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## Poetic Philosophy and the Moralization of Social Networks

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## Poetic Philosophy and the Moralization of Social Networks

Artificial Intelligence (AI) is not intelligent, but all intelligence is artificial, made, fabricated, or invented. Intelligence refers to the ability to perceive, comprehend, or understand. It is not a static capacity but dynamic and changing; it has something to do with experience. The question posed in this paper is whether we become capable of experiencing differently because of AI. The apparent answer is positive, but it comes with restrictions. AI can help humans experience more, but it also hinders them from becoming more than the ultimate purpose of the algorithm. That is a problem. For example, while social media platforms promise connectivity, their algorithms often lead to polarization, isolation, and reduced freedom. It can have a detrimental impact on democracy. Several prominent thinkers promote the idea that the solution to this problem is governmental regulation of the big tech companies behind the development and strategic use of AI (Zuboff, 2019; Floridi, 2023; Harari, 2017 & 2024; Haidt, 2024).

While I share many of their concerns, the aim of this paper is not to replace one form of goal-orientated organization with another. Instead, I propose a philosophical model of organization, particularly one that embraces the poetic as a powerful tool. This philosophy, with its emphasis on difference, creation, and connection, has the potential to liberate people from the constraints of these algorithms as powerful organizational tools. A poetic philosophy not only opens up and accepts different life forms, even ones that the algorithms did not count on, but also fosters human connection, making us feel more engaged and less isolated in the digital age.

## Introduction

The main idea in this paper is that philosophy is poetic in its origin. As an operational definition, I adopt the perspective of Richard Rorty (1989, p. 23), who writes that the poet fears the destruction of their “idiosyncratic” sense of what is “possible and important” because that sense is what makes the poet different. Rorty continues: “To lose that difference is, I take it, what any poet—any maker, anyone who hopes to create something new—fears.”

Thus, in this paper, the terms “poet” and “poetic” refer to anyone who makes or creates something new—not just those who write poems. Philosophy is poetic because life’s potentiality is actualized through a creative and imaginative process. It is an immanent or anti-authoritarian process that takes place within reality. This contrasts transcendent philosophies of representation, according to which creative acts would make visible what is already given as a representation in experience—for example, a user’s or customer’s emotional attitude towards a product or an opinion.

Creativity as an immanent practice can be understood as an inventive force that disrupts, interrupts, and reorganizes our relationship with the world, including our beliefs. Actualization is an undertaking that unfolds amidst other undertakings, for example, by challenging what we take for granted (Heidegger, 1993), whereby it opens up new horizons beyond best practices or data accumulation, sparking intellectual curiosity.

Philosophy, therefore, is poetic in its experimenting way of actualizing or effectuating the virtual. “The virtual is opposed not to the real but to the actual. *The virtual is fully real in so far as it is virtual.* Exactly what Proust

said of states of resonance must be said of the virtual: ‘Real without being actual, ideal without being abstract’” (Deleuze, 1994, p. 2008). The virtual refers to a multiplicity of arbitrary relations that might be actualized through what happens. It is the interaction between our experiences and our potential responses that makes the process of actualization creative. Actions depend on events, not on goals or objectives.

In alignment, David L. Norton (1976, p. 15) describes self-realization as misleading: “An actualized possibility, as we say, ‘exists,’ but it may at any time cease to exist. [...] To say that a possibility that assumes a working place in the existing world is thereby ‘realized’ is to imply that it was unreal before.” Thus, instead of being realized, a potentiality or virtuality is being actualized. It is not a matter of verbal dispute, but a question of existence itself, a way of living (Deleuze, 1994, p. 212).

A poetic philosophy deals with something “that is not yet actual but can become such” (Norton, 1976, p. 12). For this reason, it requires a certain kind of attention or capacity to see and hear things. For example, Iris Murdoch (2001, p. 51) created the concept of “unselfing” to overcome “the fat relentless ego” that often stands in the way of seeing the world as it is. Unselfing is a way of liberating ourselves from selfish concerns, which, according to Murdoch, is seen in art because it shows us the world—that is, actualizing aspects that do not resemble anything already known.

In this paper, this particularly poetic understanding of philosophy will be contrasted with Artificial intelligence (AI), which is the science of teaching machines to learn human-like capabilities. For example, AI models apply different algorithms to relevant data inputs to achieve the tasks or outputs they have been programmed for, such as organizing people’s behavior,

habits, and attitudes. “Algorithm’ is arguably the single most important concept in our world,” writes Yuval Noah Harari in *Homo Deus* (2017, p. 93). He continues: “If we want to understand our life and our future, we should make every effort to understand what an algorithm is and how algorithms are connected with emotions.”

The focus of this paper will mainly be on the algorithms the corporations use behind social media, networks, and businesses such as Facebook, Instagram, LinkedIn, Amazon, YouTube, TripAdvisor, etc.

