

# **Hermeneutics and Criticism**

By

**Richard Boulton**

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# Introduction

## **Telos – what are ideals and why are they in crisis?**

This book confronts the decline of ideal meaning in modern society. A good place to demonstrate this decline is with the ideal of telos. Telos means a person or things full potential, end goal, or intended purpose. The concept runs throughout the works of Plato and Aristotle as part of a wider corpus of cause and effect and has a contested legacy as it concerns accounting for progress, or more specifically how things move towards meaningful ends. Aristotle in particular sought to put telos in practical terms as a guide for how to live well. In the *Nicomachean Ethics* telos is demonstrated as the ability to encompass all aspects of meaning into an overall narrative, for example, the goal of warfare is victory, or the goal of business is to create wealth.

Aristotle's understanding of teleology argues that cause and being are fundamentally equated to goodness. To say something has good cause to be, is to say that a particular cause must have some sense of goodness to which it is aspiring to. For example, to describe a cup as being a *good* cup means that it achieves the ideal status of being a cup. The being of the cup is connected to how well it can achieve the ideal of a cup. Modern perspectives on being have revised this, for example, a scientific understanding of existence requires analysis to split being as set apart from goodness. Existence (and therefore being) is to be considered as nothing in particular when not under experimentation or observation. The great innovations of Galileo, Newton and Einstein are set around a view of the universe as an equation to be balanced to zero. This has resulted in a dichotomy in the sciences, where debates have ultimately attempted to discern what is human apart from the surrounding universe.<sup>1</sup> The most intensified forum where this has taken place originate from Kantian debates about the unassailability of reality aside from the interpretation of reality.

Within such a dynamic, it can be questioned whether what is experienced as telos is entirely exclusive to human experience or whether it has some actuality beyond it. As philosophy is unable to assert what reality is in itself, prevailing wisdom has asserted that it should rather engage in criticism to first ascertain human experience before ascribing it to a reality. The operationalisation of such a schema makes inherent a neutral backdrop working independently to human ideals of goodness, value and progression. Subsequently, German idealism of the 19<sup>th</sup> and early 20<sup>th</sup> century following Kant, such as in the natural philosophy of Fichte, Schelling, or Hegel, or the phenomenology of Heidegger developed varying idealistic systems to unify the human with nature, resulting in an anthropocentric notion of teleology with human will as the epitomic expression of nature. However, faced with the horrors of modernism, colonialism and the two industrial world wars of the 20<sup>th</sup> century and their association with both idealism and empiricism, the response has been to suppress the ideal of progress altogether.<sup>2</sup> Contemporary social and cultural criticism has fractured and no longer has a unified sense of purpose. Its biggest commonality assumes that defining progress is as futile as defining normality, with the two often becoming embroiled. With no certainty or substance to root telos in, the concept has been deemphasised rather than risk it justifying distorted or corrupted self-serving ends.<sup>3</sup>

However, in this philosophical abandonment, public morality of the 21<sup>st</sup> century has not ceased or abated and has continued to campaign for civil rights and freedoms. Global campaigns such as black lives matter, or the extinction rebellion demonstrate that progressive politics is ongoing. The consequence has been a misalignment between academic and public philosophy rendering the human sciences unable to justify the necessity of public morality, or offer celebration of its history. The result has been a largescale revision of figures such as Aristotle or Plato according to their unacceptability to current morality (such as their views on nature and the order of slavery and gender) rather than follow the ideals they express that the public still shares.<sup>4</sup> Rather than inform the present, interpretations of the past have intensified the discussion of its bias, making the representation of history, the veneration of classics, and the demarcation of disciplinary curriculums unresolvable and problematic.<sup>5</sup> Left unclear in our hyperaware modern condition is if critical theory has lost the sense of

whether it represents progression or regression.<sup>6</sup> Regardless of whether the social sciences ordain teleology however, ideals and progress inform morality.

Teleology is intractable from the validation of moral regimes, where morality enshrines righteousness as much as it ensnares transgressions. For example, in works such as St Augustine, Anslem or Thomas Aquinas the concept of teleology was interpreted by Christian theology to uphold Christian morality for several hundred years.<sup>7</sup> Service in the name of Christ was aligned with goodness which ultimately legitimised the church and state. Part of the scientific revolution that followed Christian dogma can be interpreted as an attempt to demystify sacred interpretations of teleology and lift the limits religion imposed on politics and culture. The progression of secularisation has served European society over the past centuries to globalise its cultural values. But with the global demands of the 21<sup>st</sup> century, of resource depletion and environmental collapse, the question of the role of science has been reopened.

In a time of environmental crisis, we can also question if beliefs in science have gone so far as to lose the sense of how to define progress. We must confront the question of whether some ideals of innate goodness and direction are needed to meet modern challenges even if jeopardising scientific neutrality. The industrialising epochs of the 17<sup>th</sup> to 20<sup>th</sup> Centuries, where human exploitation was the priority have been humbled by the revelation of how the ecosystems they were exploiting actually worked and whether they will continue to support human life or not.<sup>8</sup> Some sort of choice is being played out as to whether to curb scientific ambition and lessen the human footprint or reconfigure the subservience of nature to scientific belief. With a renewed emphasis on the gulf between the widespread cultural beliefs of humankind in the 21<sup>st</sup> century and the revelatory discoveries of emerging Earth sciences, both idealism and empiricism struggle to serve as a basis for what is now demanded of science. But so enmeshed is the idea of neutrality in the modern secular culture of the current epoch that it is almost impossible to think of reality without science. The principles of naturalism unifying the fields of liberalism, evolutionary biology, cosmology, physics and so on still impose themselves onto a neutral backdrop.



