the future, characterizing the plans and intentions of the claimant: the group has feasible and operational plans to realize or maintain empirical plenitude in perpetuity” (ibid., p. 113)

In other words, plenitude stems from the agent's (or agents') attitude and behavior towards the land. Because of the intentional feature of plenitude, Kolers' view faces the objection that it is too relativistic to give us objective standards to measure a subject's ability to enforce plenitude (Mancilla, 2016). Intentions, after all, may be limited to subjective or culturally specific understandings. Kolers may respond that

plenitude must meet practical epistemic tests. The plenitude that Agent A creates must be such that every other Agent/Claimant can recognize, that must be founded on sustainable strategies (to “maintain empirical plenitude in perpetuity”).

From the standpoint of our diagram, I would argue that Kolars’ problem is not that his view is too relativistic, but that it is not relativistic enough. Kolars speaks of “enhancing the internal diversity and the external distinctiveness” of a land. Yet, this is only possible if there is an internal diversity and an external distinctiveness of places to begin with, which means that the Outside must have some intrinsic trait X regardless of our stance toward it, a trait that guides our agency.

In Chapters II to IV, I have argued against this presupposition. The Inside’s essential emptiness implies the Outside’s essential emptiness. The external distinctiveness of places is actually the result of the subject’s impotence. This diversity is not just a function of our perspective, as Kolars says, but rather of the fact that our perspectives are necessarily the byproduct of our relative disabilities.

To maintain the idea of an external distinctiveness of places which may be enhanced by an agent with the right plan, we must presuppose that lands have a stronger metaphysical status than they actually have, something that only a Status view can pull off with some credibility.

But this distinctiveness of places becomes a stifling metaphysical presupposition as we acquire know-how and we learn to be more and more creative, i.e., more and more capable of doing whatever we like wherever we want. If we abandon this untenable idea that territories need to be metaphysically diverse, we must soon realize that the regulation of human action cannot hinge on its conformity with how the territory is, and we therefore need a new approach.

As we move towards the final point on the diagram, which is that of Extrinsic Achievement, we retrieve the idea of conceptual reducibility of one side, between “subject” and “agent”, to the other. This final stage is the conceptual opposite of that of Intrinsic Status.

When our relationship with the territory is understood as an Intrinsic Status we belong to the Outside, meaning that all of the traits that make us up are conceptually understandable as the consequence of our inability to react to, or act on the Outside: we appear to owe who we are to a force that is outside of our self-determination.

As we move towards the stage of Extrinsic Status, the polarity of being and acting comes into play, and we seek to keep our agency in line with our being, which remains outside (extrinsic to) our doing: who we are guides (or “ought to” guide) what we do. Conversely and complementarily, the stage of Intrinsic Achievement seeks to regulate agency as it affects being. The aim of an Intrinsic Achievement view is to spell out the traits of the agent that will inform the land in the right way.

The final stage on the diagram, that of Extrinsic Achievement, de facto treats being as a consequence of action, which means that being has no normative power left to play a role that is irreducible to that of human action. Therefore, an Extrinsic Achievement view seeks to regulate action on action itself, i.e., on how action should be carried out, regardless of territory.

It would not be wrong to call these views Award theories of territorial rights, simply because they largely disregard the concept of territory, and they only preoccupy themselves with defining right (usually political/moral) action, awarding territory to the claimants that succeed. Most Kantian theories are, unsurprisingly, part of this group.

Lea Ypi's permissive account (2012) is a good example of an Extrinsic Achievement view. In the previous chapter I used Ypi's classification of territorial rights theories (2013) as a comparison to my own. What I sought to show was that every theory is a theory of attachment, something which seems to be indirectly contradicted by Ypi's attempt to classify theories in Acquisition-based, Attachment-based, based on legitimate statehood and what she calls "forward-looking justifications".

According to Ypi, a forward-looking justification does not regard the right to exclusion as conceptually subordinated to a legitimate agent's already established jurisdiction over a land. This can be broadly understood, in my opinion, as an attempt to redeem issues of right action toward other agents, so far as acting on the Outside is concerned, from their theoretical secondariness to already established land rule.

Once the two aspects are separated, the issue of right action together with other agents in acting on the Outside may become a more defining aspect of the justification of specific jurisdictional powers. In her paper, Ypi is conscious of the reversal she is attempting to bring about: making the establishment of justice between agents (possibly on a global scale) a condition for the agents' occupancy of a land to gain legitimacy.

In her permissive account, Ypi does exactly this. Her theory is founded on (her interpretation of) Kant's concept of permissive laws.<sup>16</sup> According to Ypi, "States can continue to exercise territorial rights if and only if their citizens are also politically committed to the establishment of a global authority realizing an all-inclusive principle of right" (2012, p. 6). This view is grounded on the notion that

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<sup>16</sup> Here I am not interested in whether Ypi interprets Kant's view faithfully. Pinheiro Walla (2014) offers some critical remarks on Ypi's interpretation.

“[...] it is only possible to rightfully have something external as one’s own if, with the very act of acquiring external resources by unilateral means, we also accept the necessity of a collectively established political authority ruling in the name of all. In this way, the unilaterality of initial acquisition and the arbitrary use of exclusionary force is mitigated by the commitment to make our will consistent with others’ will through collective rules of property arbitration and enforcement.” (ibid., p. 11)

In other words, nothing can be strong enough to ground my right to a certain Outside point simply because I relate to it in a certain way (as was the case with Intrinsic Achievement views), which means that my subjective relation to that point can only be secured and validated universally by being included in an all-inclusive space outside of each particular subjective relation to the Outside, a space in which each subjectivity is somehow made part of the game, and which therefore needs universal rules in order to work.

This way, the purely subjective phase of acquisition is both overcome and included in a framework outside of which nothing and no one exists that might question such acquisition, the price for this being that the unilaterality of the acquisition phase be put to a universal use in the form of the creation of this framework. This is the essence of Ypi’s interpretation of permissive laws, as applied to territorial rights.

The important thing to note, here, is the status that is implicitly reserved to the Outside by Ypi: the Outside is no longer the external regulatory background against which my fitness to be a right-holder is measured. Ypi disqualifies the Outside from being conceptually/ontologically strong enough to impose its own peculiar rules on the agent, such as was still the case with Kolers. The Outside is stripped of all its irreducibility and particularity: it is no longer an issue of this place versus that place.

Instead, it is seen purely as a means between the agent and itself with whatever the agent wants: Inside – Outside – Inside. Indeed, this is the reason why her theory is a perfect example of the Extrinsic Achievement variety: because it accords very well with a view of the Inside as agent, rather than subject, and therefore with a prevalence of I-O-I sequences, which can only happen when we detach further from the Outside and lose the idea of being passive receptacles for the Outside.

The actions of the agent are then regulated on their own merit: in using the territory as a means, the agent must use it as a means that allow them to pass from themselves as subjectivity to themselves as part of a recomposed intersubjective cosmopolitan puzzle.

The problem with a theory that regulates agency on its own merit is the same problem I highlighted, in Chapter IV, as the paradox of normativity. The agency that establishes the rule is the same agency whose essential emptiness already implies the overcoming of the rule. Agency is necessarily unbridled. The Extrinsic Achievement camp seeks to approximate agency's essential emptiness by making its requisites less ontologically cumbersome, which is why Kantian formalism is a good example of this stage of justification. Yet, in so far as a normative theory seeks to play a normative role, it must attempt to place limitations on agency. Thus, Extrinsic Achievement is not capable of restraining agency for its own specific failings.

In conclusion, I have shown how the continuum of detachment may be expanded into a map of detachment and its justification. This justification may happen by trying to hold the agent accountable to its subjective nature or by regulating the agent's activity on the territory that informs its subjective nature. Finally, we may try to regulate agency on its own merits, regardless of the territory. I have shown that Extrinsic Status views fail because they are actually Achievement views in disguise. Intrinsic

Achievement views fail because they assume an ontology of land that only a Status view can accept. Finally, Extrinsic Achievement views fail because they seek to prevent agency from unfolding its potential.





## CHAPTER VII - Territory and History

### Introduction

In the previous chapter, I developed a visual representation of the task of territorial rights: to give a justification of detachment. I explained the notion of a continuum of detachment, first introduced in Chapter V, and expanded it into a full framework. I argued that various justifications for territorial rights found in current literature can be represented as justifications of detachment using my framework.

The problem I tackle in the present chapter is that of return. Provided the diagram highlights a tendency towards detachment and the way that tendency affects our ability to justify our actions, is it possible to go against this tendency? Is it possible to revert the flow that constantly pushes us to greater and greater detachment from the land?

If the answer to these questions is no, as I want to argue, we need to develop a philosophy of history that accounts for this unidirectional model, whereby agency, i.e., the activation of agent sequences (I-O-I) and overcoming of limits, follows a coherent flow and has its own trajectory. The problem of every philosophy of history (be it inspired by Communism, Liberal Democracy, Christianity or any other ideal) is that it needs to identify the particular configuration of humanity that will assert itself in the end and be unsurpassable by any other configuration. It needs to highlight a particular picture of the world that supposedly exists at the end of the process that is bringing us there. Here I shall develop of a philosophy of history that is aware of this issue and seeks to avoid it, on the score of my conceptualization of agency as aimless in its articulation of the interaction between subjects and territories.

If the answer to the questions above were that yes, it is possible to reverse the process of detachment, we wouldn't have the problem of highlighting a direction in history, simply because it would be possible for us to truly revert to a configuration of ourselves that appears to be in the past.

Here I attempt to unify these two perspectives. My argument is that it is exactly because we are free from any particular self-configuration that we are subjected to the most stringent historical necessity. It's because history does not have an aim that no aim, and therefore no configuration of humanity, can be the last one. But, because no configuration of humanity can be the last one, this lack of a true, static configuration implies overcoming of the possibility of any configuration emerging that can stop the process. The aimlessness of history, which is a consequence of the aimlessness of agency, causes our trajectory to be even more unbending than it would be if there was an aim.

The philosophy of history that I want to develop is founded, in other words, on what we might call an absence of the absence of destiny: by embodying a universal agency, as seen in Chapter III, we subtract ourselves from the necessity of any self-configuration that might try to impose itself on us from outside our self-determination, thereby transcending it and limiting it in an essential way; but exactly because we destroy or subjugate everything that might shape up to be our destiny, and therefore we prove the absence of a destiny, we shape our own unbending trajectory.

In Sections I and II, I introduce the idea of philosophy of history as a theoretical construct, showing how it differs from the traditional way of understanding reality. In Sections III, I discuss a criticism that has been made by Leo Strauss to philosophy of history. In Section IV I develop my philosophy of history, while in Section V I show how my version of Historicism doesn't suffer from the same problems Strauss highlights,

while also point out how it differs from other views. In Sections VI, I discuss the issue of return, i.e., of whether we can go back to the past, and I conclude negatively. Finally, in Section VII, I argue that the end of the process (Owning) must necessarily coincide with its beginning (Belonging). This allows the process to never end despite being directionally oriented.

## Section I – Introduction to Philosophy of History

In Chapter II, I discussed at some length the issue of what metaphysical picture or configuration of humanity is dominant in certain philosophies, and what the consequences of changing this picture are. I discussed how, in the history of philosophy, we have slowly gone from understanding humanity in light of what was believed to be a higher plane to, instead, seeing it as an instance of what was believed to be a lower plane. In the Christian doctrine, for instance, humans are not primarily “natural” or worldly beings, but the privileged, essentially outstanding (from nature) offspring of a divine agent, abiding by whose will (which constitutes divine law) humans can get in touch with their essential, truest core. Sin is, in this sense, a wandering off the path laid out for us by our maker, a lapsing away, which is what we call the Fall. On the other hand, philosophy of history shows that this “true core” is not a transcendent image of ourselves that exists outside of space and time, but the product of a historical, teleological process which leads to the concrete establishment of a reality that is consistent with this core.

Back in Chapter II, I quoted Josef Ratzinger who, in one of his encyclicals, described the older view in a very succinct and understandable way which bears repeating. In acting in accordance with the divine law “[...] our will and God's will increasingly coincide: God's will is no longer for me an alien will, something imposed on me from without by the commandments, but it is now my own will, based on the realization that God is in

fact more deeply present to me than I am to myself.” (2005, p. 17) God’s will forms the blueprint of my own will in so far as my will is the right will, so that I must constantly strive to close the gap between my will and God’s, and in so far as I don’t, I am not acting in accordance with what is my truest, deepest will, the one that can be found in how my soul is structured as directly created by God. Sinning, i.e., acting against the will of God and my own nature, gives us only the illusion of will.