An algorithm is a methodical set of steps or procedures for rational decision-making that allow one (e.g. the corporation behind a social media) to define which factors must be considered and arrive at a decision without regard to other factors (Harari, 2017). While the methodological process is familiar, its propagation and digitalization are not. Today, the influence of algorithms in controlling decisions and shaping opinions is a cause for concern because they rarely question or challenge people’s beliefs, understood as “a rule or habit of actions,” meaning that no alternative thinking emerges (Rorty, 2021, p. 4).

Contrary to expectations, this widespread use of algorithms has not led to a more rational decision-making process but rather the opposite, which is caused by two things: First, algorithms organize emotions through resemblance or limitation (Harari). For example, algorithms make a particular debate, product, or advice resemble what the user already likes or dislikes, or limit the emotions that diverge from the algorithm’s objective. Second, algorithms, far from being tools for information, are primarily profit-driven (see e.g. Williams, 2018; Joque, 2022; Hari, 2023; Zuboff, 2023). Their goal is not to serve the greater good by arriving at the best possible

decision for the most people but to generate maximum profit for the companies that own or use them. For example, when social media optimize engagement for its users, they do so not solely to give users what they want but to give advertisers what they want: the users' attention.

The result is a data-driven escalation of human emotions, where the user's emotional responses are not random but guided by the data and algorithms that determine what people see and engage with. It creates a kind of enslavement due to the control and regulation of peoples' behavior and habits. For this reason, algorithms function as subtle form of moral control regardless of what some believe to be a good or bad objective, respectively.

As presented here, a poetic philosophy is evaluated based on what new forms of life or modes of existence a philosopher's concepts or ideas make possible or actualize. In contrast, the objective of the majority of algorithms that the tech companies use to control people's lives is profit. One example of a poetic philosophy is Friedrich Nietzsche's perspectivism—seeing things from all angles. He changed the idea of the self as content toward the self as becoming (or what psychologists today might refer to as “self as context”, as per Steven C. Hayes (2019)). This shift in perspective suggests that the self is not a fixed entity, but a dynamic process of interpretation and change. Facebook, Instagram, and other social media seldom try to expand their users' relationships with the world; they rather try to capture their attention by giving them more of what they love and hate (Williams, 2018).

Thus, I propose that philosophy's poetic quality which inspires and fosters open, diverse, complex, and liberating discussions, can contribute to public democratic debate. Democracy can be described as the organization

of differences, “a community of sharing,” as Jacques Rancière writes, “in both senses of the term: a membership in a single world which can only be expressed in adversarial terms, and a coming together which can only occur in conflict” (Rancière, 1995, p. 49). One of the characteristics of poetry is that it is unpredictable, but true in an authentic or existential way. The poet and writer Augustin Fernandez Mallo writes in *Postpoesia*: “... every scientific theory is *falsifiable* ... On the other hand, poetry is never falsifiable; it is the result of the creation of an author, of a person, of a non-transferable sensitivity, and a person is never falsifiable” (Mallo, 2009, p. 128). Similar, the democratic citizen is a being “who speaks, which is also to say a poetic being, a being capable of embracing ... the unreality of representation” (Rancière, 1995, p. 51).

Poetic philosophy, with its emphasis on individual expression, and unique and novel perspectives, can resist the controlling, homogenizing effect of algorithms, encouraging diverse and novel viewpoints and fostering a more rich (less predictable) public debate.

### **Algorithms and Habits**

With their use of big data and algorithms, social media and networks represent a kind of morality understood as an aversion to what happens—while philosophy is more poetic and ethical, stressing that it is a creative problematization that does not prejudge the experience. Ethics is about being worthy of bearing the event, accommodating or accepting what happens to us—it is shaped by occurrences (Deleuze, 2004). It is not to be confused with resignation; rather, it is about actively taking on, accepting,

and acknowledging the life conditions, circumstances, and events that affect a person and that this person may be able to influence or relate to in a different way.

The way the algorithm strategically uses information about people's emotional habits further emphasizes the problem. In *Outline of a Theory of Practice* (1977), Pierre Bourdieu describes how culture is produced and reproduced through the concept of "habitus", which refers to "a subjective but not individual system of internalised structures, schemes of perception, conception, and action common to all members of the same group or class" (1977, p. 86). Social media algorithms and networks function through "schemes of perception," for example, by controlling or internalizing the subject to fit into an existing structure that shares the same worldview without allowing the subject to question this held belief. Algorithms personalize peoples' entry into public debate. As a user, a person will likely see more of what they already like and connect with like-minded people. For instance, if a person frequently engages with political content from a particular party, the algorithm may show them more of that party's content, reinforcing their beliefs. Thus, while creating a pleasant consensus, algorithms also polarize the debate. They steer users not only towards what they like but also towards what they oppose (often hate). This 'pleasant consensus' refers to the comfort of being surrounded by like-minded individuals and content. However, this also means many people are less likely to embrace opposing views that sometimes can challenge their worldview, help them detect self-deception, and lead towards a more nuanced self-knowledge. As these two processes, unification and division,



shape the debate, there is a diminishing space for discussing disagreements and exchanging reasonable views.