In comparison to teleology, the concept of neutrality (or nothingness) is much more taken for granted. Consider Leibniz's famous statement so emblematic of the assumptions of scientific enquiry: 'why is there something rather than nothing' which seems to encapsulate the importance of nothing as if somehow waiting behind all things as an ultimate resource. A contrary interpretation of the Socratic paradox sites that proof of nothing is unknowable as we can never be in a position to know it. Reason creates reason and so any thought of nothing is biased by reason. In many respects telos is similar to this understanding of nothing, telos cannot be disproved, as once attempted there will always be another end point. Any reference must be fitted to some sort of meaningful frame. And therefore, telos and the idea that there is a universal neutral backdrop are incompatible as it would imply that all things are going from and towards nothing. If being's telos is considered to be neutral it can be said to be inherently meaningful with the ideal of neutrality, thereby not being neutral.

These arguments played out in the logical positivism of the Vienna Circle when consigning the concept of nothing as 'meaningless metaphysics'.<sup>9</sup> Metaphysics in this sense meant any term or proposition unverifiable in principle by experience. As nothing is unobservable it is unverifiable and cannot be used as an explanation for causal relationships. Nothingness in this sense is merely nothing more than the absence of things. At the time inference was seen as needed to counter the proliferation of ideologies (arising from German idealism) in the 1920s and 30s, such as National Socialism and Communism, that on the one hand claimed to be scientific but on the other were steeped in myth.<sup>10</sup> The aim of the Vienna Circle was to create a scientific basis for all language to avoid the public corruption and fanaticism of the time. The irony of their endeavour however, was that they succeeded in proving the opposite. That the world cannot be represented entirely logically, as any logical scheme will always leave something aside. From the insight came the theory of incompleteness by Gödel and falsification from Popper. Rather than further validating mathematics and science, what was proven was that science represented a very specific mode of rationality that could not be used as the basis for all thought and decision making. So, nothingness and the ideals, values and morality it implies could not be so easily averted. Plenty of language

alludes to a neutrality to function, but this neutrality can never be fully attained.

Rather than exact accuracy, the questions of the latter half of the 20<sup>th</sup> century became more about averting modernist style totalitarianisms or 'grand narratives'. Attempts can be found in both Analytic and Continental philosophy to create an investigatory space with which to view language in general without assumption (from Quine to Sellars and then Kripke, and Putnam, to structural and then post-structural concerns). Labelled the 'linguistic turn', the aim of philosophy of this period was to look at meaning outside of itself and define the limits of what language can express. For several decades these avenues held much promise, but aside from their reactionary purpose (to combat totalitarianism) their succession left behind no belief in ideals such as, purpose or necessity whatsoever.

To overcome this inertia current theory has turned to the concept of posthumanism and a renewed commitment to realism and materialism (i.e., new materialism).<sup>11</sup> Emblematic of these debates is Meillassoux's speculative materialism and its adage claiming the absurdity of holding certainty in the incertitude of existence beyond language. Instead, he argues how this incertitude must also give proof of the certitude of knowing a reality indifferent to whatever is thought of it.<sup>12</sup> It radicalises Kant's antimonies away from proving the finitude of human understanding, i.e. that reality is only knowable to us, toward attempting to think being as it is apart from mind or experience. It raises an important point: namely that the world is not all that we can know, the world is much more than we can know. Currently these trends continue to deny the existence of telos beyond human meaning to avoid fideism and anthropocentrism. Philosophy in this sense is being used to escape the 'correlationist' circle of not being able to understand thinking aside from being. Operationalising this point is contentious however, as attempting to stop correlating things is not realistic (as Meillassoux concedes), relation is at the heart of understanding.<sup>13</sup> Therefore, Meillassoux's conclusion that the tenants of idealism, such as teleology, hermeneutics or the dialectic are irreparably compromised by this discovery, may be premature.<sup>14</sup>

To simply deny telos is to disregard that the reasons for meanings and realities are infinite. For example, alternatives to teleology are debated in philosophy of biology; life can be explained as a series of mechanisms without the inherent need to refer to higher means or functions.<sup>15</sup> However, in such an explanation the focus then becomes on what is behind the signal driving these mechanisms and the debate for higher meaning continues.<sup>16</sup> One such accession can be demonstrated in autopoiesis: where meaningful signals to a system are self-referent but also restricted to their specific function.<sup>17</sup> But in this example teleology is by no means suppressed. For teleology to be evoked one only needs to ask the question of what is the ultimate reason behind any other reason. This highlights the major difficulty for posthumanism or speculative realism as currently formulated to offer anything more than the postmodernism (or correlationism) it seeks to replace. To assert there is an unknowable reality without transcending humanity is self-defeating as such a reality offers no meaning to express its own truth. Still left overlooked are notions of inherent meaning beyond language, such as those implicit to telos. Questions that philosophy is expected to answer, such as the line between belief and knowledge or rationality and emotion are just as inconclusive as in any past epochs. As a result, the conviction modernist philosophy and post-modern philosophy briefly had in the 20<sup>th</sup> century of its own powers to avoid dualistic thinking are now in crisis and ironically left polarised.<sup>18</sup> The public realm is left disorientated with assumptions about the importance of the progression of liberal morality, economy and technology that is somehow also pointless (and even arrogant and misguided).<sup>19</sup>

Speculative materialism's central observation on the necessity of contingency (that the status of reality is neither true nor false under every possible valuation) is one that may actually help to sharpen hermeneutics. For example, if we are to hold anything absolute, even that of the absolute necessity of contingency we are forced to face an antimony; that if human meaning is not absolute and there is an absolute beyond human meaning, how can human meaning express it? Nature cannot be contingency alone as it is not adequate to express the contradictory nature of infinity. Infinite contingency implies that an infinite stability must also reign (i.e., that of contingency), so if contingency is a natural law it is a self-defeating one. In this way there may not be any one reason for reality, but rather infinite.