What the Catholic doctrine states, together with many older doctrines, is that, if we are to align our outer being to our innermost, truest structure, we need to remain within certain parameters of action, or within a certain spectrum of moral-behavioral acceptability. We need to conform to a standard that we haven’t created, but that is pushed onto us from the outside. If we subscribe to Ratzinger’s statement, the fact that this standard appears outside of us is only a consequence of sin, while, if we sanctify ourselves, we discover that that standard is the blueprint of our truest life. Still, if we accept his interpretation, we contradict ourselves, in that we state that our will as a fallen creature is illusory, but also that it is needed in order for us to act in conformity with the will that informed my soul in its ideal structure.

As such, beyond all possible rationalizations of theology, religion remains tied to a foundational act of faith. This act of faith requires the acceptance of a doctrine and of the social organization that upholds it, in this case the Catholic church. According to the church, the possibility of acting well, or reaching the “Good” has nothing to do with history, so much so that the church sees itself as not just a physical and social structure, but also as metaphysical hierarchy that seeks to win a fallen humanity back to a path that transcends the particularity and mutability of history.

In its Catechism, it calls itself the “that Jerusalem which is above” and “bride of the spotless lamb” (art. 757) and again “The Church is both visible and spiritual, a

hierarchical society and the Mystical Body of Christ. She is one, yet formed of two components, human and divine. That is her mystery, which only faith can accept.” (art. 779). In other words, the church is that metaphysical hierarchy which is a passive receptacle of the eternal Christ above, to whom she is “married”, and active towards the historical world below, towards which she “funnels” the word of God. “She” is informed from above and informs what’s below, and is therefore only outwardly a historical structure, while inwardly it is supposed to coincide with a metaphysical, eternal hierarchy. As such, the church sees itself as uniquely positioned to bring the revelation of who we truly are to our illusory, fallen selves.

According to the Catholic doctrine, the Church acts as point of juncture between the metaphysically real (and eternal) structure of the universe and the physically real, fallen one, which only appears as real. Other religious doctrines largely agree with the idea that the real world is that above or beyond, although their dogmatic aspects may vary.

It is quite telling that one of the major conservative criticisms to Pope Francis’ teachings is that he seems to excuse “sinners” from their sins because those sins are historically impossible not to commit in this day and age, which is seen by conservatives as a concession to the *Zeitgeist*, i.e., to history. When Pope Francis released his controversial apostolic exhortation *Amoris Laetitia* (2016), concerned mostly with sexual morality, a document called *Filial Correction Concerning Propagated Heresies* (2017) was circulated and signed by notable academics and higher-ups in the Catholic hierarchy. According to the *Correction*, *Amoris Laetitia* is not compatible with traditional Catholic theology, in that it yields to “modernism”. For instance, according to the document, “the languages in which divine revelation is expressed, and the cultures and histories that shaped these languages, do not

constrain, distort, or add to the divine revelation that is expressed in them” (ibid., pp. 11-12).

The reason for this, of course, is that the Catholic doctrine is theocentric, in that it presupposes the ontological, logical, metaphysical and moral primacy of God over the world and over humanity. Asserting that divine revelation might be distorted in some essential way in how it presents itself to humans is to assert God’s impotence, if we understand God as something distinct from the world and from humanity. But, still according to the document, Francis’ encyclical contravenes this point of faith, in that said encyclical argues (according to its critics) that “A justified person has not the strength with God’s grace to carry out the objective demands of the divine law, as though any of the commandments of God are impossible [...]” (ibid., p. 17).

In other words, someone may be justified, within their particular context, whether historical, cultural or personal, in breaking the absolute prohibitions contained in God’s law. Therefore, the implicit assertion would be that the relative conditions in which we find ourselves are stronger than God’s grace. This prevents us from rectifying the contradiction, seen above, caused by the fact that my illusory will must be used to do what my “true” will wants despite not being that true will and, therefore, despite being unreliable, a contradiction that only God’s grace (and therefore the Church as metaphysical structure) can somehow dissolve.

The church sees itself as intermediary between the eternal and the temporal. According to traditional Catholic teaching, the code of conduct that we ought to be following exists in the eternal region. This code of conduct informs the picture of humanity as it ought to be, and as it would be if it stayed true to its essence. It is the “real human”, the human as seen by God, the saint, whose model is eternally available in God’s mind, above the chaotic movements of history. The saints are the ones who

actively choose to divest themselves of history, which does not mean that they won't have a historical role, but that their historical role will be in harmony with the part of them that is beyond history. Saying that it is impossible, at some point in time, to conform to God's will is the same as saying that history has the last say on how we behave, and not our eternal soul, something that a doctrine that believes the real world is beyond this one cannot accept.

The reason why religious moralists constantly nag us with visions of hell and urge us to embody our best selves is that the picture of humanity they seek to get across to us is not going to work unless we work it. History doesn't take us to this picture automatically. Therefore, the possibility of us embodying our real, essential selves is contingent upon a distinction between conducive (right) and non-conducive (wrong) action. I "ought not" to sin because it is very much possible to sin, and a lot.

In fact, if I don't let my historical being be abstracted out of the contingency of history, I will sin more and more as I accept the distorted ways of the apparently real, but metaphysically secondary world as representative of my real being. The world as it "ought to" be is safely and eternally contained out of history, in God's mind, but we need to act that vision out, or it will never come true.

Conversely, traditional philosophy of history sees the "real human" as either at the beginning or, more usually, at the end of the historical process. This depends, as Karl Popper noted both in *Poverty of Historicism* and in *The Open Society*, on whether one is an optimist or a pessimist about history, so that some will see humanity slipping away from its origin back in time, others will see it reaching its most complete and perfected form (1945, Vol. I, 153).

In this thesis, I focus mainly on "optimistic" historicism, because it is what we commonly understand as philosophy of history. If for most traditional doctrines, such



as Catholicism, the real configuration of humanity is in an a-temporal being's mind, for a philosopher of history such real configuration is not an "ought" that must be lived up to (and that therefore we may fail to live up to) but rather something that necessarily will be, and that therefore already exists potentially in the current situation as something that reality is naturally reaching toward.

## Section II – The Structure of Historical Movement According to Philosophy of History

In philosophy of history, and the vision of "Good" ceases to be something that ought to be, and it becomes something that will be.<sup>17</sup> It loses, in other words, its moralistic, abstract character. The "real human", e.g., the communist, if we believe Marx (or the liberal democrat, if we believe Fukuyama) is waiting for us at the end of the historical process. By "real human" I mean the human being existing nestled in the world as it really is (and, therefore, potentially already is). So, in Marx's case, the world as it really essentially is corresponds to Communism, because it is the social/economic configuration where humanity, which he understands as essentially practical and therefore creative/productive of its objects, has overcome the class distinctions that place limits on its practical nature by alienating the means of production. Every other

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<sup>17</sup> I do not mean to imply that history is not important for those doctrines that hold that the "real human" is above and beyond time: Christian scholar Claes G. Ryn, for instance, sought to develop the notion that "[...] there is synthesis between the universal and the historical particular. To recognize this fact is fully compatible with recognizing what is equally important to understand, that particularity/individuality is frequently in sharp conflict with universality." (2005, p. 45) Christian eschatology itself holds that there is an end of times, with a final judgment, where everybody will be judged, i.e., where God will hold everybody against the picture of the "real human", and those who do not match it will burn forever. Similarly, there is yet another sense in which, for the Christian doctrine, humans used to live as they ought to in the past and have lapsed away from that state, i.e., before the original sin, when life as it really is matched life as it ideally is.

It is obvious that the Christian doctrine seeks to establish outposts throughout history (Ryn calls them moments of "synthesis" between universal and particular, or between eternity and history, we might say) in spite of being an essentially a-historical doctrine. Still, in these doctrines, the end of times is relevant because of the a-historical principle that manifests at one point or another, not because it is the end of times, that is, not because there is an immanent process in history that fulfills itself through history, an essential contradiction that slowly solves itself.

moment in history acquires its meaning in light of that last state of affairs, which it directly or indirectly helps achieve.

History is thus a system of vessels, each vessel corresponding to a historical configuration, and the whole system is designed to carry history to this final moment. The final configuration is the driving force which is contained in each vessel already from the beginning of history, but for which the first vessels are not adequate containers, which leads to them shattering and being replaced by new vessels. As historical periods elapse, the vessel becomes more and more adequate to the driving force it carries until, as we enter into the final state, container and contained become the same and there is no more room for further essential transformations. This implies, of course, that history moves and changes not by accident, but because a particular aim is being reached: feudalism, for Marx, didn't end for contingent reasons, but because feudalism wasn't an adequate vessel for historical movement anymore.

The above doesn't mean that, as soon as we reach Communism, we freeze in place and stop moving. However, the human action that establishes communism (or liberal democracy) is more ontologically significant than any action that may be carried out within those final states of affairs: once that final configuration is achieved, no other essential change is going to happen, and therefore no action is going to be capable of causing essential change.

Marx's Communism was, after all, not an abstract moral doctrine about a political idea we ought to endorse, but a prediction of what was to come. Marx wasn't trying to move us to tears with Dickensian accounts of how unjust Capitalism supposedly is so that we could mend our ways to avoid ending up in some communist version of hell.

Marx was theorizing that there is a (dialectical) motor of history. He thought that this motor makes history flow toward a particular configuration of humanity (and, through

humanity, of the world), which in a sense already exists: the motor of history is the reaching of Communism itself, i.e., the self-making of Communism over time through non-communist history: “Communism is the riddle of history solved, and it knows itself to be this solution. The entire movement of history, just as its [communism’s] actual act of genesis – the birth act of its empirical existence – is, therefore, for its thinking consciousness the comprehended and known process of its becoming.” (1959, XXXIX, IV-V)

Non-communist history, in other words, is a sequence of vessels or containers that shatter one after the other as the historical “riddle” slowly solves itself, until, in the last moment of history, when Capitalism is overcome, the last container that is not adequate to the contained shatters and we are left with the historical content itself, acting as its own adequate container. At this point, there is no more “fuel” for history to go on.

Marx writes, concerning dialectics, that:

“In its rational form is a scandal and abomination to bourgeoisdom and its doctrinaire professors, because it includes in its comprehension and affirmative recognition of the existing state of things, at the same time also, the recognition of the negation of that state, of its inevitable breaking up; because it regards every historically developed social form as in fluid movement [...]” (1995, p. 15)

The breaking up of Capitalism is inevitable because, as a historical configuration, it doesn’t solve the contradiction that is the primary motor of history, and, because it cannot solve it, it cannot stabilize itself as the final moment in history, which means that it is internally flawed in such a way that it must necessarily lead to its own overcoming. Capitalism already contains Communism, which is the solution to the

riddle, i.e., to the system of historical contradictions that has kept history going. As it progresses, Capitalism reaches its breaking point, where it is no longer capable of holding itself together without causing the advent of Communism.

This is not to say that Marx didn't approve of Communism as fair, or he wouldn't have filled his Communist Manifesto with such heart-felt appeals. But there is a difference between political propaganda and philosophical endeavor, and Communism's (supposed) fairness is not its main selling point from a philosophical perspective. Unfairness is just how the dialectical movement manifests itself, i.e., in the disparity between classes which precludes to and is condition for such disparity to be overcome. Without such disparity, which is perceived by one side of the dialectical movement as injustice, there would be no history, and we would already be at the end of history.

Marx was inspired by Hegel, whose system also contained a philosophy of history. Hegel, being an idealist, thought that everything was spirit, and that spirit's life was articulated dialectically in units made up of three moments each: the abstract, the dialectical and the speculative.

In the abstract moment, opposite concepts (e.g., being and nothing, good and evil, etc.) are understood as independent from one another, as rigid notions that may be conceived separately, without reference to one another. In the second moment, the dialectical moment, we find that the opposite concepts, when understood in their absolute separation from one another, destroy themselves automatically each into their opposite. Absolute being, for instance, must be understood without any determination, and therefore it is nothing, while nothing, when we think about it in its absoluteness, must still be conceived of as something.

This leads to the third moment, the speculative, where the separation of the two concepts is overcome: "being that is not" and "nothing that is" give rise to the third

moment, that of becoming (Hegel, 2010, pp. 59-60). In this third moment, the opposites are still denied existence as separate entities (as in the second moment), but they are reaffirmed (as in the first moment) in their unity (third moment). In other words, every pair that is made up of opposite concepts is actually unified in a single concept that both preserves and overcomes them (this is sometimes called “sublation” in English), and which in turn becomes the abstract moment (the first) of a new dialectical movement, and so on.

But for Hegel, and this is the heart of the question, this process does not go on indefinitely. The series of contradictions that animates the Spirit is, at last, resolved (in fact, it is already eternally resolved). There are three macro-moments to Hegel’s dialectic: logic, nature and spirit, each made up of sub-triads (the Being-Nothing-Becoming example above is the first triad of Hegel’s logic). Logic, for Hegel, represents the articulation of Spirit in itself, regardless of nature, and therefore in its abstract moment. His philosophy of nature, on the other hand, discusses the articulation of Spirit in its alienation into nature, and thus in its dialectical moment (for Hegel, who denied, like all idealists, the existence of Kant’s noumenon, nature is Spirit alienated from itself).