Paradoxically, the more our public debate is ‘rationalized’—for example, by strategically collecting and using people’s emotions and behaviors—the less rational it becomes. This paradox underscores the implications of algorithmic moral influence because virtues are ingrained in habits. “Ethics” derives from the Greek word for habit, *ethos*. “*Habitus*”—our habit, state, or condition—is related to human excellence or flourishing (Urmson, 1988; MacIntyre, 2002; Clifford & Feezell, 2010). If a person lacks tolerance or compassion, they need opportunities to develop those new habits. It refers to building more flexible personalities, where people can accept mistakes or doubts without judging themselves (or others who might hold different beliefs). Algorithms organize public debate in such a way that people’s behavior is rarely tested. As part of a democratic public, everyone has the power to shape this debate, due to/given the fact that the human is a “creature who speaks” (Rancière, 1995, p. 51); yet speaking/shaping the debate is not just an individual responsibility, but a collective one. However, the power to do so declines because algorithms function as a seductive organizational tool; gradually, they organize more and more aspects of a person’s life, subverting critical and imaginative experimenting through the habit of following the guidance of the algorithms.

Poetic philosophy is not guided by a transcendent moralistic or ideological ideal, as I argue many social networks are; rather, it operates with an immanent ethic. It rejects the idea that philosophy should appeal to something external and fixed—for example, a given truth or authority. A poetic project is creative and imaginative, as when Nietzsche urged us to

become “the poets of our own lives—first of all in the smallest, most everyday matters” (1974, p. 290).<sup>1</sup> Some can enhance reality through poetry: “the imagination is the principle vehicle of human progress” (Rorty, 2016, p. 11). Furthermore, philosophy can be seen as poetical, as is Gilles Deleuze and Félix Guattari’s statement (1994, p. 3), “the friend in philosophy no longer stands for an extrinsic persona, an example or empirical circumstance, but rather for the presence that is intrinsic to thought, a condition of possibility of thought itself.” Philosophy is not about building the right idealistic persona, but facilitating thinking itself; it is about matching, or becoming worthy of, what is happening—that is, becoming *with* the multiplicity of life’s various forces.

The philosophical love of wisdom has always been a result of freedom. The underlying thesis in this paper is not that love makes liberation possible; it is, conversely, that freedom opens the door to love. Freedom is the element of love; without freedom, there is no love. This thesis helps individuals overcome the tendency to reduce love to function or to be limited to specific markers of identity, such as race, gender, or sexuality—markers that are used to affirm users’ social identity as members of a particular group (Chan, 2024, p. 233).

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<sup>1</sup> Earlier, in *The Gay Science* Nietzsche speaks about such poetic creatures as “always out to shape and interpret their environment as *free* nature: wild, arbitrary, fantastic, disorderly, and surprising (p. 233). Rarely is AI wild, arbitrary, disorderly, or surprising, yet that may not be interesting. Nevertheless, when people refuse to become poetic in minor everyday matters like writing an invitation to a party, the scope of new forms of life might decrease. In addition, another possible angle to discuss the role of AI could be through the concept of authenticity as used by existential writers, where one *creates* one’s authenticity, or *becomes* authentic. Perhaps for the same reason many existential writers were fiction writers (see e.g., Golomb, 1995).

Instead, freedom emphasizes that each human being—regardless of race, gender, or sexuality—is already a multiplicity, and therefore, free to love, free to become *with* life. Simone de Beauvoir’s statement that “One is not born, but rather becomes, a woman” suggests that identity gradually takes form (Beauvoir, 1973, p. 301). There is no extrinsic humanistic or social ideal, although many cultures have tried to restrain women’s freedom to determine their destiny. Therefore, the challenge lies in liberating all human beings from becoming restrained or strategically affected through gratification or moral social ideals, affording them the freedom to respond in whatever way is preferable.

Poetic philosophy, as tentatively outlined here, provides an alternative to the comfortable, linear thinking and mechanical efficiency that has become more evident today. This is due, for example, to the instrumentalism of capitalism and the rise and the strategic use of algorithms that organize people’s lives. There is a danger of conformism today because algorithms produce and reproduce the same emotional patterns or triggers that keep the user’s attention.

Thus, it becomes difficult not to view the algorithm as serving the big tech corporations behind and their advertisers. “Economics and subjectivity go hand in hand,” writes Maurizio Lazzarato (2014, p. 11). He describes—without referring to algorithms—how machines have invaded our daily lives; “they now ‘assist’ our ways of speaking, hearing, seeing, writing, and feeling what one might call ‘constant social capital.’” (p.13). The constant social capital refers to the fact that the users, by paying attention, produce, reproduce and distribute what is keeping them in “enslavement”. Thus, it is not “machines that have created capitalism, but capitalism that creates

machines,” Lazzarato concludes referring to Deleuze and Guattari (Lazzarato, 2014, p. 23).