And so what is demonstrated beyond certitude is a deeper, speculative hermeneutics of infinity. The realisation that the world is infinitely bigger than our conception of it and so the chief principle implies that no one ideal can define all others (not even neutrality). Just as infinity may go beyond the human, so too does it imply an infinity within the human (this equates to the infinity of the human, and of the human concept of infinity). As reality extends inexhaustibly, so too does human telos to meet it (meaning that that both proof and disproof of contingency and causation are cyclical and reinforcing).

For example, technology could be said to have no exact beginning or end, yet we can feel an arrow in technology like the automobile, or successive mobile communications technologies. Such technologies may have many implications, never ultimately reducible to one reason alone or being merely good or bad. And someone with no context or knowledge of a mobile phone or an automobile may not be susceptible to the progressive line of a technology. But by somehow being compelled to participate in these technologies we struggle to dismiss our experience of the arrow.<sup>20</sup> And so too with liberal politics we see a line going forward in civil rights such as gender equality, race equality class mobility over the course of the 20<sup>th</sup> and 21<sup>st</sup> centuries. However, the narrative and sentiment of these movements no longer accords to critical theory. In perspectives such as posthumanism the lines between progressive movements could be argued to only be momentary concerns of a certain epistemic assemblage, or endless hybridisation.<sup>21</sup> What is left behind has been branded elsewhere as the 'school of resentment', an endless cycle of doom and discontent at the human condition.<sup>22</sup>

The inability to discern progressive ideals can be seen to play out in the crisis of the so-called post truth agenda in which modern criticism, media, and politics are engaged (and attempting to escape from).<sup>23</sup> Associated with Nietzsche and the post-structural concerns of figures such as Foucault and Derrida. Post truth is the popularisation of the idea that good and evil, truth and fallacy are elaborate social fabrications and is the fruition of a nuanced history of ideas in reaction to modernity.<sup>24</sup> Foucault developed the concepts of Nietzsche to offer an extreme form of genealogy in which history supposedly has no teleology. His work attempted to demonstrate how the

principles of humanity (and especially the morality of modernity and humanism) change according to the ways in which they are emphasised. For example, in a culture (or episteme to use Foucault's terminology) where rationality is emphasised, madness is pathologized. This implies a diversion of the concept of teleology and presents history as a question of perspective rather than one of advancement.

Most accounts critical to Foucault get caught around the implied relativism of this point.<sup>25</sup> But debating this threatens to obscure the other (some would say unsuccessful)<sup>26</sup> feature of Foucault's canon that doesn't dismiss teleology all together, but rather seeks to temper it. If advances and complexities are to be raised in one milieu, they are at the expense of focus and emphasis in another milieu. Foucault was developing a Nietzschean point of the circular characteristic of history and deeds done in the name of good and evil. A great good of one epoch obscures another evil. It is in the process of pursuing goodness that blinds us to the evil caused and the inevitable perpetuation of the cycle. Foucault's own insight was that rather than committing (like Nietzsche) to demonstrating romantic conclusions of how this implies the power and importance of will (or the love of fate; *amori fati*), the question is left open. No triumph or end point is implied by them, only the starkest of elucidations on some of the machinations of our ideals of humanity beyond what they overtly promise. However, neither the dialectic nor the telos of history are averted by Foucault, their ideals can be seen to cast influence on his theory of history. For example, by interpreting a genealogy at all there is an implication of truth.<sup>27</sup> Other post-structural theorists such as Derrida or Deleuze also attempted to avert dialectics but were met with similar difficulties.<sup>28</sup> The lineage of post-structuralism can primarily be understood as one attempting to detach ideals from identities, which still defines the predilection of contemporary critique.

The confusion of what to idealise is inherited into the critical agenda of posthumanism/new materialism. Inherent to the aspirations of this criticism is a castigation of the notion of ideals altogether, yet the perspective with which it seeks to launch this castigation must still defend its own ideals to justify the pursuit of its own ends.<sup>29</sup> Here again there is an issue implied around what is considered to be neutral. The extremity seeking normalisation here is that all truths are defined by society and there

is no truth to self. Whilst originally billed as emancipatory, the inertia caused by ceasing the pursuit of ideals in criticism has given political causes more room to bypass logos (truth/reason and proof) and play to pathos (emotions/values), obscuring the purposes or self-serving interests that certain politics operate from (such as Brexit and Trump). Posthumanism, and new materialism are supposedly engaged with the problems of post-truth. Yet by simply shifting the categories, from the human to the posthuman, or from language to materialism the inertia behind what to idealise remains underdeveloped. Posthumanism is as fixated with proving reality as post-structuralism was on restricting access to it. Both approaches are so concerned with reality that they have no focus on the meaning of ideal itself and give no further lens with which to construct an alternative to teleology. We should ask if continuing to obviously enforce where the lines between categories begin and end in rational terms really represents progression? There is no exhaustion of reality or materiality, rather the more we look for it the more we find. That the reality is infinite means that each specific detail has infinite extensions and nuances as well as a finite expression and multiple different infinities. The search for neutrality should not be linked to rationality, as only madness and oblivion survive the human in the face of the infinite. The very act of meaning is to place onto something that is always less perfect than what is implied. It is an assumption to believe that maintaining a neutral perspective of reality equates to reason and rational. Belief in reality dictates that not all reality is rational or neutral. Irrationality and partiality are as much a part of reality as their counterparts.

Rather than seek a solution rooted wholly in rational external truths, what may ironically be lacking is a more sophisticated understanding of the dynamics of ideals. The continued enforcement of difference or the lines between categories engages philosophy with science in the attempt to find a neutrality or backdrop. But what is needed is a method that engages different ways of rationalising. New movements are not needed, rather renewed belief in what is shared between them. Anti-teleological philosophical aspirations are self-defeating as they struggle to give purpose to their own criticism. One aspect of the current crisis in meaning is about

coming to terms with the fact that the maintenance of a both science and its criticism as neutral is at the expense of belief in ethics and ideals.