Finally, Hegel’s philosophy of spirit discusses how the two moments (logic and nature) are both preserved and overcome in Spirit, the speculative moment, which reaches its final, absolute configuration (which, for him, is “philosophy”, understood as the last, speculative moment of the last triad, that of Absolute Spirit). We may say, therefore, that for Hegel, history is the system of logical contradictions that allows the gradual self-achievement of the Absolute’s self-understanding through humanity’s perfect understanding of itself (an understanding that happens to be achieved by Hegel). Even more specifically, this process eternally begins (logic), eternally comes out of itself

(nature) and is eternally resolved (spirit), so that history (the emerging of spirit from nature) is the recapitulation of a script that has already reached its denouement.

On Hegel's view, beyond the absolute there can be nothing, no further movement or development, or else it wouldn't be the absolute, but a moment that has something opposite to it, that therefore is part of a pair of opposites and that can therefore be overcome. The absolute is absolute because it has no more contradictions to overcome within itself, and nothing outside of it to limit it.

In contrast with Hegel's Idealism, on Marx's materialist view, consciousness and spiritual matters (psychology, politics, philosophy, religion, ideology, etc.) are the result and reflection of material relations and the idea of dialectical movement that Marx inherited from Hegel is preserved, but applied not to concepts, but rather to material relations ("production relations").

For Marx, the contradiction animating history was, not a logical contradiction of opposite concepts, but a material struggle of opposite classes for changing relations of production that were perceived as unfair. Again, though, this unfairness is not the point Marx is trying to drive across.<sup>18</sup> Unfairness is only how the need for struggle (the contradiction) announces itself to the side which has the short end of the stick at a given point, but this doesn't mean that struggle is an ethical duty, an "ought": it is still only a material necessity. If it were a duty, it would contradict Marx's own materialism,

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<sup>18</sup> Similarly, Fukuyama's point is not that liberal democracy is absolutely good, although it certainly doesn't displease him. He argues that there is probably nothing else that could overturn it because everyone is going to more or less make their peace with it, and even if there were disruptions, history would slowly come back, once again, to liberal democracy. True, in a later article (Fukuyama, 1995), Fukuyama laments that people have mistaken his statement that the end of the Cold War marked the end of history for a statement of fact while in reality it was intended, he says, as "[...] a normative argument concerning the justice and adequacy of liberal democratic political institutions" (1995, p. 27) I would say that the reason people have mistaken his argument for a statement of fact is that it was very clearly intended to be taken as such, and this is just about the only reason his argument was of any interest. If it had been a normative argument, it would have been hard to justify the excited buzz caused by yet another praise of liberal democracy right after the neoliberal decade par excellence had just ended; a praise, by the way, unnecessarily complicated by convoluted detours in the philosophy of Hegel and Marx.

as it would be proof that a non-material aspect of life (a moral one) is not just a consequence and reflection of material relations, but a cause of the establishment of new material conditions, which is what people like Max Weber tried to show was possible in order to disprove Marxism.<sup>19</sup>

The struggle (which fulfills the role of dynamic contradiction) can only end, for Marx, when class distinction, which is the motor of history via the unequal distribution of the means of production, is overcome and humanity comes back to itself in its restored form. Thus, we can say that, in the economy of Marx's theory, Communism fulfills the role that the Absolute had for Hegel: just as the Absolute is the Idea (Spirit) that has left nothing outside of itself that it needs to reabsorb and find a systematic place to, Communism is the material state of affairs that has used up all the potential for (major, structural) struggle and thus all momentum for essential historical change.

The Absolute cannot destroy itself into its opposite as it had happened to the previous concepts, because no pair of opposites within it has been left unsystematized. Every one of the previous steps is preserved within the Absolute in its proper place, where it therefore remains. Similarly, Communism is the only material arrangement that doesn't leave space for something opposite to it to be born and threaten it, because history is the history of class struggle, and Communism has no classes, thus no further historical development of great moment is possible. As I said at the beginning of this section, the action that establishes Communism is more ontologically important than any action happening within Communism, because within Communism no action can lead to the end of history, or it would imply that Communism is not the end of history.

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<sup>19</sup> Nor is it possible, as Engels later tried to do, to moderate Marx's position by saying that, had he had more time to elaborate on his view, he would have made it more nuanced as far as the relationship between economic base and superstructure goes. No matter how nuanced we try to make Marx's position, in the end we either accept that the superstructure has a decisive role in shaping the structure or we deny it. In the first case, we bleed into Max Weber's view, which wouldn't be doing Marx any favor. In the second case, albeit in hushed tones, we must acknowledge the absolute primacy of the economic base. There is no middle ground.

Nor can we say that Capitalism, on Marx's principles, could preserve itself ad infinitum and Communism always be postponed to the next day. If it were possible to constantly salvage Capitalism, Capitalism would have an endless ability to rebalance itself to avoid crumbling down, but this would in turn imply that, by definition, Capitalism is not essentially, structurally flawed, and therefore Communism would not be the answer to that flaw. To use Hegel's jargon, either Capitalism is an abstract moment, and therefore it must necessarily reach its breaking point as it clashes dialectically with its opposite, or it is, itself, the absolute.

### Section III – Strauss' Criticism of Historicism

Leo Strauss was one of the great critics of historicism. In his essay "Political Philosophy and History", he writes that "[...] characteristic of historicism is the assumption that restorations of earlier teachings, or that every intended restoration necessarily leads to an essential modification of the restored teaching" (1949, p. 34). Historicism, i.e., philosophy of history, considers it impossible to return to the past, in so far as certain (political) configurations are the product of certain historical moments which are situated within the movement of history towards its final stage.

This consideration justifies Strauss' trenchant statement, at the beginning of the essay, that

Political philosophy is not a historical discipline. The philosophic questions of the nature of political things and of the best, or just, political order are fundamentally different from historical questions, which always concern individuals[...] (Ibid., p. 30).

Here the emphasis is on the distinction between what is natural, i.e., essential and therefore universal (and thus above history) and the individual, particular or historical.



If one specific political order is essentially the best one, regardless of the historical conditions, then its being the best one is inscribed into how humans essentially, i.e., “naturally” are, regardless of their historical development.

Historicism categorically excludes the claim that “[...] a political philosophy which emerged centuries ago may be the true political philosophy [...]” (ibid., p. 38). By contrast, from an anti-historicist perspective the fact that a certain political philosophy has manifested at that point is, at the end of the day, contingent, and does not say anything about its value.

So, for Strauss, Plato’s teachings might be a viable source of concrete political guidance even today, while for Marx or Hegel this could never have been the case. Same goes for historical political organizations of reality: for Marx, Communism could never revert back to Feudalism, because the two are strung together in a logical form that make one follow the other.

Strauss writes in *Progress or Return*, “The substitution of the distinction between progressive and reactionary for the distinction between good and bad is another aspect of the discovery of history [...]” (1981, p. 27). What was once a distinction between eternally possible conducts (the good and the bad conduct, in their archetypal, essential and therefore natural form) has been secularized, through historicism, in a choice between attempting to go back to the past and fostering the manifestation of the future, or between trying to forestall the future or embracing it.

Marx almost seems to agree with Strauss when, in the *Communist Manifesto*, he writes that “When, in the course of development, class distinctions have disappeared and all production has been concentrated in the hands of a vast association of the whole nation, the public power will lose its political character. Political power, properly so

called, is merely the organized power of one class for oppressing another.” (2000, p. 27)

For Marx, the political character of history is nothing essential: history, understood as a whole process, is essentially a-political, and only appears as political when its dialectical movement makes the whole split in two or more opposite manifestations (the classes) which are momentarily kept separate by their differentiated access to the means of production. Once the whole is restored, politics doesn't make sense anymore, simply because politics, i.e., the striving for the elaboration of what “ought to” happen to the collectivity, can only be decided by the dominant class (the ruling ideas of an age are the ideas of the ruling class) and imposed on the other, as a result of the distinction between one side and its opposite (again, the classes). Once the lack of class distinction prevails, politics disappears.

To summarize, both Strauss and Marx seem to agree that, after understanding the deep metaphysical implications of the issue, we cannot seriously ask both “What ought to happen?” and “What will happen?”, except that Strauss prefers the “ought” question, while Marx prefers the “will” question. The two questions are, from a metaphysical perspective, mutually exclusive, and presuppose irreconcilable approaches to the relationship between history and eternity and a fundamentally different understanding of the place of human agency in its relation with the whole.

In *Natural Right and History*, Strauss argues a further point. According to him, one of the problems of historicism is that any philosophy of history that is worth its salt will tell us what the “absolute moment” is, i.e., the moment in history where the essential characters or traits of humanity finally reveal themselves: “One does not have to transcend history in order to see the historical character of all thought: there is a

privileged moment, an absolute moment in the historical process, a moment in which the essential character of all thought becomes transparent" (1953, p. 28)

In other words, for Historicism it is no longer a requisite, as it was in ancient philosophy and for religious doctrines, that we climb upwards out of history into the realm of eternals in order to see what the absolute looks like, for hints of eternity reveal themselves at some point IN history. Strauss goes on to criticize the idea of a philosophy of history as self-contradictory in that it asserts the historical character of everything, except the thought of he or she who received revelation of the absolute moment. Historicism must be understood as a sort of relativism (which is one of the reasons why Catholicism holds it in contempt). Relativism asserts that everything is relative, but in so doing it asserts its own absoluteness, that it, it argues "everything is relative except what I say". Similarly, historicism argues that everything is relative to its historical period, but in so doing the philosopher is effectively saying "everything is relative to history, except me when I say that everything is relative to history".

I agree with Strauss' criticism: in so far as we seek to assert the existence of a particular picture of humanity that manifests at the end of the historical process, an absolute historical aim, we are necessarily going to fail, because it is not self-evident why that picture is not simply itself a phase in a process, unless this is stated to be the case in some metaphysically a-historical place, which is itself an anti-historicist solution. Marx, for instance, asserts that history is essentially a history of class struggle, but this, in addition to being a gross form of reductionism, is untenable from a conceptual standpoint: if history is a history of struggle for changing material relations, and thoughts and ideas are just passive reflections of the current relations of productions, how can Marx be right? What gives him the privilege of looking at history from the outside, rather than being himself a product of his own period?

The problem seems to be that a philosophy of history seeks to describe two states of being or phases: the normal one and the “absolute” one, i.e., when history reaches its peak and the “real human” appears, nestled inside the world as it “really” is. However, in describing these two phases, it can only leverage one single ontological plane, i.e., the historical process itself, while traditionally the two phases were assigned to two distinct metaphysical planes (the mundane/historical and the divine/eternal). Such a distinction made sense in terms of the qualitative distinction between the two phases to which it gave rise, but its price was paid in terms of not being able to say for sure whether the superior phase would ever manifest, being conditional on us acting in a certain way (e.g., not sinning).

In “Progress and Return” further Strauss argues that there can be no philosophy of history without an idea of “good” that asserts itself at the end (1981, p. 28). According to him, once we remove the idea of an “absolute moment”, as he put it *Natural Right and History*, we cannot speak, in any meaningful sense, of historical progress, but only of historical change.

In other words, progress implies a destination in light of which one may make sense of the process that leads to it. The final moment is the driving force of history, while the previous historical moments must be seen in light of it, as the vessels that carry it to its final establishment. In my own terms, philosophy of history implies the idea that the process leads to the final establishment of a certain way of being human, which I have called the real human. It implies, like the older doctrines, that the real human be the more essential configuration of humanity, but instead of being above history, it is at the end of it. It is the non-contradictory configuration of humanity that justifies the contradictory process and puts an end to it, just as in older doctrines reality was the contradiction that we sought to escape by conforming to some a-historical principle. This is what causes philosophy of history, in Strauss’ view, to be contradictory.

Philosophy of history seeks to show that there is an absolute moment that unfolds through a process, but because we are inside the process, we cannot know if a moment is the absolute one or is itself just another stage in the process.

Strauss distinguishes two kinds of Historicism: philosophy of history, i.e., the proposition that the absolute moment exists or that the real human configuration will manifest at some point; and historicism proper, i.e., the proposition that there is no absolute moment and each period is historically relative, or that there is no real human configuration and therefore every configuration is the real one, relative to the point in time and space in which it occurs, without having to measure up to any standard (1953, p. 35). Strauss suggests that the second form of Historicism is a result of the abandonment, on the part of philosophers of history, of the quest for an absolute historical moment.

This distinction between philosophy of history as teleological view and historicism as acceptance of history as pure change can be related to philosophy's attempt to solve contradictions. Teleological philosophy of history is not too different from the old view that informed many doctrines (including Christianity). In the older doctrine, as described in Section I, the solution to contradiction exists outside of time and space, in God. In teleological philosophy of history, the solution exists at the end of the process. In both cases, there is a fundamental reality, and this fundamental reality is immune to contradiction. As such, its existence and ultimate triumph, whether at the end of times or beyond time, makes the existence of contradiction tolerable, in that it acknowledges its existence in a limited way, taming it, as it were, and justifying it in so far as it is not the last word.