In *Revolutionary Mathematics: Artificial Intelligence, Statistics and the Logic of Capitalism*, Justin Joque (2022) highlights how algorithms and datafication have become a modern organizing mantra.<sup>2</sup> They offer speed, reliability, and predictability in decision-making, but also carry the risk of a narrow, short-term focus and the potential to make individuals feel like calculated automatons in the long run. Joque's observation is striking when he describes our world as one “without the traditional subject precisely because, in algorithmic form, the distinction between subject and object evaporates; one must act in accordance with what the algorithm will calculate about them, like a content producer constantly trying to optimize their search engine ranking. Each looks more and more like the other, and both subject and object become free, in a way, but only to follow the laws of the system.” (p. 170).

Following the laws of the system emphasizes how people are free only to choose among already existing possibilities but not free to become another by actualizing what might be, experiencing more. Algorithms establish an order that gradually makes the user less comfortable with the chaos of life.

Gaston Bachelard, in the introduction to *The Poetics of Space*, speaks about how poetry, or the power of the poetic image, brings about a change in our being, it makes us resonate with the world. “The resonances are dispersed on different planes of our life in the world, while the repercussion invites us to give greater depth to our own existence [...] The reverberation

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<sup>2</sup> I wish to thank one of the anonymous reviewers for bringing my attention to this work.

brings about a change in being [...] It becomes a new being in our language” (Bachelard, 1964, p. xix). This underscores the profound role of poetry and philosophy in shaping our forms of life and ethical development, inspiring us to reflect deeply on our existence and the world around us.

A poetic philosophy does not rely on assisting “users” to reproduce or maintain a certain culture in their world; it aims not at judgment but at *experimentation* to invent ourselves as new people. For example, it does this by opening up to greater flexibility in the boundaries of our selfhood while “sewing together a very large, elaborate, polychrome quilt”, as Rorty writes (2021, p. 141). It also stresses that the moralization of algorithms (the process of imbuing algorithms with moral principles or values) based solely on reason, while using people’s emotions, misses out on our human sentiments. Moral progress, therefore, is “not [...] a matter of getting closer to the True or the Good or the Right, but [...] an increase in imaginative power” (Rorty, 2021, p. 142).

The imaginative and poetic power of philosophy opens us up for questions about what might also be possible.

## **Two premises of poetic humanism**

Poetic philosophy rests on two fundamental premises. The first asserts that doubt constitutes a vital element in creative thinking. As Charles Sanders Peirce (1877) articulated in the essay “The Fixation of Belief,” beliefs serve as guides for desires and shapers of action. In essence, a belief operates as a habitual or rule-governed mode of action—an example of the tendency to seek advice from AI under the assumption that it unfailingly imparts truth,

or confirms the status quo by joining like-minded on social media. Peirce explains that doubt, being an uneasy and dissatisfied state, either propels one toward belief or sustains a cycle of adherence to established habits, potentially creating a closed loop impervious to doubt.

Furthermore, Peirce contends that doubt and belief have “positive effects on us” (Peirce, 1877). Belief establishes a moral condition prescribing specific behaviors in appropriate circumstances, while doubt serves as a critical evaluator, testing the limits of our actions relative to our beliefs. When algorithms use peoples’ emotions to obtain a specific result (e.g., grab their attention and gain profit), their calculation relies more on traditional induction and deduction approaches. The habits and beliefs of its users are represented or resembled. In contrast, Peirce introduces abduction as an alternative that sets aside any authority or representation; instead, a belief becomes a habit of action. The point is that algorithms often limit their users’ actions by giving them (representing) what they already want. Abduction, the process of forming explanatory hypotheses, is a more creative way of introducing new ideas and questions; it operates as the “logic of the maybes” (Kaag, 2013, p. 261).

Within the framework of poetic philosophy, abduction contributes to a humanistic orientation in a world characterized by uncertainty, imagination, and surprises. It empowers individuals to scrutinize societal structures, boundaries, technological inventions, and ingrained moral norms, fostering a sense of responsibility by engaging with “the maybe of abduction” (Kaag, 2013, p. 272). The point, therefore, is not to oppose technology or inscribe an ontological difference between the human being and technology, as

Martin Heidegger did (Dreyfus, 1972), but rather to open us up to new ways of thinking, feeling, and behaving.

The second premise of poetic philosophy posits that creative thinking is an immanent approach, emphasizing that thoughts and feelings are integral aspects of reality and constitute actions within this reality. This perspective rejects locating a foolproof belief outside the world without uncertainty. Beliefs, akin to habits, generally do function, but only with exceptions. This premise underscores that individuals are shaped by the reality that influences them and, in turn, shape reality through their actions. It is here that algorithms' calculative power can enslave people. By contrast, poetic philosophy resists this form of subtle control. According to Michel Serres (1995), the concept of "mixed bodies" blurs the distinction between subjects and objects, observers and observed individuals; it is a kind of rhizomatic interbeing in the world that "fosters connections between fields" (Deleuze & Guattari, 2000, p. 9). "A rhizome has no beginning or end; it is always in the middle, between things, interbeing", unlike the tree metaphor with its foundation, roots, and moral character that impose the verb "to be"; the "fabric of the rhizome is the conjunction, 'and... and... and...'" (*Ibid*, p. 25).<sup>3</sup>

Poetic philosophy advocates for a fully engaged existence, responding to life as it unfolds. Contrary to classical and idealistic approaches to humanism, poetic humanism asserts creativity by affirming and unleashing life's potentialities through living, thinking, and feeling with the stream of life.