A crisis is evoked when using naturalism or science alone to explain reality, purpose and meaning.<sup>30</sup> For example, belief in naturalism is self-defeating when considering that evolution as a model for the development of cognitive functions must gear thought towards survival and not truth.<sup>31</sup> Cognitive functions not geared toward truth cannot assert truth in naturalism. Once this limit is exposed it is hard to put the genie back in the bottle, what if teleology is an elaborate ruse not towards higher purpose, but our own survival? Therefore, what is exposed is the choice enabled in any interpretation of scientific teleology. For example, we could equally choose to interpret the history of scientific culture as lifting the limit off sacrosanct cultures or a way to find what to limit as sacrosanct. The absence of a clear scientific answer to these questions means that ideals cannot be eliminated. Even in a moment of total crisis a progressive narrative is still possible. One way or another the apparent crises of the current epoch must end, but if the end is to be that society regresses or humanity becomes extinct, there is still no reason not to believe in a desired alternative.

So, the question remains one of ideals and what exactly to root ideals in. I do not wish to argue for a simple revision of teleology in the style of Aristotle, Hegel, or Marx that imply the end of history, and equate teleology as dictating some ultimate form or order like laws of nature. Equating telos with nature initiates further questions such as: is telos intrinsic or extrinsic to its subject i.e. imposed upon an object by a subject or residing in the object itself; and if so does telos presuppose choice and intention? Depending upon how such questions are considered there is a danger for teleology to become confused and inflated. The association initiates the grounds to begin categorising things seen as natural as upholding good or bad telos. This kind of interpretation of nature may use telos as continued means to justify its own world view regardless of new information. Even if nature is viewed as imminent (such as Spinoza's) it is always already achieving its telos. In this view it is hard to reconcile individual meanings from larger processes or states of becoming. In either of these perspectives nature becomes distorted, either to be used as a means to exclude and invalidate, or everything becomes nature and nature

becomes meaningless. Therefore, telos should not be reduced to any other concept such as nature or neutrality (political descriptors cannot fully represent a form of nature like liberalism or capitalism). Whilst at the same time telos cannot be easily denied any more than denying meaning or narrative entirely; narrative will always accompany meaning. And any backdrop serving as neutral or natural cannot carry the meaning of telos without distortion.

It is from this perspective of telos, as wholly undefined, neither tied to the ideals of nature, humanity, or neutrality that I seek to forge here, to focus once again on the meaning of ideals themselves and the search for their will and purpose. The meaning of what constitutes an ideal is perhaps ambiguous because they are the principles or values behind the pursuit of goals. This suggests that in some way, every meaning has an ideal to it, albeit that more importance may be placed on some rather than others. Even decline has an ideal when one considers what a perfect decline in service to a justified cause would entail. This confuses the claim that there has been a decline in ideals, because the meanings of the ideals haven't gone anywhere. Rather, their implications have just shifted their emphasis in comparison to one another. It is this contrast in between the relationships between ideals that my analysis is seeking to intervene in. My argument more precisely, is that contemporary beliefs are use ideals to deemphasise the meaning of other ideals, rather than allow them to emphasise their truths and values more freely.

\* \* \*

In what follows I argue that human progress hinges upon ideals meaning what they intend and intending what they mean. The human sciences have given us the lens to see social systems such as capitalism, but these labels can often be restrictive of how the nuances between ideals have been evolving in their own way over generations. And this is where this book comes in, to give that lens where the ideal of human sciences is no more ideal than any other. The current age of science and technology is one so desperate for proof of identity, truth and reality that the ideals that accompany it are subject to inflation and relativism. Rather than will a common belief in something more meaningful, modern beliefs maintain a



fear of deviating from established norms or neutralities. The result is an age bloated by over-production, numbness, conceit, and self-righteousness. The more that the meaning of an ideal is pushed to the extreme of being true in every instance the more distorted it has become. Ideals judged solely by their usefulness to singular interests only ever reflect a binary of truth and fallacy and lose their own meaning.<sup>32</sup> Even instances of critical descent become involved in the singular task of defining reality and so can be ingeniously itemised in service to the cumulative scientific knowledge of the age. As a result, modern thinking (aided by technology) has begun to obscure a prime quality of the ideals inherited from ages past; that ideals should be free to change meaning when they get so extremified as to not reflect their original intent. This is important because each time the meaning of an ideal begins to no longer reflect its intent, it should be imperative to understand it using another word (or range of words). Without a sense of belief in ideals we are in no position to judge something's meaning or further engage or enrich future language and meaning. For this reason, no matter the truth, thoughts that manage to enshrine ideals with intent are by definition more worthwhile than ones that do not, as without intent thought must resort to nihilism, cynicism, and fatalism.

This book is an attempt to engage with this problem by utilising a hermeneutic method that lets concepts transform free from servitude to one particular rhetorical investment. This is not to say that investment is not important for developing nuance and specificity, but only in as much as we believe and develop the ideals of concepts themselves. To attempt this, I seek to centre a philosophy around contrast as the great known unknowable to replace the essentialist notion of opposition or contradiction in dialectics and hermeneutics and overcome their limits. Rather than base reality in contradiction, opposition, neutrality, or nothingness I demonstrate the reliance of these concepts on contrast, and how contrast gives access to the infinite. As such my attempt is not one to police the line between where an ideal begins or ends, but rather demonstrate the contrast between them, and use it as an aide to guide where ideals shift. My use of hermeneutics, dialectic and rhetoric is not to revive humanism or defend anthropocentrism but rather to demonstrate a new way to use ideals that

doesn't resort to the other extreme of posthumanism/new materialism and lose sight of the human altogether.