On Strauss' view, philosophy of history seeks to justify contradiction by making it a preamble to the final, non-contradictory state of being. Pure Historicism, on the other

hand, sees that contradictions are ineliminable from reality, that is, reality is fundamentally contradictory and in movement, and therefore no historical progress is possible, because no goal is in sight that will put an end to the process.

In the next section, I provide a conciliation of the two stances: I want to develop a stance according to which there is no real human configuration, but there is, nonetheless, progress. History is pushed in a particular direction. In fact, I want to show that it is exactly because there is no destiny that history has a trajectory. Finally, I want to show that this new stance does not fall into the trap laid out by Strauss against philosophy of history, i.e., it does not contradict itself by understanding itself as historically relative.

Inherent in most philosophies of history is the idea that we have a destiny before us. This is the reason Marx's Communism was "scientific": it provided a prediction of what was to come, rather than being, like many other forms of socialism before Marx's, simply a humanitarian call to action for a morally right cause.

Before moving on, I need to justify my attribution of a concept of destiny to Marx's philosophy. I am not arguing that Marx actively believed in some kind of abstract destiny. For him, the proletariat is truly free, although it finds itself in a condition of subjugation (they need to "lose their chains"). The necessity of Communism arising from the ruins of Capitalism comes not, according to Marx, from an extrinsic necessity, from fate, but from the very fact that the proletariat is the "universal class", that is, the class whose struggle corresponds to humanity's struggle and whose transformative activity on the outside world corresponds to humanity's activity. In this sense, the bourgeoisie is necessarily going to be defeated, on Marx's principles, exactly because it doesn't correspond to anything essentially real: it's an abstraction,

understood in a Hegelian sense. On the other hand, the proletariat has, within itself, the seed of restored, whole, concrete humanity.

Thus, Communism is heralded, for Marx, by an act of freedom, that is, a free act. But it's a necessary act of freedom. If Communism wasn't the necessary outcome of history, this would imply that the proletariat's action and struggle does not correspond to the struggle of humanity, which in turn would imply that the proletariat is not truly free and is not representative of humanity as such. The proletariat is supposed to be the only class that is essentially free and only contingently in chains, because, in being the class that represents humanity as humanity really is, no other human being can durably oppose their freedom without undermining themselves in the long haul and thus heralding the very victory of the proletariat that they wanted to hinder. In this sense, the necessary coming of Communism is the proof of the pudding for the proletariat's essential freedom. Admitting that Communism may never come implies asserting that the proletariat is not truly free, that it has no special status, and that only moralistic pleas to equality can (accidentally, and not durably) lead to Communism.

But while Marx may have rejected the idea of destiny, I still think that his conception of history is necessarily burdened by an untenable form of destiny, exactly because Communism is a static picture of the world, one that has solved all essential contradictions. For Marx, humanity is essentially practical and creative (which is why the proletariat, being the productive class, represents humanity's struggle). This means that it creates its objects: it exists in essential connection with the world, in a relationship with it that is essentially creative. This makes his concept of agency differ from mine. On my view, as articulated in Chapter III, agency is primarily destructive and aimless, and only secondarily constructive and aim-directed. But on Marx' view, humans create their objects, including the social reality that they live in and that

influences them. Because they are primarily creative, humans must end up creating a reality that is adequate to how they really are, and this reality corresponds to Communism, the society where no chunk of humanity, organized in the form of a class, can stifle the productivity/creativity of another part of humanity by keeping them away from the means of production.

But this means that, for Marx, history is a process of adequation of the object to the subject, a process that ends up restoring a tautology where the object is adequate to the subject's essence,  $A = A$ . This, in turn, implies that the inadequacy/discrepancy between subject and object is only accidental or momentary, and therefore that the historical movement is itself accidental or momentary, because the static tautology already exists in it, just hidden underneath the appearance of things. If the discrepancy is only accidental, then it has already been overcome from the beginning in its essence. This essence, thus, must necessarily exist before humanity's agency, and not as a consequence of it, otherwise humanity could act in such a way as to go in other historical directions, for instance toward a society where classes proliferate.<sup>20</sup>

This makes Marx's view fall into the problem I highlighted in Chapter III, i.e., that if there is an essence of agency, there cannot be agency. Once we have a static picture of how things truly are, no movement comes from it. In being founded on an untenable view of agency as creative rather than destructive (as on my view), Marx's view is fatalistic even if it does not want to be fatalistic. He was trying to have history move according to its internal necessity, rather than because of some extrinsic destiny. Yet,

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<sup>20</sup> One may try to argue that this essence does not exist prior to agency, but together with it, and is, therefore, the transcendental form of agency. But this will not do, either, because it changes the wording but not the problem. If we take agency in its "creative" or "adequative" form (which I have disproven in Chapter III, but which Marx could have subscribed to), the state of balance which is the end result of agency must already exist in the concept of the change caused by agency in its manifestation, justifying the movement. Therefore, we still have a passive, static equilibrium at the bottom of movement, so that movement cannot even arise, not even as the illusion of movement. If, instead, we take agency as destructive, as I do, we can have no Communism, or at least no durable Communism, because it would be a state of being X that is destined to be overcome due to its heavy attempt at limiting agency's scope.



he ended up forcing agency to conform to a principle that necessarily rests prior to it and is therefore extrinsic to it, a principle that negates agency in its manifestation as agency.

It would seem, therefore, that having a philosophy of history without some idea of destiny would be impossible, so that abandoning all conceptions of destiny would result in us having to abandon the idea of a philosophy of history and turn to what Strauss called Historicism, i.e., the idea that all there is unqualified change.

The idea of destiny, as classically understood, suffers from the same problems as that of the “real” human in the classical sense, that is, as seen by God. Both assert that there is something, a configuration of humanity, that is essential, or natural, or real, as opposed to all others, which are contingent, unnatural or relatively unreal (or only relatively real, and therefore illusive to some degree). To sum up, Strauss holds that if we believe that there is an absolute aim revealing itself in history, we have no way of identifying it, because we are inside the process, and if we abandon the idea of an absolute aim in history, history becomes just change, rather than progress.

#### Section IV – A Different Philosophy of History

In this section, I develop my philosophy of history, showing how my conception derives from the premises developed in the previous chapters. In the following section, I show how this view differs from traditional philosophy of history and how it overcomes Strauss’ argument and doesn’t imply a conception of destiny.

We have seen, in Chapters II and III, that agency must be conceived as essenceless, because the existence of a fixed trait implies the impossibility of the emergence of agency and the impossibility of an interaction between Inside and Outside. Agency, I argued, is active essencelessness, that is, the active negation and overcoming of all

possible limits that, by not being overcome, would constitute a fixed essence that denies agency itself. Furthermore, I showed that because there is no limit that is not a trait of a subject, agency's limit-overcoming is actually self-overcoming. We saw that this essenceless agency must be the same Inside and Outside, so that my agency corresponds to what we call "change" on the Outside, and vice versa, what we call agency is actually just change happening on the Inside.

Furthermore, we saw that this agency, in order to be essenceless, must be the same in all individual subjects, which is what prompted the name of Universal Agent. I showed that individual subjects are the same agency at work in different fields characterized by partially different disabilities (lack of know-how). Also, just as the individual subjects cannot act but as the Universal Agent, the Universal Agent is always only at work through the various subjects, never outside of them. Moreover, because agency is universal and subjects are characterized by their lack of know-how, group subjects are groups that filter agency in similar ways as consequence of sharing similar disabilities.

I further argued that agency, being self-overcoming, is not a force that conforms the Outside to the Inside (this is, for instance, implied in Marx's view, as we saw in the previous section). Agency dissolves particularity, which derives from a particular subject's contingent limitations, based on this subject's lack of know-how. In being simple limit-overcoming, agency does not bring reality into conformity with aims that exist on the Inside. On the contrary, it only brings reality out of conformity with itself: agency is how a certain configuration of reality overcomes itself. Aims and needs are only how the particular subjects interpret the change that happens through them, and they result from the particular subjects' lack of know-how, which brings them closer to overcoming certain limits in opposition to others. The lack of know-how makes the subjects develop a certain self-image consistent with the reflective or irreflective belief that certain traits are more essential to them and that the overcoming of limits must

be in sight of aims consistent with that self-image. Thus, individual subjects, each constrained by its own limits and therefore experiencing a different territory (O-I-O sequences), believe they are bringing reality into conformity with their identity, that is, they misinterpret self-overcoming as self-determination. Because the Universal Agent never act but through individual subjects, the teleological self-determination of individual subjects is how the a-teleological self- overcoming of agency carries itself out.

In Chapter IV, I showed that the illusion of self-determination of the individual subjects causes what I called a “paradox of normativity”. In attaching more importance to certain traits/limits than to others, individual or collective subjects seek to either make or keep reality consistent with those traits. Either way, the self-image of the subjects becomes the norm or rule to impose on reality. But in so doing, subjects seek to make agency an instrument in setting limits for agency, unaware of the fact that the same agency that establishes X as a limit also necessarily overcomes it. This, on one hand, reaffirms agency’s constitutive limitlessness; on the other hand, it creates a limited space where the limit-overcoming activity of agency is allowed to carry out its process as long as it doesn’t go against the limits set by the subject. Once the space is filled, the rule that delimits this space turns into a limit that attracts its own overcoming as wider self-identifications create wider spaces. Thus, the role of the normative act is not of constraining agency, but of progressively allowing it to unfold.

This phenomenon is complemented by what I argued in Chapter V. Agency is reality coming away from conformity with itself. As such, agency, far from “restoring” a lost equivalence or synchronicity of Inside and Outside,<sup>21</sup> is what constantly, dynamically

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<sup>21</sup> This is exactly what humanity does, in Marx’s theory. He postulates the existence of a primitive Communism that was overcome by the developing of classes and is restored at the end: Communism is negated and then negates its negation. This doesn’t mean that the Communism that ends history is the same as the one that starts it. The one that ends it has actively asserted itself after being challenged by the emergence of classes, so that it represents humanity’s conscious return to itself as human, that is, as a whole. Still, no matter how great

grounds their correlative difference, their dissonance. This, in turn, implies that the distinction between Inside and Outside never ceases to express, and is there from the beginning. The Inside's distinction from the Outside is given by the needs and aims that individual and group subjects seek to bring reality into conformity with, while needs and aims in turn derive from subjects interpreting reality through their self-image/attachment to certain traits/limits. In so far as aims are not realized, they exist only in the Inside and not on the Outside. Therefore, the constitutive dynamic difference between Inside and Outside implies that the Inside constitutively exceeds the Outside by being the place where aims and needs emerge that do not find a direct answer on the Outside. Thus, agency (and therefore humanity) is constitutively excessive. Subjecthood, including human subjecthood, is the space where the sum total of aims corresponding to the sum total of traits to overcome and limits to exceed gradually manifests.

But this means that the overcoming of the first limit, the one that broke the hypothetical state of Belonging, is just as excessive as the overcoming of the last limit, the one that leads us to the point of Owning. Once we have the former, we already have the latter, because both are manifestations of the same self-overcoming activity of the Universal Agent. At no point can agency set a definitive limit for itself midway between Belonging and Owning. The overcoming of every limit is a direct consequence of agency, so that the only way for agency to stop would be for it to be essentially limited in some way, but this would imply the negation of agency tout court: agency must either overcome every limit or no limit at all. Therefore, if the process exists, it must be carried out to the end. And the process must necessarily happen. Belonging, being the negation of agency, is the presence of the sum total of all possible limits to

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the difference between the beginning and the end of history, they must be conceived, on Marx's principles, as points in time where we don't have what it takes for historical movement to be generated, namely class distinctions, and therefore the alienation of the subject from its object.

it. But these limits cannot be absolute, or agency would never begin to manifest. Thus, they must be contingent, but we have already seen that a contingent limit is a limit that is already conceptually overcome. As such, the process necessarily happens, and because it necessarily happens it necessarily goes all the way to the extreme.

The self-overcoming of the Universal Agent requires the overcoming of all possible limits (and therefore the suppression of territory), but this requires, in turn, that the sum total of all possible limits gradually presents itself to the Inside as a limit to overcome, i.e., as the object of the aim to overcome it. The state of Belonging is the presence of the sum total of possible limits, and therefore the full negation of agency, i.e., full territoriality. As we emerge out of Belonging, the process of detachment from the territory that “starts”<sup>22</sup> implies the gradual presenting itself to us of the sum total of these limits or, which is the same, our gradually becoming aware of them as limits to (what we interpret as) our self-determination. As a result, as we develop aims and needs and wishes and projects, we can discover the know-how that will make us overcome those limits, that is, that will make them belong to us, which allows us to suppress territoriality.