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<sup>3</sup> Poetic philosophy is, in other words, not about building a moral character or promoting an "ethics of self-realization" since it focuses on acts, not essence. To become who we truly are is, as Nietzsche said, a perpetual movement of self-overcoming, a free creation of one's own perspective (Golomb, 1995, p. 149).

The affirmation of a meaningful life occurs as an ongoing unfolding or actualization of the potential of reality within the movements of reality.

In this context, poetic philosophy is about activating all senses. It prioritizes interconnectivity over self-actualization; it establishes “a logic of the AND” (Deleuze & Guattari, 2000, p. 25) that emphasizes an ontology of becoming—one of changes, in contrast to one of being or order. In addition, it rejects predefined norms for living a good life, encouraging curiosity and compassion through sensitive engagement with life.

### **Thinking as problematization**

Some might believe that norms can be criticized only normatively. This is not only a mistake but also an inducement to narrow-minded moralism. Something is moralizing not because some authority—the church, the state, authoritative persons, or intelligent machines—tells us which norms are valuable but because a value is attributed to such a judgmental institution or authority. As Simone Weil (2002, p. 19) writes, “The ability to judge freely is becoming rarer and rarer”; the practice has become “to believe without understanding.”

Algorithms and social media often hinder the individual from freely creating meaning based on what takes place and then ascribing value to it. Their power comes from the users and members believing in the legitimacy of these systems by submitting to their control. “Every power, from the mere fact that it is being exercised, extends to the farthest possible limit of social relations on which it is based” (Weil, 2002, p. 70). For example, while norms are social artifacts, their fabrication requires that people be free to imagine



alternatives; if not, their actions cannot be regarded as responsible (Wallace, 1988). When people change their minds and behavior, “it is never simply a matter of recognizing the light of reason, but rather of altering our entire being” (Kaag, 2020, p. 54). Norms are created, corrected, or destroyed by human beings. The term “human beings” refers not primarily to influential institutional figures and experts; rather, as Serres (1995, p. 122) puts it, “Humanity makes progress most often thanks to small children, women, old people, the sick, the simpleminded, and the poorest. [T]he most fragile are bringing grandeur and newness.”

Poetic philosophy does not rely on ready-made solutions; no universal method exists. Instead, all existential development occurs through the exposure and acceptance of our collective and individual vulnerability; the fact is that no one learns or develops skills or capacities without making mistakes. Mistakes are overcome through new creative experiments that put one’s vulnerability at risk. Using Peirce’s vocabulary, a person believes that he or she is doing the right thing; otherwise, the person would not do this. Nevertheless, they ought to remain open to doubting these beliefs in their quest for improvement because their beliefs form their existential decisions.

The relationship between vulnerability, learning from mistakes, and gradually mastering a particular task is, among other things, one that algorithms and social media might eliminate. The relationship between vulnerability, learning from mistakes, and gradually mastering a specific task is, among other things, one that algorithms and social media might eliminate. This elimination could lead to a gradual decline in our ability to

learn—to become more knowledgeable and adaptable individuals. Has the human being forgotten that it is never fallible, although it makes mistakes?

Some would argue, on the contrary, that AI, algorithms, and social media would help human beings make sense of what happens. In many aspects, this is likely, but they also carry the risk of being a subtle form of control where social networks function as passwords that moralize by telling what form of behavior to accept or cancel. It is not that “machines determine different kinds of society but that they express those social forms capable of generating them and using them”, and people willingly conform (Deleuze, 1995, p. 180).

Thus, while social media and networks can produce security and comfort for their users because they minimize doubt by resembling something already known, there is a risk of not being confronted with limitations and vulnerabilities, through which they—the users—might develop a more attentive, creative, and inventive approach to life.

For example, a student might believe that all questions have an answer or that all problems have a solution. However, some questions only create new problems. “We are wrong to believe that the true and the false can only be brought to bear on solutions, that they only begin with solutions ... this prejudice goes back to the classroom: It is the schoolteacher who ‘poses’ the problems; the pupil’s task is to discover the solutions,” writes Deleuze (1991, p. 15). He continues: “In this way, we are kept in a kind of slavery. True freedom lies in the power to decide, to constitute problems themselves” (*ibid.*)

There can be severe psychological consequences when we live by a rigid problem-solving formula or rule such as “get rid of it,” “figure it out,” or

“just fix the problem.” We “are paying a psychological price because what is truly wrong is treating life as a problem to be solved rather than a process to be lived” (Hayes, 2023, p. 10).