What follows in part 1 is a demonstration and justification of the hermeneutic method I will employ to analyse ideals and intension. Part 2 will then discuss the importance of dialogue, how ideals equate to ideology, and the difficulty of willing our ideals into reality. Part 3 will use the insights gained to demonstrate the currant disaccord in the social sciences and humanities to conceive freedom and a just way to classify the world effectively. Part 4 will surmise how modern life distorts ideals and how the corruption of ideals is fostered and maintained by a system now in crisis.

Each section is based around a set of ideals, not to offer an exhaustive account of them in the style of an encyclopaedia, but exactly the opposite, to demonstrate the inexhaustibility of such ideals around a common theme (in this case the line between individual ideals and ideology) and use the ideals as a generator to reinstate the significance and importance of their meaning and interrelation. What follows is an exploration using the dialectic/rhetoric method to craft, orientate, and reproduce belief in ideals.

## **Part I**

***“Reality does not exist until it is measured.”***

**— ANU Research School of Physics and Engineering,  
Press Release**

# Method

## A hermeneutics of contrast

To address the current crisis in meaning I wish to look at ideals through the lens of contrast. More precisely, the contrast I seek is the one between deductive and inductive reasoning, or in another sense intuition and reason. Intuition can be understood as gaining a belief of something through rationality rather than experience. Most often this sense of intuition is taken to mean knowledge that can be acquired without experience of the external world, through thought alone (i.e., *a priori* knowledge), against knowledge that can only be acquired from experience of the external world (i.e. *a posteriori* knowledge).<sup>1</sup> I wish to argue that the sense of contrast cannot be neatly attributed to either *a prior* and *a posterior* knowledge as it belongs to both. Therefore, I will employ contrast to close the gap between the two. To begin this search, I will look at the contrast implied by antonyms. For most words, there is a widely accepted antonym, and if not one can be intuited using the word 'not'.<sup>2</sup> This raises a question as to the reasoning guiding meanings to the selection of according antonyms.

The dynamic has been interpreted in different ways. For example, constructivism would argue that the relationship between antonymic words is culturally conditioned, i.e., that the meaning of them is one that is taught to us and then we learn to apply. This perspective was developed progressively through the schools of phenomenology, structuralism, and post-structuralism.<sup>3</sup> Through concepts such as 'othering', antonym is argued to not correspond to any reality beyond the social milieu in which individuals operate. In particular, post-structural figures such as Levinas, Lacan, Baudrillard, and Derrida attempt to deny the essentiality implied in the belief in true opposition between antonyms. They stand against the idealist natural philosophy by Fichte, Hegel, and Schelling that argues that truth and the essence of nature can be accessed through dialectically opposing binary opposites together.<sup>4</sup> Post-structuralism's issue with idealism is that it creates an essentialist notion of contradiction and

opposition that is open to bias and manipulation. In so doing however, all meanings deemed as socially constructed leave no room for interpretation aside from social conditioning. So, in their premise rejecting binary opposition they cannot escape forming a view uncertain of reality aside from social conditioning.

Meillassoux argues in response that it is absurd to be certain of a world that we are uncertain of, as to make such a claim would imply some certainty of the world to affirm the argument. This point has been used to assert proof of reality aside from the human perception of it, albeit one which we can only speculate on. And is at the centre of a larger movement in philosophy claiming to be posthuman and new materialist. However, aside from what this means for our understanding of the human, less work has been done in this vein to discuss what this may mean for antonym and binary opposition. Meillassoux, argues that it should mean the end of causation, the absolute necessity of contingency, whilst retaining the law of non-contradiction. However, this threatens re-treading an essentialist view of opposition and contradiction that has proved so dangerous and open to manipulation in the past. Meillassoux's view of reality is essentially nothing but contradiction. I wish to take a slightly different tact to replace contradiction with contrast and make no assumptions on the nature of this contrast or prioritise it as presented over different senses. Contrast is more malleable and precedes opposition, with opposition being total contrast (rather than the other way around). And contrast is not just a concept of language but also a feeling and a sense, and so presents indiscriminately to both rational and intuition. Therefore, rather than close down the cause or reason for reality, contrast can help to realise that causes and reasons are infinite.

In this way, the use of contrast opens new possibilities for analysis and can reintegrate lines of thought considered to be disbanded. For example, through intuition we may revisit the structural linguistics of figures such as Saussure, C. S. Peirce, or Levi-Strauss (or in other ways the innatism of Jung and Chomsky) to avoid the infinite regression implied when formulating mind as deriving from external stimuli; in the style of cognitivism, constructivism, empiricism, or new materialism that leaves whatever is initiating the meaning aside.<sup>5</sup> Whilst at the same time challenge

the essentialism they imply. Contrast can be used to avoid splitting between monism or dualism. Rather than meaning being assigned to words internally or externally, we can view it as coming from the contrast between words themselves.<sup>6</sup> In this sense, meaning is both definite and infinite, and at the same time dependent and independent to the thinker. To put this another way, rather than meaning being rationally derived (or innate), or empirical (from experience) I argue it is from the combination of all three. It is what allows for all of the speculation and thought of its nature, radically inclusive beyond any one conclusion, whilst at the same time allowing for an infinite number of different solutions. Therefore, I wish to assert an understanding of intuition as this sense of contrast engaged when finding antonymic meanings.

To demonstrate this, we can posit a clearer example of a meaning deriving from contrast rather than contradiction. For example, between positive and negative there is neutral, or between large and small there is medium. To arrive at these meanings relies not only on a sense of the meaning of opposing words but also those in between them. And this intuition is too nuanced to operate from opposition, but rather requires a much wider sense of contrast. For opposing words with a less obvious middle point between them, a meaning in the middle can still be speculated. This task involves taking both words together and imagining a meaning that combines both. The dictionary definitions for the original words can be used for clues. For example, for the words good and bad, the OED defines them as meaning:

“good - having the required qualities; of a high standard”,

and “bad - of poor quality or a low standard”.