We have seen that this historical process happens within the spaces afforded by the various subjects’ self-images, which makes them interpret the process as one of self-determination, while in fact it is a process of self-overcoming that ultimately disregards the various subjects’ preferences, even though it unfolds through those preferences. These spaces constantly upgrade themselves when they become stifling to the process they contain. But if the process is one of self-overcoming of the sum total of all possible limits, and if limits are a consequence of subjects’ ignorance/lack

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<sup>22</sup> We’ll see, in the last section, that this process doesn’t really begin or end. Belonging is just our projection into the past of a state that we have overcome and we see in its fixed aspect of overcome limit/state of being, while Owning is our projection into the future of a fixed state that we use our agency to reach.

of know-how, the self-overcoming of all possible limits implies the collection of all possible know-how, that is, the gradual identification, over time, of what we can positively do with what is possible for us to.

There is also a further implication. The various subjects' lack of know-how is what makes them develop a self-image/identity, because their ignorance makes them develop a sense of self based on certain traits that are considered more stable and more descriptive of their "essence" as opposed to their opposite. In turn, our self-image is what we use to make sense of the world by checking the gap between it and reality (a gap that we seek to close through our interpretation of agency as self-determination). As a result, if the historical process requires the emerging and the overcoming of all possible limits, it also implies the emerging and the overcoming of all possible ways of making sense of the reality and of creating meaning and identities within it. History is therefore an iconoclastic process that conjures up self-images as vessels and then shatters them when they become unfit to carry it further.

Every self-image draws the line somewhere as to what it will allow to happen, that is, as to beyond what point self-overcoming is no longer acceptable. This is because every self-image is founded on the reflexive or irreflexive belief that a certain number of (actual or potential) traits be more vital to the subject than the others. Thus, every self-image is founded on the belief that a certain relative limit is (or should be) absolute, and that the constantly excessive process of life cannot (or ought not) to exceed it, otherwise the person with that self-image would not be able to recognize themselves as being the same person. Thus, the point where the self-image draws the line is the point where it will shatter when the process of self-overcoming inevitably sweeps away that limitation.

At that point, the subject that survives the process creates a new self-image, a new vessel that will allow the process of self-overcoming to go on. This self-image will be wider, allowing more space for the process of self-overcoming to happen without the person losing their sense of self. It will be wider and more flexible, but not infinitely so. Therefore, even the new self-image will draw the line somewhere, it will shatter at some point, etc. An infinitely flexible self-image cannot exist. Its existence would imply an absence of preferences as to what is to happen next, that is, it would imply the absence of subjecthood, without whose limitations the Universal Agent cannot act. As I showed in Chapter III, without the teleology of the various subjects, the Universal Agent's aimlessness wouldn't manifest.

The process I just described is valid both for individual subjects and for groups. On my view, groups are just individuals sharing comparable disabilities that allow them to express agency in a similar way. Thus, groups are individuals who partially share a self-image. This can mean anything from doing similar things to sharing similar moral/religious views that inform action. After all, having a self-image means knowing how the world "ought" to be: it "ought" to be in such a way as to not threaten the continuing existence of that self-image.<sup>23</sup>

It is an observable fact, for instance, that our sense of morality today is much looser with respect to our agency than it would have been in the past centuries. We mostly have a mellow "good dude morality", which is a far cry from the prudish moral practices, say, of the Christian era, which sought to regulate most aspects of life to

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<sup>23</sup> This is true of humans, but also of every other living thing. A plant's constitution "knows" how the world around it "ought" to be, simply because it thrives in certain circumstances and not in others, although the plant has fewer tools for neutralizing negative conditions. <sup>30</sup> In Chapter V, I quoted Mandeville's Fable of Bees, whose main topic is the usefulness of vice, while virtue might be said to be the tomb of progress. Virtue is always limitative and always tries to force us to adhere or conform to a certain picture of who we ought to be. This will not do in a universe that constantly exceeds itself, where each moment, as I showed in Chapter III, defies the previous one.

keep agency within austere, absolute limits.<sup>24</sup> The constant excess that is implicit in the historical process necessarily led us out of that worldview, which had simply stopped being a useful vessel for the process of identification of what we can do with what it's possible for us to do. The Christian/Abrahamitic worldview, for instance, possibly created the conditions for the emergence of modern science, which is probably the best tool we have ever had in the process of identification of what we can with what is possible.

Yet, that Christian worldview itself is too cumbersome for the full unfoldment of the scientific worldview, and had to be left behind, or it would have smothered, within its non-negotiable limits, the process it had incubated and that was ready to overcome those same limits because it didn't perceive them as sacred.<sup>25</sup> Thus, what was once the greatest sphere of sense-making available, which was capable of directing every other activity and sphere toward its own aims and within its own limits, has become one sphere among many within a different overarching sphere.

What is true of the example of Christianity is true for every other identity, individual or collective, and therefore every other ideology, religion, spiritual path or worldview,

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<sup>24</sup> In Chapter V, I quoted Mandeville's Fable of Bees, whose main topic is the usefulness of vice, while virtue might be said to be the tomb of progress. Virtue is always limitative and always tries to force us to adhere or conform to a certain picture of who we ought to be. This will not do in a universe that constantly exceeds itself, where each moment, as I showed in Chapter III, defies the previous one.

<sup>25</sup> The same may be applied to other modern institutions. For instance, a recurring argument used by religious people is that democracy would not have been possible without Christianity. This may or may not be true, but even if it were, it wouldn't imply that democracy ought to remain within the constitutive limits of the Christian worldview, something that would actually defeat the purpose of this new institution being born. Even the economy, to make another example, would never have reached its current degree of development within the Christian worldview, founded on a scorn for "non-productive" activities such as merchantry, inherited in turn from Aristotle's distaste for activities where money is manipulated but nothing concrete is immediately produced. A merchant's activity was seen as to be heavily limited, when not banned, because difficult to reconcile with a view of the cosmos where the creator's activity was to create, and where therefore humans had to imitate it by also being creators, not by creating ex nihilo, but by being productive (Le Goff, 1980). The irony in this is that the modern market, heir of the old merchants, causes a far greater increase in reality (in the sense I have been using throughout this work) than most traditional activities not frowned upon by the church. Despite this, the Christian era created the background from which the modern era could emerge, for instance, by creating a culture common to the whole West. But this, again, does not imply that the economic sphere ought to be guided by religious principles, something that would defeat the purpose of it being born. The religious argument amounts to trying to stuff a grown chicken back into the egg.



past, present or future. The exceptions might perhaps be philosophy and science, which do not seem to have constitutive sacred limits, being the most adequate forms of expression of agency's essential emptiness. After all, it is hard to construe them as identities that impose themselves on agency's process of destruction of identity to try to keep it within fixed limits. If anything, they are themselves forms of agency's self-overcoming, in that both are constitutively open to challenging every limit, both being open to the radical innovation that emerges as we constantly exceed ourselves over time, both ready to challenge their own preconceptions. As such, they are modes of agency's role as universal solvent of limits, discussed in Chapter III. Having no intrinsic concept of sacredness, they necessarily eat through all that is sacred, because sacredness is limiting.

But as far as the various fixed identities/self-images are concerned, each allows the process to go on up to a point; each believes the process of self-overcoming can be reconciled with their constitutive aims, i.e., that the change that happens through them can be made consistent with the limits that inform their constitution as self-images. Thus, they are all "tricked" into contributing their share to the process, and when their constitutive limitations get in the way, they are exploded from within and overcome, because the agency that they use to set the limit X is the same that will lead to -X, once the conditions produce themselves. Thus, the aims of individuals and groups are not important in themselves, but only in so far as they delimit a positive space for the negativity of an aimless agency to partially unfold while on its way to its ultimate consequences.

## Section V – Problems That My View Solves

In the last section, I developed my philosophy of history. In this section I show how it overcomes certain difficulties that traditional philosophy of history has and how it overcomes Strauss' objections.

My view, as articulated in Section IV, proves that it is possible to find a trajectory in history that exists not because there is an aim in history that seeks to reach itself, but as a result of the fact that no aim exists that might let history flow toward itself and then stop the historical process from going beyond, thus limiting it. This trajectory is unavoidable not because there is a necessity in history, but because there isn't. History's trajectory can be ascertained not because there is an absolute moment in it where its meaning is revealed, but because there is no absolute moment and no meaning. My view stems from rigorously drawing the consequences from assertions such as "history is not predetermined" or "there is no meaning in history". My view, in other words, does not try to reduce history to a system of laws or rules and patterns, but affirms that there is no such system of rules and patterns.

As such, I understand my view to be completely anti-systematic. But my anti-systematism is concrete. I do not deny the validity of systems in an abstract way. My view, as shown in this section, is that the anti-systematic nature of the historical process implies the arising and overcoming of all possible limits/traits/states of being. Therefore, it overcomes also all possible ways of closing reality into a system that revolves around a certain image of oneself and of the world, which would be founded on making some of these states of being the essence of reality.

My anti-systematism asserts itself not regardless of all systems, nor in opposition to them (otherwise it would be, itself, systematic), but at the breaking point of every system that concretely, positively manifests, and it therefore requires the

manifestation of each of them; for the same reason, the Universal Agent's meaninglessness and aimlessness can only manifest not abstractly, as opposed to meaning and teleology, but concretely, at the breaking point of every positive attempt at creating meaning and purpose, and it therefore requires each of these attempts to be made and then be overcome. Every self-image, every system is an attempt to negate the aimlessness or meaninglessness of reality (and therefore of agency). Consequently, the overcoming of the sum total of all possible self-images is the dialectical negation of the negation, which constantly reaffirms not reality's core, as in traditional philosophy of history, but the absence of any such core.

To stay with the example of Marx, for him the three moments in the historical process are: 1) (Primitive) Communism; 2) Negation through the arising of classes; 3) Negation of the negation through the struggle of classes, which ultimately leads to the reestablishment of Communism. I, on the contrary, understand the process in these three moments: 1) Negation of meaning which is constitutive of the Universal Agent; 2) Negation of the negation through the arising of the sum total of limits/traits, and therefore the affirmation of self-images/systems; 3) Negation of the negation through the overcoming of the traits/limits that the self-image/system can be pinned to, as a new one arises.

For Marxism, negativity is not a primary element of reality, but a means in the (re)establishing of what is uncontradictory and positive in itself, and therefore static and fixed. Owing to this view, the process is "Yes – No – Yes", where "No" is "No to the first Yes" and the second "Yes" is "No to the No to the first Yes". Thus, an uncontradictory reality rids itself, through the historical process, of what contradicts it and reestablishes itself at the end. But this creates a major problem for this kind of views, because once we have a positive state, the negation can only be introduced

extrinsically, or it would never arise by itself (a “No” cannot be deduced from a “Yes”), so that the dialectical movement isn’t allowed to unfold.

A positive state is a static, spent state, which therefore has no strength to initiate a process of negation to set itself in movement. The only active movement is a negative movement, but if the state is positive, no such negativity can be found, while if it is actively negative, it is not a positive state of being with a privileged place in history. This is part of the reason for my affirmation, in Chapter III, that agency is negative of meaning, aims and traits/states of being, not teleological as we might assume: the Universal Agent is self-overcoming, that is, self-destruction, self-negation. Agency is either primarily destructive or it is not agency at all, but a still frame.<sup>26</sup> Positivity (e.g., creativity, purposefulness, etc.) can only be understood as a byproduct of this destructiveness, i.e., how this process of self-destruction of reality is interpreted by the subjects through which it expresses.

On my view, the process is not “Yes – No – Yes”, but “No – Yes – No”. The (logically) initial negativity is the Universal Agent’s active lack of positive determinations that inhere to it essentially: essential emptiness, as shown in Chapter III, implies the active overcoming of limits/traits. The Yes stage is really a No to the first No. Our positive existence as subjects, each with its identity with which we seek to systematize reality to bring it into conformity with that identity, is really a negation of the Universal Agent’s negativity. It is our attempt to turn its negative self-overcoming into our positive self-determination, its aimless destructiveness into our purposeful creativity,

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<sup>26</sup> One may try to argue that Communism is itself a negation, because it negates the existence of classes. But this is playing with words. If we understood Communism as the negation of classes, we would understand classes as the primary, positive reality, which is clearly not the case for Marx, for whom Communism is the return of humanity to itself. Or, if Communism were the negation of classes and classes were the negation of Communism, we would have a process whereby the negation of the negation (Communism) is overcome by its negation (Classes), which is overcome by its negation (Communism), which is overcome by its negation (Classes) and so on ad infinitum. This clearly doesn’t match what Marx is trying to say. As such, Communism does not negate classes: classes negate Communism, and then negate themselves, thus reestablishing Communism.

thus negating agency's negation of meaning and aims.<sup>27</sup> As our self-image/identity inevitably reaches its breaking point, we subjects move on to wider self-images/identities, which once again negate the Universal Agent's negativity from a new angle, while allowing it to unfold in a wider variety of directions. Meanwhile, the self-images that break apart constitute the third moment, which negates the positivity, that is, the negation of the negation. This overcoming of self-images prevents a subject's identification from constituting an essential limit to the Universal Agent's initial negativity, something that would fix said negativity into a positive, unmodifiable picture of it that prevents agency from arising at all. As such, the third moment is a No to the No to the No: a negation of the negation of the negation. These are not really three separate moments, but the same movement seen from three different perspectives: the Universal Agent regardless of the subjects (first No), the individual/group subjects (second No) and the Universal Agent through the subjects (third No).