Living a life worth living is not only about knowing the correct answer, having access to information, or developing a particular skill but more about understanding the importance of one's relationship with oneself and others. Self-knowledge and self-understanding are about accepting one's limitations and understanding that everything is never possible for all; instead, each person's challenge is understanding what they can and cannot do. In brief, regardless of the availability of artificial intelligence, people's limitations are always their own—including the finitude of life. Limitations, however, do not refer to skills alone, but rather to our whole “interbeing” in and with the world. Serres (1995, p. 122) speaks about “weakness and fragility” as fundamental for invention, creative thinking, and compositions. Thus, if knowing oneself is related to knowing one's frailty, the poetic approach becomes one of experimentation or exploration. That is, the poetic approach is one where a person creatively actualizes an unknown potential by taking a step into the unknown—never, however, according to a given ideal or norm, but only according to what is needed, here and now, based on one's attention.

Some researchers stress the need to reach out to others, rather than simply know about them (Todres et al, 2014). This approach encourages the 'use of oneself' when connecting with another human being. However, this 'use' is inherently vulnerable, as we can never be certain about the inner world of the other. The philosopher K.E. Løgstrup (2022) spoke about an ethic of trust that underscores the interconnectedness of all human beings.

In this interconnected web, we each carry the vulnerability of others in our hands, just as they carry ours. Unfortunately, social media often distorts vulnerability and compassion, creating a spectacle of love and hate.

This more pragmatic condition is related to the fact that no privileged position exists, just as nothing is the same from every point of view. Consensus has never been a guarantee of truth. Philosophical thinking begins with a problem that appears almost as an assault, where something violates a person's previous assumptions, beliefs, and habits (Deleuze). Such an assault is not necessarily normative. Rather, it is associated with a realization and feeling that something is wrong, incomprehensible, pointless, absurd, and nauseating. As Ludwig Wittgenstein (2009, p. 124) states, "A philosophical problem has the form: 'I do not know my way about.'" In other words, one is existentially lost.

Thinking is a problematization where a person accepts that they do not know how to proceed or that they do not know what the right thing to do is—which is why they cannot do anything but experiment, explore, and try to create new concepts, which can open an alternative way of existing (Deleuze & Guattari, 1994; Janning, 2017). However, to become and grow into a sentient and, possibly, wise being, the person must be mentally and physically involved in this exploration.

Morality involves forming new and controversial customs or habits (Rorty, 2021, p. 131). If a person believes in an ultimate referent or authority, they would feel obliged to follow its advice. This authority gets its seductive power from using people's emotions and habits to make them comfortable, as algorithms in social media. In contrast, a poetic philosophy trusts human actions, even those that might make us uncomfortable,

because moral progress is understood as the maturing of our thoughts, feelings, and behaviors. “Moral progress is a matter of wider and wider sympathy,” writes Rorty (2021, p. 136); or of our capacity to both experience more differences and experience differently. For example, as Serres noted, society's marginalized or vulnerable groups are often more creative because they must be. They do not fit in.

### **Poetry as dialogue**

An exemplary illustration of philosophical thinking, characterized by compassion, immanent critical thinking, and creativity, can be found in the work of philosopher Hannah Arendt, particularly in her coverage of the trial of Nazi Adolf Eichmann in the early 1960s.

Arendt refrained from adhering to a fixed moral code. Instead, she stepped aside, allowing room for something undeniably painful for our collective self-understanding. Arendt did not approach the trial with a predetermined set of standards but rather exposed herself to the unfolding events. Despite being upset and shocked, she refrained from prejudging Eichmann. Arendt's detailed descriptions clarified that Eichmann's evil stemmed from his thoughtlessness; for he neither doubted nor questioned the rules of action, nor did he inquire about the purpose of the orders he loyally executed. “Eichmann was troubled by no questions of conscience. His thoughts were entirely taken up with the staggering job of organization and administration” (Arendt, 2006, p. 151). Eichmann was a chilling example of following whatever means as long as they led toward the desired

goal. “He did his duty [...] he not only obeyed orders, but he also obeyed the law” (ibid., p. 135).

It would undoubtedly have been comforting if Arendt could have declared Eichmann abnormal. However, she noted that several psychologists described him as “normal”; one psychologist even stated, “More normal than I am” (ibid).

The disconcerting aspect of social and cultural norms is that many people gradually and uncritically incorporate them into their lives, even when these norms cause stress, depression, and anxiety (Janning, 2015; Haidt, 2024).