The operative word here pivots around ‘qualities’, and so taking a synonym for qualities that would mean both good and bad qualities could produce the word:

“average - having qualities that are seen as typical of a particular person, group, or thing”.

What becomes evident at this point is the fluidity between the meanings and the words that express them. In some cases, there may not be the word for the meaning attained for. But this is exactly what this exercise is trying to get at, the intuitive structure to meaning that guides the meanings that can be made. I argue that this form of intuition relies on contrast. I.e. it relies on a sense of contrast between the words, and as such is neither fully from experience or from some internal source or cognition, but somehow combines both. Contrast doesn't imply that words have a perfect and static opposite, any word can be put in contrast with any other. To place meaning is to always place it onto something less exact than its intension. The configuration of the antonym comes from a sense of when one meaning contrasts another entirely to the point of contradiction.

The point I am making can be further understood through dialectics; where one point is given and opposed by another and then synthesised together. Although the example above is referring to individual word meanings and not overall arguments (as is most assumed by the dialectic method) the dynamic is essentially the same. Hegel's philosophical system (the figure most responsible for modernising dialectic) has a similar aim for dialectic as the aim I have for contrast detailed above; that dialectic can reconcile *a priori* knowledge with empirical knowledge (the circle of circles). However, there are some important differences. Hegel's version of dialectic acts like a logic that surpasses the previous two meanings to create a new one. Ultimately in this schema all meanings are subordinate to the concept of spirit as the force of nature itself, and consequently spirit is set in opposition to world.<sup>7</sup> Here I wish to employ intuition and contrast rather than spirit and opposition (or the coincidence of opposites) as less assumptive and less anthropocentric operatives for dialectic. Rather than imagine dialectic as combining ideals to create more and more absolute meanings and levels of consciousness, I wish to argue that dialectic is a circle that doesn't imply suppression or negation, or have an end or higher point. For example, if we take a word and oppose it, then find a middle word between the first two words and then find the opposite to the word in the middle, and then continue to find a new middle in this way, I argue that we return to the meaning of the original word after 12 iterations. The figure below illustrates the method by which this repetition in meaning can be followed intuitively.