My view, in conclusion, does not suffer from the same problem that Marx or Hegel would have had, because I do not seek to surreptitiously introduce, from the outside, an element that is not implicit in the first moment, as was the case with the contradiction (No) to the first affirmation (the initial Yes). I simply posit a constitutive negativity and let it to unfold, which allows me to account for the positive phase without adding it from the outside: the negation automatically negates itself (or else

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<sup>27</sup> This view allows me to overcome Hegel's famous (Spinozian) notion that individuals are a negative moment of the universal. For me, individuals (and groups of individuals, owing to my definition in Chapter III) are all there is of positive in the universe, because, in being negative, they negate the negation, thus affirming. On my view, it's the universal (the Universal Agent) that is negative. Therefore, my view is wholly individualistic and anti-organicist, because it results from the self-disintegration of all possible attempts at creating an organic picture of reality that satisfactorily reabsorbs all particulars within it. The process which, in Hegel, overcomes the negative in each pair of opposites, while preserving the positive, is now turned inside out. The positive content of each self-image is negated as the self-image is overcome. However, its negative import, namely, the fact that, in asserting itself, it negated a previous positive content, is preserved.

it wouldn't be a negation) and in doing so it affirms something, thereby negating its previous positive state.

Thus, on my view, it is not a matter of an uncontradictory, positive core of reality eliminating, through the historical process, all its possible negations, but of contradiction eliminating, through the historical process, the sum total of all attempts at forcing it into a system/self-image that makes sense of it by postulating what the core of reality/one's identity might be.<sup>28</sup>

It is further to be noticed that the possibility of overcoming the difficulties I highlighted above comes from a different approach to the concepts of vessel and force. In traditional philosophy of history, the force is static, because it is a positive state, and therefore a spent state with no momentum left for change. The vessels, conversely, constantly change because they are abstract moments, that is, they clash dialectically because they are not capable, due to their internal flaws, of "eternalizing" themselves. They are missing something that would allow them to be the absolute moment. In Marx, history is essentially non-Communism, which is why it is subject to fluctuations until it reaches Communism.<sup>29</sup>

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<sup>28</sup> As described in this section, my take on the concept of dialectical movement which privileges the negative moment is different from (and in many ways opposite to) the notion of "negative dialectics" developed by Adorno (1966). He criticized any attempt at closing reality into a system. But Adorno remained stuck in an abstract, politically charged attitude (although expressed through ontological language), criticizing all possible attempts at systematizing reality as a way to oppress the individual by reducing them to the regularity of a system. I have no such criticism to offer, for my view is wholly apolitical. I have shown that not only this systematizing action of subjects is inevitable, but that it is a necessary step in the unfoldment of the non-systematic character of reality: reality is unsystematic but (and because) it walks on systematic feet, just as the Universal Agent does not have an identity but (and because) it walks on the legs of individuals who do and who use their identity to make sense of the world. Therefore, this systematic attitude cannot be meaningfully criticized, from my perspective. As I said, my anti-systematism is concrete. Adorno's anti-systematism is abstract, because it is affirmed as a possible alternative to systematic attitudes, and is therefore systematic itself, so that his dialectics, too, is negative in name only. Finally, Adorno affirms the difference between reality and Idea to distinguish his dialectics from Hegel's. I, on the contrary, have affirmed, in Chapter III, the identity of reality and agency, in that both express the same essential emptiness, that is, the same self-overcoming.

<sup>29</sup> As I said at the beginning of this Chapter, I am not attributing to Marx the idea that, once we reach Communism, we all freeze into place. However, once we reach Communism, at the very least some fundamental trait of reality must be prevented, for ontological reasons, from changing. This is enough to show that there is an essence of reality, on Marx's principles.

On my view, the reverse happens. The force itself is dynamic, while the reason the vessels shatter is that they are not capable of keeping the process of self-overcoming from happening only within their constitutive limits as vessels. They try to stifle the contradiction by closing it within the limits of a positive, fixed identity. They try to make the constitutive excessiveness of reality respect the limit that they set for their own identity, but in so doing they fight a losing game, because the agency that they use in trying to keep reality within limits that are consistent with their identity is the same whose emptiness already implies the overcoming of those limits. This is ultimately why history has a direction. Not because there is an aim in it, for if there were an aim, there wouldn't be the history that leads to it. History has a direction because no state of being can be set up to keep the process from overcoming it.

Furthermore, my view shows that Strauss was wrong in assuming that the elimination of aims or meanings in history would make history itself just a process of indiscriminate change without directions. In fact, the absence of meaning is a necessary condition for history to happen. Indiscriminate change, if we are to understand it concretely, can only manifest following its own rigorous process of unfoldment. My philosophy of history is founded on an attempt to rigorously expunge any trace of meaning and rationality from history and then thinking through the consequences of this operation.

Finally, my view of philosophy of history does not suffer from the weakness that Strauss pointed out, that is, that Historicism asserts the historical relativity of everything except of itself. My philosophy is not relativistic at all. It simply doesn't understand the absolute as something that is to be contrasted with the relative, but rather as something that finds expression through the relative, just as the Universal Agent could never act but through individual subjects, and individual subjects could never act but by being the Universal Agent.

There is no point where the absolute begins and the relative ends, and vice versa, there is no point where the absolute ends and the relative beings, because the two are of equal importance: without one, the other doesn't exist. Since I deny the distinction between absolute and relative, in that the relative expresses the absolute and the absolute is fully expressed through the relative, I do not need to highlight a particular state of affairs that is more important than the others because it supposedly expresses the essence of history more than the other states of affairs, and therefore I don't need to prove how I know that such state is essentially privileged by the historical process. Every point in time is ascertainable, through reasoning, as being a manifestation of the same absence of limits to agency.

## Section VI – The Possibility or Impossibility of a Return

The question now becomes whether the idea of a return makes sense. In other words, given what the continuum of detachment implies, it becomes questionable whether we can actually go back towards Belonging. The problem of going back, i.e., the problem of return, is important also from the standpoint of the justification of territorial rights: many theorists advocate one solution or the other, but they see each solution as something distinct in itself, that humanity is free to work towards, and not as something organically embedded in a net of possible justifications that has a certain direction. Many theorists may, even in the future, advocate a solution that falls in the Extrinsic Status field, for instance, but this doesn't make that stage of development any the less obsolete from a conceptual standpoint and therefore destined to be, at some point, abandoned.

If the structure of justification of territorial rights has a direction, then solutions to the problem of attachment are not to be understood as existing outside and above history, ready to be channeled and applied according to what we decide here on earth. Instead,



they become themselves telltale signs of what stage of detachment we are at, and since detachment has one direction only, as I will show below, it doesn't make sense to advocate solutions that are no longer actionable (and, gradually, all solutions become non-actionable).

What guarantees that detachment is a continuum that flows in one direction only? Why is detachment a one-way street? I give two closely related reasons for this. Firstly, because going back would imply a mistaken conception of what is behind us as our origin, a true self of sorts. This is not the case. If we follow the diagram, we see that what we are leaving behind is Belonging. Belonging, as we have previously seen, is not, however, descriptive or representative of who we really are. Belonging is, in the widest possible sense, a perspective illusion created by our lack of knowledge, which is why at that point we are almost fully embedded in the Outside in the form of O-I-O sequences.

But, as we have seen more than once, O-I-O sequences are the result of our lack of know-how, rather than something objective in itself, or rather, the appearance of objectivity of the Outside is a result of our lack of technical know-how, having which we could use the Outside as a means through which we actively manifest ourselves. The possibility of a return, in other words, hinges on a wrong understanding of the past as something that is linearly behind us and therefore the possible objective of our actions, rather than within us and therefore out of which we have emerged.

If the past were behind us, it could be seen as a different instance of us that we can use as a guiding principle for our actions today. If it is inside of us and we outside of it, the past is simply a series of limitations that we have outgrown and that therefore can provide no guidance. The very fact that those limitations could be outgrown proves that they were only relative limitations, i.e., that their status as limitations was a

consequence of our relative inadequacy, at that time, in growing out of them. In this sense, they do not provide any accurate representation of ourselves as we really are.

On the contrary, it's the future, i.e., the sum total of I-O-I sequences that can be activated, that tells us more about ourselves: since nothing, no self-configuration, can exceed that sum total (otherwise it wouldn't be the sum total of all possible self-configurations), it represents us truly, in that it shows us in our active lack of a fixed essence, our active lack of limits. The future, once again, is not something in front of us. Just as the past, i.e., Belonging, is not behind us but within us, the future, i.e., Owing, is not in front of us but outside of us. We don't move from past to future: we outgrow the past and grow into the future.

In addition, the process whereby we constantly outgrow ourselves toward the future entails a growth in know-how. As we grow out of ourselves, our understanding of ourselves, what is outside of us and the relation between the two changes inevitably. This is not to say that this process has to be linear: there can be ebbs and flows, in fact there have been, and there will be. Entire chunks of previously held know-how may go lost for individuals or even for the collectivity. This is fine and normal, but we are talking about the sum total of possible bits of know-how being acquired over an indefinite amount of time, that is, the overcoming of the sum total of all possible limits, each of which coexists with all the others as a direct object of the Universal Agent's agency, so that if one is produced, all the others must be produced as well. Something may happen that knocks us back in our journey, just as I may pick up water in a jar from a river, go back against its flow and then pour the water back into the river. This will slow the process down, but it will not change it. In fact, it will enrich the process, because it will have produced a further possibility out of the sum total.<sup>30</sup>

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<sup>30</sup> Nor should we forget that potential accidents of history are no less a consequence of our agency, and therefore of the Universal Agent, than the facts that we can consciously ascribe to our own will. No matter how

We may further use the following example to elucidate the concept of growth in know-how. Suppose I am unaware of the existence of a trapdoor under the carpet in my living room. Not only do I ignore its existence, but I ignore ignoring it: I don't know that I don't know. As such, this unawareness of my unawareness will reflect in my being aware of a certain way of being myself, of a certain way of my surroundings being the way they are and of the relationship between the two. Suppose that, while recarpeting the apartment, I find the trapdoor, but it's locked. I am now aware of my ignorance of a certain portion of the Outside, and therefore of a certain portion of myself and of the relationship between the two. I know that I don't know.

Finally, if I find the key and manage to get into the secret room, I finally know, and I know that I know: I have gotten past a limit I had become aware of. Discovering the hidden room certainly changes, once again, my awareness of my surroundings, and also of myself as embedded in those surroundings, and of the relationship between the two. My ability to access the new room certainly modifies the way I act and therefore am: now, if I have to store away the Christmas tree after Holiday season, my mind will go to that room, regardless of whether I choose to use it or not.

Now suppose I suddenly realize how creepy it is to have had, all this time, a hidden room inside the place I had grown to intimately know, love and consider like an extension of myself. I finally resolve to lock the trapdoor and have new carpet sewn over it. Does this make me go back to my pre-discovery self? Does this lead me straight back to the type of awareness of myself, my surroundings and their relationship that existed before I realized I knew I didn't know something?

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enormous, unpredictable and apparently unstoppable or alien to us they may appear, they are conceptually an extension of ourselves in our current configuration, with our relative disabilities. As I showed in Chapter III, the change outside is the same thing and the self-overcoming inside.

I would say that it doesn't. Now, if I decide not to use or go into the room, mine is a conscious choice I constantly have to reaffirm. Awareness of a wider region of truth has shattered the coziness of the previously more limited existence I had created for myself within limits I thought were final and forever given. Short of banging my head on the wall hoping to damage my brain in the right spot, there is nothing I can do to go back. Even if I managed to forget my discovery, given enough time I would come across it once again. This because my previous, more limited self is not somewhere outside of me, so it cannot be the aim of my actions.

What is true for a hidden room in my house is true for non-obvious ways in which we can functionalize the Outside so as to express ourselves in new ways. Wherever we think there is a final layer of concrete, there is actually a trapdoor leading somewhere new, i.e., every limit, as we've previously seen, is a resource seen from the wrong perspective.

Our previous self-configurations and self-images are more limited and therefore closer to the point of Belonging. As we move on from them and outgrow them, we factually prove their inessentiality to our identity. Only by investing them with some untenable moral/metaphysical status, and therefore turning them into an ought, can they be kept relevant to our current situation. Otherwise, they act as the limited eggshell that served its purpose in incubating us, but that it makes no sense, nor is it possible, to go back to once we are out. We can only go forward, being incubated by our newer, more spacious "egg", until it's time to come out of it, too.