However, the challenge is to prevent frustration and anger from devolving into pure skepticism. A more nuanced and pluralistic approach can be realized with the help of philosophical thinking. This continuous problematization is not driven by rigid moral rules or the urge to be correct, but rather by constantly trying to establish new connections between different forms of life or re-establishing connections with forms of life that we have separated from throughout history. Søren Kierkegaard (2009) stressed that only love could build; unfortunately, diverging groups often nurture anger and hate, creating separation between people. Kierkegaard's love resonates with Martin Buber's (1958) concept of responsibility; according to Buber, a dialog is possible only when an individual is prepared to act on the responsibility to respond to another human being. Acting responsibly requires freedom. “Freedom is the source from which all signification and all values spring. This is the original condition of all justifications of existence. The man who seeks to justify his life must want

freedom itself absolutely and above everything else” (Beauvoir, 1991, p. 24).

In other words, all human beings can act responsibly for their own lives and interactions because they are free. To act responsibly is to love one's neighbor, and Kierkegaard (2009) stressed that the neighbor not only represents one's nation, tribe, religion, sexuality, or race; the challenge is to love all human beings as equals. It is a challenge because although humans are free to love all as equals, comfort, need for identity, group pressure, or other forms of restraint can prevent them from loving only their group, which can cause democratic debate to deteriorate. Human progress or learning happens between different forms of life and people; hence, an encounter is important—an encounter that is as direct and unmediated as possible.

A recent example between two so-called influencers, Greta Thunberg and Andrew Tate, illustrates how shallow public dialogue has become (Solnit, 2022). I do not intend to judge whether caring for the environment is better than just caring about sports cars and getting rich. The interaction did not turn into dialogue but only illustrated what two people (and their followers) already felt and thought. “Dialogue is a living experience of inquiry within and between people” (Isaacs, 1999, p. 9). Dialogue is not about being right or winning an argument but about, collectively, becoming smarter. Those who already disliked Thunberg or Tate most likely disliked them afterward because the purpose was never to change, provide nuances, or add perspectives but to maintain an identity and position. Unlike an open democratic debate that includes difference, Thunberg and Tate came together in order to exclude.

The two influencers are modern-day priests, whereas a poetic philosophy promotes a polytheistic approach to the world. The audience, or people, have the power to encourage a polytheistic approach, according to Rorty (2021), when they think that “there is no actual or possible object of knowledge which would permit you to commensurate and rank all human needs” (p. 27), which is precisely the way algorithms organize habits.

Furthermore, Rorty opens up a relationship between dialogue, a classical philosophical activity, and poetry, when he says that poetry is necessary for any philosophy. “For poets are to a secularized polytheism what the priests of a universal church are to monotheism. Once you become polytheistic, you will turn away ... from anyone who purports to tell how things really are” (Rorty, 2021, p. 28). To make the point even clearer: The blind followers of the demands of influencers or algorithms are self-convicted prisoners. Nietzsche (1990, p. 1984) writes, “Convictions are prisons [...] Freedom from convictions of any kind, the capacity for an unconstrained view, pertains to strength.” Additionally, the argument is that only free people can love because love requires taking responsibility for what happens instead of judging.

Therefore, it is also more fruitful to create alternative possibilities for living life than judge and produce new thoughts and ideas than zealously evaluate. What opportunities does this encounter unlock? How is it also possible to relate or respond to what happens?

However, instead of critiquing today's controlling systems—technological, capitalistic, or consumeristic—from a particular standpoint, thereby making the struggle a normative struggle, affirming and caring about what is already full of life proves to be more liberating. However, it



requires engaging all of our senses. As Susan Sontag writes, “For it is our sensibility that nourishes our capacity for moral choice and prompts our readiness to act, assuming that we do choose, which is a prerequisite for calling it a moral act, and not merely blindly and unreflectively obeying” (2009, p. 25).

According to Kierkegaard (1992), taking responsibility means choosing a form of life despite having insufficient information about our choices. To choose means to acknowledge that we, as human beings, do not know what we can do before we choose to do so. Each choice embodies courage and vulnerability, an existential or poetic truth, acknowledging the potential for loss, such as the loss of a particular way of life. The aim is not merely to achieve something but also to become authentic. Acting ethically, therefore, is a way of life that supports a nonjudgmental experience of what occurs.

### **Attention is given to clearing our minds of selfishness**

Philosophy as “a way of thinking and living” is not oriented toward a given goal, but rather gradually integrates into and with life. It resembles what Pierre Hadot (2006, 83) has called “the art of living”, which connotes concepts such as cultivating, nurturing, or gardening one’s life in interaction with life as such; or, creatively trying to give room for the other’s singularity without reducing these to a certain normative identity.

For example, abduction takes place in the here and now. It requires that we pay attention to and remain conscious of what is happening. It requires that we know ourselves sufficiently to understand what we believe and

why—before entering the ethical phase of “maybes” (Kaag) or before exploring alternative possibilities and ways of living.

Poetic philosophy advocates for an attentive and compassionate approach to life. It stresses the importance of imagination since responsible and sustainable decisions begin with the ability to imagine another possible world. It takes place; it does not point to a place. Among other things, it involves stepping into the unknown terrain to see if we—since we are in this life together—can create a temporary foundation on which future generations can freely invent their ways of living. Put differently, philosophy is about being so attentive that something can wake us up, provoke us to think, and present us with new insights or existential alternatives.