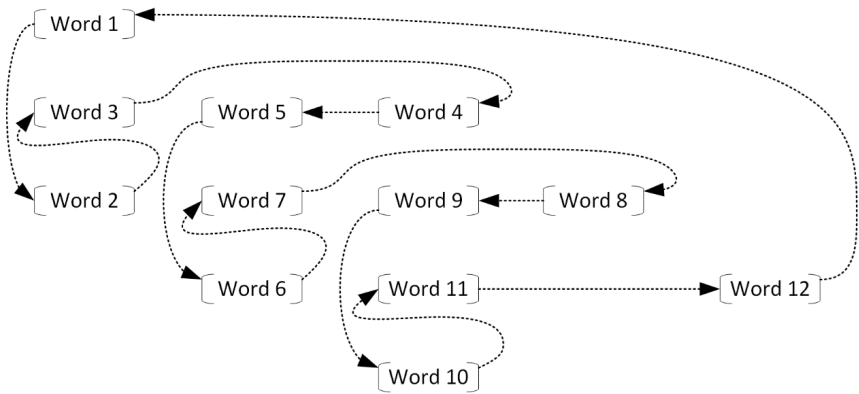


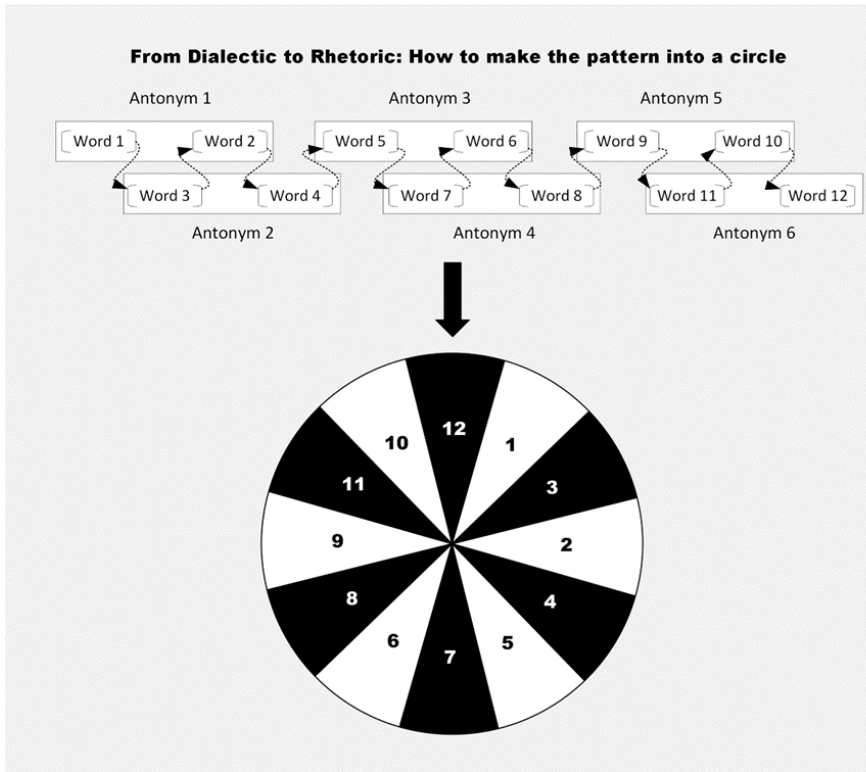
Figure 1: A dialectic pattern in words

The results of the dialectic method above resembles a form of the hermeneutic circle (where interpretation of a text refers to its context, and an interpretation of its context refers back to the text). But is an attempt to overcome the limitations (posed by Badiou or Meillassoux) of traditional hermeneutics that reduces analysis to finite human understandings, i.e., only ever referring to its own interpretations.<sup>8</sup> Whilst not resorting to the abandonment of causation (advocated by Meillassoux), and all that that entails for our understanding of ideals such as the human. Rather I attempt to demonstrate how it can be used to confirm a sense of infinite contrast, both in meaning and the nature of reality. In similar ways that hermeneutics is used to interpret infinity by Ricoeur and in the philosophy of communication by authors such as Purcell.<sup>9</sup> And from this sense of contrast a more sophisticated understanding of meaning can be attained that doesn't rely on singular concepts. Contrast avoids reductionisms like those already mentioned of neutrality or opposition. It can even be employed to abstain from Hume's Fork, truths needn't be a choice between necessity or contingency. The truths of infinite meaning must be beyond any one singular concept, sense, or expression of it. This is not to say that all meaning is true, but rather there is no exhaustion of truths, meaning is not entirely reducible to truth alone. The reality is the sense of contrast against the sense of a meaning.



The dialectic reasoning initiated is circular, therefore, no one meaning is entirely reducible to any other, a word's affirmation is also that which can invalidate it. Meaning must serve two functions: to represent its significance to the individuals referring to it and relate a meaning back to all other possible meanings. If we consider the translation of language as an extreme example of this, each language has its own unique meanings and systems, but can also be translated more or less into other languages. Languages don't continue to endlessly create new meanings that don't refer back to older ones. Even the oldest or most distant languages can be translated coherently to modern ones given that a correspondence can be established. This is because all languages fulfil the same function, to make unique expressions possible with a limited number of familiar meanings. Language makes the infinite expressible, and therefore reflects the paradox of the infinite itself; that infinity is one and many things at the same time. This must mean that there are intuitive structures in the meaning of words that relate them back to themselves. One well known circular structure to meaning is antonym, another is displayed through the dialectic method demonstrated. This circularity in meaning dictates that no-one reason can be placed above another, and no one meaning can be used to explain all the others. As a result, there can be no purpose beyond meaning, or meaning beyond purpose as there would be no way in which to articulate it. Purpose and meaning are integrally linked and should not be thought apart. When a certain meaning has been articulated it must have a certain purpose even if negative, or invalidating. Therefore, this method serves as a way of thinking through bias, i.e., as a means to think about the mode by which meanings are employed. Consequently, it will be used in this book to gain insight on the status of common place ideals of the English language.

The meaning of the words generated according to the dialectic method above can be further arranged in a symmetrical gradated wheel. There are several ways in which such a wheel could be assembled, but to ensure that the order of the words are evenly gradated, the wheel should follow a different line than that of intuition in the figure above. For example, to regulate the meanings, each pair of antonyms can be arranged interlinking with the previous pair. In this way the intuitive sense of finding antonyms and their middles interacts with the logical sense of regulating word relationships.



*Figure 2: How to make a dialectic rhetoric wheel*

To see the method used on an actual ideal see Figure 3 onwards (in part 2). Once placed in a wheel, the words can be freed of their dialectic relationship, i.e. that words go in a structured way from meaning to meaning, what results are 12 meanings that can be taken in whatever order to rhetorical effect, and more broadly perform a hermeneutic spectrum of meanings. The meanings expressed by doing the exercise may expand or constrict the meanings of the words. Therefore, I have used the word intuition to describe this process, but it could equally be called instinct, imagination, or logic etc. What is being searched for is the generative origin of meaning itself (the point where analysis meets synthesis). And according to this aim the method used should not be the exclusive domain of either dialectic or rhetoric, (and will be henceforth named dialectic/rhetoric).<sup>10</sup> The wheel proves that even once accounting for the opposites, no matter

which direction reasons are pushed they return back to themselves. Demonstrating the futility of expecting the absolute to reveal itself through reason, but affirming the original promise of idealism that we are never far away from the absolute.

This further reiterates its distinction against Hegel's version of the dialectical process. I wish to use contrast to replace dialectics seen as a process of negation (or contradiction). The intuitive sense I seek is not initiated by negation, where one meaning is negated or obscured by the other to generate a further meaning. Hegel's process uses negation, or nothing to imply being and then combined becoming and so on until representing all things as a manifestation of absolute idealism (will and reason). Rather I suggest dialectic is initiated through an intuitive sense of contrast, i.e., that the point where two opposite meanings meet contains an indefinable line productive of new meaning. Cognition has no *apriori* sense of negation, but a sense of contrast, and antonym represents total contrast, or the point at which meanings eclipse. Therefore, all that we can ever sense is contrast. But contrast cannot be sensed in its entirety as it is infinite in scale, the more contrast is zoomed in upon the more contrast is found, therefore, it is always approximated.<sup>11</sup> Nor can contrast be definitively denied, as reference to anything external must be cognised with contrast to form its definition.<sup>12</sup> Therefore, contrast doesn't belong fully to perception, nor the world independent of the perceiver. Contrast offers definitive knowledge of the world but denies any one particular absolute. I use contrast rather than negation to analytical effect as it needs no prior definition, it is always present and undeniable.

In line with the 20<sup>th</sup> century concerns with idealism already noted I wish to avoid presenting my understanding of intuition or contrast in totalising, dogmatic ways, somehow able to root themselves in self-evident truths, or an absolute logic beyond literalisation.<sup>13</sup> My evocation of the sense of intuition or contrast are not meant to be entirely logical. Rather, I stress that any sense cannot be fully expressed in one meaning, argument or perspective alone. That any expression always refers to yet wider expression and further concepts. My attempt here is similar to Malabou's hope for epigenesis or Apel's intension for transcendental pragmatics; to allow meaning to access the transcendental function, but at the same time

avoid the trappings that transcendentalism implies by placing meaning in some inaccessible realm beyond analysis and criticism.<sup>14</sup> This is approached by attempting a philosophy of non-neutrality, that bases analysis not conclusively in contradiction, but in contrast, i.e. that all concepts need contrast to gain definition but expression of this contrast cannot be reduced to any one meaning alone. And so is a sort of hermeneutics not only of texts and interpretation but of the sense of meaning itself.