The point is not to find final solutions, which would be the triumph of stasis, but to perpetuate the self-challenging of every limitation that happens through us, to prevent any attempt to stifle the vivifying contradiction that keeps life going. Nor is this a moral duty. We may not like challenging our certainties, but we will do it, because it is just

how life works: our mere existence as separate consciousnesses is a form of defiance. This is an exciting view of life, and therefore of philosophy, understood as awareness of life, which cannot be conciliated with the sternness of moral pleads to retreat into the past because we find awareness of the present uncomfortable and we would rather go back to our previous oblivion. Of course, this point was not more comfortable when we were there. It only appears more comfortable when seen from the outside once we have outgrown it, because we see it in its aspect of finished matter, which is therefore easier to grasp due to its static nature.

All this discourse hinges on the fact that O-I-O sequences are not on the same level as I-O-I sequences. They are, in fact, only the way in which the potential for an I-O-I sequence presents itself to someone who doesn't know that the potential is there. Once that potential is discovered and reached, the previous O-I-O to I-O-I ratio becomes inadequate and obsolete as a support for the new dimension of our life that we have discovered. This doesn't necessarily imply that progress, i.e., the reduction over time of what is possible to what is not impossible, be necessarily and predictably linear, but it does imply that the general flow will always be from Belonging to Owning.

Before we move on to the final section, I should point out that know-how is not necessarily held equally by all individuals. The more complex society is, the more know-how develops through the specialized search for knowledge. This is not in contradiction to my view, however. I do not hold that, as we grow, everyone knows everything, but that as we grow (as individuals and as societies) fewer and fewer things are outside of our (and every agent's) control. I know, for instance, how to use potatoes for a hundred recipes, yet I do not know the first thing about how to cultivate them, something for which I rely on someone else's know-how. What does this reliance mean? It means that I sacrifice the potential need to discover that know-how for

myself by making an investment of trust (and will) into other individuals so that, in exchange for this, I get something that allows me to do many more things.

Plus, because I rely on someone else who is human just like me, I know that the know-how related to cultivating potatoes is not essentially kept from me by any law of nature or, worse, by any divine or esoteric law: no essential limit exists, only strategic ones, as I could learn how to do that, but I won't. In accepting other people's know-how as premise of my own agency, I have that know-how vicariously, which is also true from an ontological standpoint, since all agency, as I have been saying all along, is one. The specialization we experience in the acquisition of know-how is not at all a limit, but rather a prerequisite for acquiring it in even larger chunks and more rapidly than ever. It also has costs, of course: in not challenging the way potatoes are cultivated, I forego the chance of discovering a more efficient or better or more environmentally friendly way of doing it, but this is my choice, that is, an emanation of my will in the context of the situation: in wanting my potatoes cultivated by someone else, I want them cultivated the way they cultivate them.

## Section VII – The Identity of Owning and Belonging

There remain to be settled the twin issues of what makes the beginning begin, that is, what makes individuals emerge from pure Belonging, and what happens at the end of the process, when individuals are fully the Universal Agent, at the point of Owning. These two issues are solved through the same argument, which forms the subject of this section.

We have seen that the Universal Agent is self-overcoming. This means that it does not reach for an aim, but it overcomes a limit/state of being. Conversely, for individual and group subjects, aims are developed as a consequence of their more or less static self-image. We have also seen that agency is actually a different name for "change". What

I call agency in me is what I call change on the Outside, so that even my agency is just change. The reason why we individuals see agency as change toward a specific aim is due to our limitations, as shown in Chapter III.

We can therefore say that, from the standpoint of subjects, for every trait/limit, we have an equation “change  $\rightarrow$  Trait X”. For the Universal Agent, however, the equation is reversed as “Trait Y (-X)  $\rightarrow$  change”.

Finally, we have seen that history implies a gradual identification of what we can with what is possible to do, with the acquisition of know-how and the destruction of sense-making self-images that this implies. Therefore, the historical process is one where individual subjects become more and more universalized, because what makes them emerge from the Universal Agent, namely their ignorance, is reduced, and complementarily the Universal Agent finds less and less obstruction in expressing its self-overcoming through every individual subject that acts as its vessel.

But what happens when the process of identification of container and contained, vessel and force, individual and universal is complete? In a sense, we have nowhere else to go, no more space to fill, no other shell to break through and no other possibilities to conquer. This would make my philosophy of history comparable to Marx's, or, really, to that of any other philosopher of history, in that a final state is reached after which no more essential change is possible.

What's worse, as we've seen on numerous occasions in the previous chapters, individual subjects act because they cannot do everything: the disabilities that shape them slant their plane of action in a specific direction, determining the priorities that inform their ability to channel the Universal Agent's agency. Yet, if everything is equally possible for a subject to do, their plane of action is perfectly even, so that there is no way for action to occur, just as the center of a circle has no reason to go toward any

point on the circumference rather than its opposite following a path of least resistance, because every path is the path of least resistance. The distinction between possible and impossible is due to a situational lack of know-how, so if everything is equally possible, everything is also equally impossible. We have already seen, in Chapter III, that the Universal Agent only acts through subjects, never outside of them. But if the difference between the subjects and the Agent is overcome, the Agent remains without outlets.

It would seem, therefore, that, as containers and contained fully merge, the historical process runs out of momentum, just as was the case for Marx' Communism, in a sort of entropic extinction where all source of change, all pressure to overcome the next limit has been used up. Thus, once again we would have inertia and stillness triumphing over movement and dynamism, no limit left to overcome. The absence of limits would be the greatest, deadliest limit. Furthermore, the very fact that we, as shown in Chapter V, can never go back to the past, is itself an absolute limit to agency.

But we've seen that the Universal Agent, which is the only real agent, works as a constant self-overcoming, in a "-X → change" type of process. Once we reach a full identification of container and contained, the question is: how can the "change" part come into effect? After all, it's the distinction between containers and contained, vessels and force, situationally possible and situationally impossible that keeps the process going, because history, which I have qualified as the history of the identification of what we can with what is possible, implies the progressive identification of containers and contained and therefore their initial difference.

The solution to this quandary must be paired with the solution of another issue which I have put off discussing until now: how do individual subjects come into play in the first place? We saw that, at first, subjects belong to the territory, but then, at some



point, they begin to act transformatively toward the territory by seeking self-determination for themselves as opposed to it but through it. But how can this process start at all? Where is the initial thrust that breaks the inertia of Belonging, giving rise to an individual consciousness and agency which opposes the Outside? If Belonging is this state of perfect unity between subject and territory, with no hint of separation between them, and no room for agency to emerge, then how can the initial separation occur? In reality, Belonging and Owning seem to be exactly the same thing, in that both lack the idea of a tension between Inside and Outside that prevents subjectivity to emerge and therefore agency from manifesting, because agency can manifest only when there is a tension between Inside and Outside.

The question, in other words, is: does the process even “start”? If it does, that is, if it has a beginning, it implies a previous stasis, but if we postulate stasis, we cannot derive anything from it without adding some external element. Movement can never come from stasis, unless we postulate some dynamic element in it, but then it’s no longer stasis. Similarly, we must ask: does the process “end”? If it does, the process leads to stasis, but once again, this is impossible, because the stasis that exists at the end, in order to be truly static, must be there from the beginning, before agency, but then it would be impossible to derive from it the process that leads to it. Movement can never end in stasis, for the same reason it can never come from it. We have either one or the other, and because we cannot have stasis, there must be just movement.

We said that the Universal Agent’s process is “-X → change”. We also said that the final state of history is a state where every possibility, every piece of know-how, every power to cause change and overcome limitation has been actively conquered. This final state appears completely positive, so how could it be a non-something (-X)? But there is one thing that this state is not: it is not a state where every possibility needs to be conquered. The last limit that agency can overcome in its constant self-

overcoming, after having overcome the sum total of all possible limits, is the limit constituted by its own having overcome the sum total of all possible limits.

The completion of the process must also make it start, for, if everything is the negative of nothing, its self-overcoming leads to nothing (no thing), just as nothing, being the negative of everything, is overcome by leading to everything. The movement that seems to extinguish the last separate subjectivity is actually the movement that kindles the first separate one. Therefore, there never really was a static moment called Belonging where the Inside was an adequate expression of the Outside, and there never will be a static moment called Owing, where the Outside is an adequate expression of the Inside, but the two always remain in dynamic tension, allowing the process of self-overcoming to go on. Belonging and Owing are the same moment, only seen from two different perspectives: we call it Belonging as we get away from it and Owing as we go toward it.

In fact, Belonging is just a projection that subjects make toward the past, seen in its aspect of outgrown limit and therefore static state. In this sense, Belonging is every state of being, once we leave it behind and look back to it. Complementarily, Owing is just a projection that subjects make toward the future, seen in its aspect of state of being to reach for, to establish, and therefore the static traits that justifies the movement towards it. In this sense, Owing is every state of being as we reach for it.

The renewal of the process that happens when we overcome the Owing point in front of us and find it behind our backs as Belonging is not the result of an attempt to go back. It is by going forward that we end up going back, while whenever we try to go back, we end up going forward, as shown in Chapter V. Thus, no going back as opposed to going forward, no return as opposed to progress, as both Strauss and the historicists thought. This opposition would be inappropriate, in the view of history as a constant,

iconoclastic act of upheaval and excess that I have described. The process is best envisioned as a system of spheres within spheres, the smaller filling up until, unable to contain the process, it breaks, leaking its content into the bigger, ad infinitum.

No will to go back, therefore. On the contrary, an obdurate will to constantly go forward, to constantly exceed and transcend and upset past equilibriums. In this sense, as the process “starts” again, it is not really the same process, because the ability to reduce the possible to the non- impossible is strengthened indefinitely in an n+1 fashion as it is renewed.<sup>31</sup> Meanwhile, the distinction between containers and contained is also renewed (otherwise, no process could happen). In fact, we discover that this distinction has never gone away, nor has it ever started. This makes sense, because the disappearance of separateness that seems to await us at the end, the point of Owing, must mirror the lack of separateness that we seem to have left behind at the beginning, at the point of Belonging, so that they both are the same perspectival illusion. As said, the act that ends subjectivity is the act that reestablishes it anew, so that at no point there is a point where there is an Outside without an Inside or an Inside without an Outside.

Thus, the outermost, biggest container of one cycle, which has been fully merged with its content at Owing, turns out to be the innermost and smallest container the next cycle at Belonging, breaking through which the new cycle kicks off. This way, the biggest achievement of the previous phase becomes the smallest of the new phase. In this manner, the primacy of dynamism over inertia is preserved, in a riddle that is never

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<sup>31</sup> This is what ultimately distinguishes my philosophy of history from the other examples I have discussed. In Hegel, for instance, the historical movement ends up being just an illusion, even though he probably didn't intend for it to be so. But it is an illusion, because everything is a constant recapitulation of the process leading up to the absolute. The reason for this is that the absolute moment is absolutely positive, so that its being achieved cannot lead anywhere else. Similarly, Marx certainly didn't intend to make history an illusion, but, on his principles, he cannot afford history not to be an illusion. By contrast, my take, as shown in the previous two sections, is founded on the constant negation of limit, so that once every limit is negated, the absence of limits must also be negated and kick off a new cycle, or else negativity would end up being something positive itself. But the new cycle is not a recapitulation of the previous one: it's a way for movement to keep going forward.

solved or finally systematized, but rather perpetuates itself through every possible attempt at solving it.

In conclusion, in this chapter I discussed how my view, as developed in the earlier chapters of this thesis, can be developed into a philosophy of history. Furthermore, I showed that this philosophy of history, while inspired by classical examples, contains elements that preserve it from the same pitfalls.



## Conclusion - The Philosophical Importance of the Issue of Territorial Rights

In this thesis, I did not set out to provide a normative solution to the issue of territorial rights. I sought to show how the issue of territorial rights is actually the normative mask worn by a wider problem of the relationship between subject and territory. I argued that the process of detachment, which is the core element that theories of territorial rights seek to regulate, necessarily escapes any attempt at blocking it within the limits of a normative theory, and that the form more convenient to explaining it is that of a philosophy of history.

My intent, however, has never been to belittle the efforts of the many theorists who have developed various normative approaches, but rather to show that we address in the field is wider in scope. This does not imply that my approach is meant to discourage further normative approaches (that, in itself, would make my theory normative in nature, rather than descriptive), because I have also shown that the normative approach is a necessary phase of our relationship with the Outside, that is, of the relationship between subject and territory. Without seeing reality through normative eyes, we would fail to try to bring it into conformity with our self-image (which is the definition of normativity I introduced in Chapter III).