Similarly, Weil skillfully describes attention as something “which is so full that the ‘I’ disappears” (Weil 2005, 233). The “I” becomes someone else. Becoming someone else can be considered ethical because it is a refusal to possess one fixed identity—that is, a refusal to fit into an already existing network of control. For Weil, attention is a receptivity that gradually enables the individual to carry or experience more. This enabling concerns the immanence ethic outlined here, where the individual or the collective makes itself worthy of containing or carrying the event. The so-called “profound” thinker denotes one capable of acquiring or absorbing life's depths and differences without reducing them to the same extent.

As mentioned earlier, Murdoch (2001) described this practice using the term “unselfing”, which, contrary to the countless selfies of the time, tries to open one's body and mind to others. Murdoch (2001, p. 82) writes, “I am looking out of my window in an anxious and resentful state of mind, oblivious to my surroundings, perhaps brooding on some damage done to my

prestige. Then, suddenly I observe a hovering kestrel. In a moment, everything is altered. The brooding self with its hurt vanity has disappeared. There is nothing now but a kestrel. In addition, when I return to thinking of the other matter, it seems less important. In addition, of course, this is something that we may also do deliberately: *give attention to nature to clear our minds of selfish care.*”

The seer no longer sees through a selfish or protective filter but sees clearly. The one who sees no longer sees everything through the lens of personal goals and ambitions, but rather on behalf of the other's world, the planet itself. This approach to life has generously expanded our depth, making life a rewarding difference. “Attention consists of suspending our thought, leaving it detached, empty, and ready to be penetrated by the object... Above all, our thought should be empty, waiting, not seeking anything, but ready to receive in its naked truth the object that is to penetrate it” (Weil, 2005, p. 8).

It is about feeling and sensing life without a prefabricated assessment calculus, without seeking anything, without having a preference, or too unquestionable beliefs; it is about establishing a more direct and curious connection with life. How else can we live? What else is possible? What kinds of life are worth repeating?

Such questions are poetic in that they actualize what is only in its infancy. Murdoch and Weil offer an attention that is not afraid of the silence of waiting. There is, however, an ambiguity to attention, a concept that can both imprison and liberate. On the one hand, Murdoch appears imprisoned by something—her anxious state of mind—but then she sees the world, the kestrel, and through this, she becomes *differently* aware of herself—a

brooding and vain self. An objective or goal does not guide her attention but a humble waiting that creates space for what might emerge.

The next question is how to decide when there is no transcendent master plan or omnipotent reference to follow. A poetic philosophy offers little guidance. However, one might try to embrace vulnerability by not being afraid of making mistakes to live a more prosperous and flourishing life. If one lives to avoid failure or mistakes, one also avoids growing as a human being. It requires that one experiment and explore life to determine what forms of life are worth repeating and give room or create space for those forms of life to emerge and come into being.

## **Conclusion**

It is not norms that we—as a society—lack, but rather resistance—the ability to stand against many of the norms, ideals, goals, and the growing use of intelligent machines that control our minds and behavior. The argument does not concern the ability of algorithms to form human habits and thereby predict the outcome of our existential choices. Rather, algorithms might hinder our ability to transform ourselves into something different and open up new forms of life for ourselves. Imagination and creativity nurture our compassion, wisdom, and capacity to experience more and differently, stressing that these skills come before representational knowledge and reason. A poetic philosophy is not about accessing the right ideals or truth or building a particular moral character; instead, it is about unraveling what lies in the process of becoming—facilitating its growth.

Thus, the argument has been that freedom allows us to act creatively and engage critically to affirm what opens up new forms of living. Freedom is necessary not only for human development but also for our capacity to love.

The primary concern of all human growth, whether in education, democratic governance, or humanism should be freedom. Freedom is the essence of love; thus we, as a society, cannot truly love without freedom. This raises three questions: Does the algorithm use love to form or organize people's different habits, or does it use control by resembling or limiting their habits? Does it promote a love for critical thinking, learning, and imagination, or does it cultivate a fear of making mistakes or being left outside? Do people who unquestioningly follow the guidance of the algorithms (or influencers) do so because they lack the freedom to think for themselves?

Poetic philosophy does not favor what might be named "misfits". It just suggests that there is nothing to fit inside or outside a free world. In a free world, there is a place for all life forms—and if not, it is our job to create that room.

Any philosophy—hence, thought—always exists amidst the complexity of life. Therefore, there is a risk associated with the well-intentioned moralism of social networks, even if it can feel reassuring and helpful to many people.

This paper claims that the more complexly a person can see, feel, hear, and experience life—without a judgmental filter or normative guide—the more significant or relevant the thought that arises in the encounter with life will become. Alternatively, the fewer the aspects to which an institution or

person exposes itself, e.g., due to calculative behavior, the less understanding that institution or person will have.

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