If contrast is ubiquitous and unavoidable in all philosophical traditions, it is only usually seen as a passage between all things or nothing. There are some allusions to it as a major device, for example in Plato's cave; that knowledge of the world reaches us only through shadows; or Locke's paradox of the basins to demonstrate the impossibility of experiences of sensorial differences as separate from one another; or Einstein coordinates where contrast is used to demonstrate the implicit fallacy of knowledge without comparison. But sooner or later, in seeking to derive a direction for insights derived from contrast, a focus is lost from the contrast itself. And so, the concept holds further potential. As contrast is difficult to place as empirical or ideal, natural or cultured it can be used as a means to approach telos with the aim of avoiding assumptions. In equating telos to contrast it is not to imply that the two are one in the same or conflate their meanings with each other. Rather, contrast can be used to elucidate what is often seen as telos's contradictory nature. I don't wish to emphasise telos as a force towards more sophistication (as Hegel), but rather emphasise its quality of adaptability (beyond logocentric or literal endpoints) and penchant for infinity.

To do this, contrast can be used to make a conceptual space for telos to remain undefined. For example, as interpretations of the classical teleology of Aristotle question if telos is intrinsic or extrinsic to its subject;<sup>15</sup> the same can be considered with contrast, i.e. does contrast presuppose a subject or is formed according to the subject? At first, contrast may seem to merely pose a rhetorical problem with no immediate answer. Yet rather than merely idealistic, the paradox clearly has a physical dimension. If we dismiss contrast, we find it hard to do so without further dismissing a grasp of both our subjective sense of personhood as well as our objective sense of reality itself; without contrast no object, real or imaginary can be perceived

to exist apart from any other thing. Therefore, contrast can be further used to elucidate a significant insight on telos. Namely, that purpose can only be raised in contrast, i.e. in reference to something else. This complexifies our understanding of telos, as on the one hand any reference to purpose aside from circumstance should be regarded as partial or bias, whilst at the same time the meaning of purpose refers to something's meaning beyond its circumstance. The point is to be aware of this idea as there is no means to resolve it free from contrast.

In this vein, I seek to demonstrate the function of contrast in deriving purpose, or perhaps that should be the contrasts that surround functions and purposes. Unfettered contrast is neither ideal or material, quantity or quality. To believe in contrast then is to not believe in negation, or neutrality as waiting in the wings as some kind of ultimate background state. Rather, any state of being can only be said to exist in contrast, outside of contrast is unknown, for all we know total contrast could be totally anything.<sup>16</sup> Being able to view the meaning of telos with awareness of its circularity, ironically frees it from a predefined order or other totalising end point, and disconnects it from assumptions that nature is supportive or not of the human, or that it implies a definitive ethics. At times telos can seem to adhere to a nature whilst at others goes against it. I am not attempting to put morality or progress beyond words in its own realm, but rather to engage the sense of it. To consider ways of making meaning beyond logocentric literalisms and use contrast to define reason.

Once teleology operates from a space of contrast it is no longer tied to any specific totalising pre-defined order (such as neutrality, or nothingness, or nature), and so there is no reason to deny purpose, meaning and goodness from being. Reason is no more aligned to being as it is nothingness, as their existence is only observable through contrast. And so, nothing is no less questionable than anything deemed as being. There is no predefined reason therefore, to choose bad over good, cynicism over optimism, uncertainty over certainty etc. Of course, different people's sense of ideals may differ, but the differences are translatable through contrast. Thus the intension to ideal meanings is preserved from being lost in the relativism of Nietzsche, Wittgenstein, Derrida or numerous others promoting language as overly literal and untranslatable. Going back to the aforementioned classical

idealism where being is equated to goodness, i.e. that the measure of something's being is to say how good that thing is at serving its purpose. The overarching issue with the received classics is that in practice they become assumptive, hard to justify and easily employed by causes and regimes lacking in scruples. However, from the perspective of contrast, being and cause can be more effectively split. Being can be seen as a direction or momentum, and cause as working towards a momentum. And so, we may deem causes or effects as good or bad, whilst still preserving a sense of being or existence as undeniable and always able to offer an alternative to our assumptions.<sup>17</sup> So, I do not wish to draw all things to contrast, as anything to be known must be in contrast to contrast, but rather draw attention to the interaction with contrast that makes being, purpose, and telos visible.

Understandings of telos must be averted from defining or entrenching absolute or singular truths, or their own version of neutrality. As human meaning is not entirely neutral, neutrality can be alluded to in the same way that all things thinkable can be alluded to, but never fully realised. Rather we must look to a meanings purpose; to what intension are we engaging a meaning. When looking at the concepts used to describe something, the intensions for using them can serve as a means to mediate its telos. And so, the meaning of telos is the possibility of an object to gain definition (as in the concept of *techne* or bringing forth).<sup>18</sup> Telos is only visible when not fully defined. As soon as an object is defined it loses its indefinite quality and has a finite intension. Therefore, telos cannot be fully captured by singular descriptors alone such as being, it is rather in the intension to ideal meaning. Intensions have a choice therefore, to aspire to the infinite and escape definition, or accept their finitude and gain more definition, neither aspiration can fully represent an ideal or telos in every situation, but rather the ideal is in the choice of intension itself.

This point also makes it possible to distinguish telos from the monism of Heraclitus, Spinoza, James, Whitehead, Deleuze (and process philosophies more generally) where nature (or god) is always imminent, infinite and indivisible. The problem with monism is that if existence is seen as infinite and imminent then it is difficult to decipher as to whether this implies telos, as something that's infinite is always already achieving its telos. Infinite