Therefore, I do not argue that people should stop theorizing territorial rights. My argument is that the fact that people theorize territorial rights (and the fact they do so from a normative standpoint) is a philosophically instructive fact that has its own descriptive relevance. While it is impossible to solve the issue of our relationship with the territory from a normative standpoint, because normativity is always an attempt to stop the unstoppable, it is also necessary that we humans attempt to regulate our relationship with the outside from a normative standpoint, for our normative

approach to our relationship with the Outside is the vessel that carries out a non-normative process.

Normativity, in other words, does have a role to play. Its role, however, is not the one that it would like to have. It is a historical role that rests not on the normative premises that it defends, but on the historical results whose manifestation it fosters beyond its intent. We, as individual subjects, seek to push our own agendas, which we deem consonant with our identity, and this opens us to normative approaches in dealing with the outside world, and it is through our teleological, normatively-driven effort that history, as I have characterized it, unfolds in a non-normative, a-teleological way.

As I argued in the previous chapter, it is impossible to ask “What ought to happen?” and “What will happen?” at the same time. Prediction implies the inevitability of events following a certain course. Therefore, any attempt to say that events ought to follow a certain other course implies a fundamental misunderstanding, or at least a fatally incomplete understanding, of the matter at hand. If it is inevitable that X, saying that -X ought to be the case suggests the dreaming up of an irrelevant scenario that has nothing to do with reality.

Normativity requires that a particular state of affairs be conditional on our behaving a certain way rather than in a different way. But I have constructed my philosophy of history on the most general and inescapable traits of human agency, those without which agency wouldn't even manifest, and I have shown how necessity stems from this most basic layer. In other words, I have constructed my claim that the issue of which question to choose, between “will” and “ought”, can be settled in favor of the former by anchoring it to the most foundational level of human agency that even those wanting to argue in favor of normativity would have to accept, thus contradicting their effort. The issue of which question to choose is therefore not an existential question

that one needs to settle for themselves in a more or less arbitrary manner, depending on their personal preferences, but a point of theory that can be clearly resolved through argument.

Yet, exactly because I have argued that the issue must be settled in favor of prediction over prescription, I am not at all arguing that we ought to abandon prescriptive approaches. In fact, I have sought to show how prescriptive approaches are a necessary component of the development of the interactive relationship between Inside and Outside. It is necessary that we adopt them because it is part of how we work as subjects, both individual and collective. As soon as we have a sense of identity, we are attached, consciously or unconsciously, to certain traits and we are detached from others. As soon as this happens, we already look at the world through normative eyes, because our aim becomes to conform the world to the aims that stem from our identity/self-image, which means we believe the world ought to be a certain way other than it is.

If I see the trait X as more in line with my identity than trait -X, and if, as a result, I direct my agency in the world through my predilection for that trait, I must automatically seek to hinder the manifestation of traits that I believe to be incompatible with X. In seeing self-overcoming as secondary to self-determination, I am necessarily inclined to making the world wrong for not corresponding to that specific picture, or for abandoning that specific picture, or for not flowing toward that specific picture.

Detachment from the territory implies identification with wider and wider spheres of identity. As we upgrade, in a sense, our attachments, we make room for more and more flexibility, more and more sequence activation, the emergence of new aims that require the exceeding of new limits and accumulation of new know-how, etc. The



fulfilling of our aims brings in more problems, more aims, more solutions, etc. However much we may increase our ability to recognize ourselves in wider spheres of identity, there is always going to be a situational limit. The reason for this is that identity is itself always the result of ignorance and of the overattachment that stems from ignorance. I am me because there is something that I consider impossible to reconcile with my view of myself, which means that there is always something, a collection of traits, that I consider indispensable and above other possible traits.

This overattachment is what keeps us having an identity and what keeps us seeking self-determination over self-overcoming. If self-overcoming were to become more important to me than self-determination, I would cease to exist as an individual, because I would no longer have an identity, a tautology ( $A=A$ ,  $I = me$ ) that I could use to filter the world around me and systematize it in accordance with that tautology, a tautology that I can go back to even when the world around me seems to go against it. In losing any trace of a personal identity that channels it, the Universal Agent within me would remain exposed, and we have seen that the Universal Agent does not have an essence or identity, and is in fact the very negation of them, being movement, contradiction and difference. Therefore, without my attempt at self-determination, the process of self-overcoming would not even begin.

We have seen that the Universal Agent needs to be channeled through individual subjects just as much as individual subjects need to channel the Universal Agents in order to act. If I was left without a self-identification, the Universal Agent would be unable to keep the process of self-overcoming going. But individual subjects exist only as limited (albeit constantly self-upgrading) identities, that is, they exist by having something to battle against as a threat to their identity.

Thus, the continuum of detachment highlights a process of constant upgrading of human attachment, as a consequence of the identification of what we can with what is possible. The fact that no individual would ever accept absolute change, that is, change qua change, self-overcoming qua self-overcoming, is a consequence of how they are structured as vessels of the Universal Agent. Still, there comes a point where we have detached enough from the territory and have asserted a wide enough conception of ourselves that we find it difficult to justify our exclusive access to a specific territory. Our identity is bound to exceed the limits that it currently accepts as final. Therefore, it is bound to lose its comfortable, irreflective anchorage in the set of limits (the territory) that it used to see as indispensable to its previous, limited identifications.

The need to justify attachment, which I have shown in Chapters V and VI to be actually a justification of detachment, always occurs when it is already too late. The need to bring in normative elements highlights the fact that the issue has already been settled. Normativity is meaningful only when two opposite outcomes are possible, that is, when the outcome is not self-evident, but this implies that a theory of the justification of detachment kicks in when the horse has already bolted, that is, when we have lost our irreflective, unquestioned attachment to a certain territory.

Here lies the most interesting philosophical aspect of the issue of territorial rights theories. Individual theorists may battle each other on what principles are sound for solving the issue from a normative standpoint. I have sought to show that the issue can never be solved, by definition, from a normative standpoint. But the problem remains very interesting from a philosophical standpoint. In tearing each other's theories apart, territorial rights theorists accelerate the process of detachment by further reducing the degree to which we consider our connection with the territory an

obvious given. The theorizing of territorial rights is therefore both a consequence of our detachment and a concurring cause of our inevitable further detachment.

To a degree, this is true of every philosophical discipline. In showing the problems that lie behind the façade of unquestioned, irreflective certainty they concur to the elimination of limits. This enmity with limits is ingrained in how philosophy works because it is ingrained in how humanity works, which makes philosophy the most characteristic of human endeavors, the most adequate to its essential emptiness.

However, in the field of territorial rights this tendency of philosophy seems to me to be especially vivid, in that it problematizes not our relationship with any object, but with the very setting within which our lives unfold. By seeking to provide a normative solution to this relationship, the various theories highlight how the process pans out through them, that is, how they are themselves vessels contributing to the manifestation of the force they contain. This happens both in spite of and thanks to their normative nature, as we have seen.

The fact that we seek to regulate our relationship with our surroundings is itself the mark of the growth of our power toward them, because normativity only makes sense if human action is perceived as relevant. As a result, normativity, which is an attempt to place limits on our use of our ability to act, ends up being a tool in the growth of our abilities, by providing spaces where the identification of what we can with what is possible is allowed to happen within the limits of the norm. Once the norm is perceived as stifling, it is overcome anyways and a new, more comprehensive vessel is found under the guise of more tolerant normative views of agency.

My analysis started, in Chapter I, with a consideration of what it would mean for us to truly see our relationship with the territory in terms of interaction. I concluded that, in order to truly speak of interactive approach, it is not enough to see subject and

territory as influencing one another. Interaction must be seen as the primary element, which grounds subject and territory in their unity and their difference at the same time.

If we take interaction as the primary element, it follows, as shown in Chapter II, that said interaction cannot be limited by extrinsic considerations or elements, such as preconceived notions of what a subject or a territory are, since what they are must be seen as a pure consequence of the interactive process they exemplify. This formed the basis of my sequential approach. The interactive process, in short, manifests through a subject seeking to change the territory while being nestled in the territory that partly resists its attempt the subject's attempt to change it.

As discussed in Chapter III, the interactive process, being independent of prior considerations and extrinsic limitations, must be universal and unique. I called it the Universal Agent, because even though it manifests through an unfathomable variety of particular subjects (individuals or groups) seeking to overcome particular limits, the basic process is the same throughout, being one of constant limit-overcoming.

In Chapter IV, I showed that, exactly because the process is always the same underneath every particular subject's attempt at overturning a limit, this process cannot be limited and stopped, either by ontological considerations or by normative ones. It cannot be stopped because, in attempting to stop it, a subject would make use of it, thereby increasing the limit-overcoming activity.

In Chapter V, I discussed the consequences of my view when it comes to justifying attachment to the territory. The interactive process cannot be stopped, and it takes place via the constant overcoming of limits. But because limits are what allows us to form a clear image of ourselves, the overcoming of limits implies the leaving behind of old identities and therefore detaching from the land that offered us those limits. As

such, as the process unfolds, subjects feel the necessity not to justify attachment to the territory, since the overcoming of limits make us detach from it. On the contrary, we seek to justify our detachment in front of other subjects. The justification of territorial rights is, first and foremost, an interpersonal activity we engage in because we are caught in a process that leads us to abandoning attachment.

In Chapter VI, I discussed how the justification of detachment takes place. I showed that, as the interactive process inevitably goes on, our strategy for justifying our detachment changes, in that the relationship with the territory loses gradually importance and is replaced by forms of justification that reflect the interpersonal nature of the concept of territorial rights.

In Chapter VII, finally, I showed that, exactly because the process cannot be stopped, it must be interpreted in historical-philosophical terms. Thus, I developed a philosophy of history according to which the development of the interactive process of limit-overcoming implies the presenting itself to our attention of the sum total of all limits, which are then gradually overcome.

I have already discussed what I consider one important takeaway from my thesis, namely the fact that the field of territorial rights has broad philosophical significance and is not just a specialist issue, nor just a political one.

Additionally, I believe theorists of territorial rights will find my view of resources interesting. In privileging the notion of interaction, I have done away with the distinction, still present in Kolers, between objects and objects under description. Consequently, I have adopted a much broader and more elastic view of resources which is the perfect negative of the notion of limit. Every limit that delimits an emerging subject to its current configuration is a resource locked behind a situational lack of know-how, which prevents the subject from using that object as a means in its

self-expression by activating an I-O-I sequence, which therefore remains an O-I-O sequence. Even when taken out of the context of my view, this conception of resource can be applicable to the field of territorial rights when it comes to discussing issues such as access to resources by wildly different groups of people, or the status of objects that are not yet seen as resources but could, in the future, given the appropriate know-how, be regarded as such.

Another contribution to highlight is my conception of collectives. On my view, subjects are characterized by their disability, that is, the way in which they fall short of agency's self-overcoming by lacking the know-how necessary to overcome a certain limit. As such, collectives are not groups of people united by either a form of rational collective subjecthood or by shared aims. Collectives are, on my view, naturally emerging collections of individual subjects who happen to share some form of disability, i.e., who are limited in similar ways. I believe parts of my approach could be adapted, by other theorists, in understanding the formative role that shared limitations and challenges have on groups, especially on group divisions relevant to the problems of territorial rights.

A further contribution is the idea, developed in Chapters III to V, of humanity as having constantly shifting needs. Within the economy of my thesis, this idea goes hand in hand with my notion of resources. However, I believe my view can be the jumping-off point for further reflection on problems connected with the relationship between the relative fixity of territories and the constantly upgrading of human needs.

A more specific contribution is the one concerning my redefinition of territorial rights theories as theories of detachment rather than attachment. This is not simply a linguistic nitpick, because behind it is a particular understanding of the role of theories of territorial rights within the economy of humanity's relationship with the land.

Reflection on territorial rights is, I have shown, organic to our interaction with the territory and, because we are always interacting with the territory, it is organic to us. I think my reflection can prompt further discussion on the social/political effects of the act of theorizing solutions about territorial disputes.

Finally, I believe my thesis has opened up the field of territorial rights toward influences from a sector of philosophical reflection, namely that of philosophy of history, that one would not, *prima facie*, think of discussing when talking about territorial rights. And this, despite the fact that reflection on history, as more commonly understood, forms an important part of discussing territorial rights, since the field is concerned with problems such as redressing past territorial injustice or regulating the future of territorial appropriation.

My view presents an alternative way of integrating the concept of history into that of interaction with the land. Usually, within territorial rights studies, we see history as something to approach with a particular idea of justice in mind to see where things need to be set aright. Therefore, we see history as something we approach, as it were, from the outside, in the same way that a surgeon corrects a body with a history of illness or prepares it to better survive future ailments. My approach shows that, when it comes to steering history's course, we are a surgeon doing surgery on themselves, so that problems and solutions exist in a constantly renewing loop, and every action we take feeds into that loop rather than breaking it. As such, my view can offer a different jumping-off point for discussing the historical relevance of human-territory interactions in a more compact and conscious way.





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