There's a certain Slant of light.
Three attitudes towards the Political Turn in Analytic Philosophy.

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Abstract

Analytic philosophy is increasingly interested in political and social issues. This change has been recently identified as a political turn within the discipline. The aim of this paper is twofold. First, it discusses the very characterization of the political turn. In particular, it introduces the definition proposed by Bordonaba-Plou, Fernández-Castro and Torices, suggests that we should not consider it as a form of activism, and explores an additional benefit of the ideal/non-ideal distinction for characterizing the political turn. Second, it addresses the concern of what attitude we should take in the face of the different sensitivities we might have with respect to what constitutes an injustice. Which philosophical works should count as part of the political turn? We explore three different attitudes towards this dilemma, and favor what we call the revisionist attitude, which emphasizes the fact that our perception of injustices is subject to error.

Keywords: Political turn; Injustice; Analytic philosophy; Normativity; Disagreement.

1. Introduction

There is a growing interest in political and social issues within analytic philosophy. In the philosophy of language, questions concerning how language shapes, and is shaped by, political and social factors are receiving increasing attention –see, for instance, *The Routledge Handbook of Social and Political Philosophy of Language* (Khoo & Sterken 2021) and *Non-Ideal Foundations of Language* (Keiser 2022). In the philosophy of mind, some authors have been working on politically oriented issues –see, for instance, *The Mind-Body Politic* (Maiese & Hanna 2019) and *Feminist Philosophy of Mind* (Maitra & McWeeny 2022)–, such as the characterization of the status of implicit biases (Borgoni 2022) or the political importance of understanding mental states attributions as fundamentally normative, rather than descriptive (Pinedo 2020). In epistemology, philosophers have become increasingly interested in issues at the intersection of knowledge, disagreement, truth and polarization –see, for instance, *Political Epistemology* (Edenberg & Hannon 2021) and *Polarisation, Arrogance, and Dogmatism: Philosophical Perspectives* (Tanesini & Lynch 2021).

Part of the increasing interest in concrete political and social issues by analytic philosophers has been identified as a political turn within the discipline (Bordonaba-Plou, Fernández-Castro & Torices 2022; Pinedo & Villanueva 2022), akin to the linguistic turn that

philosophy underwent in the early twentieth century. In the same way that philosophy in the 20th century began to be understood as a discipline aimed at elucidating the complex interrelationships among philosophically relevant concepts by means of the analysis of language, analytic philosophy is now starting to be understood as being aimed at analyzing current detrimental political and social issues.[1] David Bordonaba-Plou, Víctor Fernández-Castro and José R. Torices have recently offered a very useful and interesting characterization of this political turn. They conceive it as a philosophical activity focused on the study of different forms of injustices and aimed at intervening in them. As they put it, the political turn is characterized by

> […] placing at the center of philosophical inquiry those injustices that some disadvantaged groups experience as epistemic, linguistic, or intentional agents that are generated by unfair power relations and draw on the philosophical tools of analytic disciplines including the philosophy of language, epistemology, and metaphysics, to name just a few, to understand, identify, and resist those injustices. (Bordonaba-Plou, Fernández-Castro & Torices 2022, 20)

Following this characterization, we can identify at least three conditions for a philosophical work to count as part of the political turn. First, the main objective of a philosophical inquiry must be to address some injustice suffered by disadvantaged groups. Second, philosophical inquiry must make use of the tools, theories, and concepts of analytic philosophy. Third, a primary objective of philosophical research must be to intervene in these injustices in order to eradicate them. Thus, the political turn is characterized by addressing particular injustices using the tools of analytic philosophy with the aim of ameliorating the situation. In this sense, the authors say, the political turn is a form of *philosophical activism*.

The novelty of this turn raises many questions, ranging from the specific conception of analytic philosophy at stake and the origin of this shift, to the precise meaning of "political" within the expression "political turn", to name just three of them. We believe these questions to be interesting and important, but we do not address them here. Instead, we focus on a very specific concern, which has to do with the various "sensitivities" we may have in determining what constitutes an instance of injustice. We specifically tackle the question of whether we should consider works that present certain situations as instances of injustice, which we would not take as such, as part of the political turn in analytic philosophy. Should philosophical works that focus on issues that we do not recognize as unjust be part of the political turn? What attitude should we take in the face of this dilemma? Note that this concern is not contingent upon the specific definition of the political turn provided by Bordonaba-Plou and his colleagues. Pinedo and Villanueva, for instance, have proposed a slightly different definition of it, wherein its focus is not on the injustices experienced by individuals, but rather on *oppressive practices*. In their words, "the guiding principle of the political turn is to always keep in mind the project of detecting and intervening on actual oppressive practices" (Pinedo & Villanueva 2022, 110). This definition also raises the question of what precisely constitutes an instance of an oppressive practice.

In this paper, we explore the advantages and disadvantages of three possible attitudes towards this question. We refer to them as "neutral", "inflexible", and "revisionist" attitudes.

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[1] It remains to be determined if this is accurate, only time will tell.

The first is characterized by defining the political turn in purely descriptive terms. That is, according to this attitude, the definition of the phenomenon should simply discriminate some philosophical works from others, without taking sides as to which inquiries should or should not be considered as part of the turn for value reasons. The inflexible attitude is characterized by advocating that the political turn must be conceived as linked to a set of fixed values, and any investigation that does not align with these values will not be considered part of the political turn, regardless of whether it meets the other conditions. Finally, the revisionist attitude acknowledges that our perceptions of injustice or oppressive practices are tied to a set of values, yet maintains that the identification of particular cases of injustice, as well as the values associated with our perceptions of injustice, is subject to error. This attitude is closely connected with what Amia Srinivasan calls "genealogical anxiety": The acknowledgement that a significant part of our beliefs and values are determined by contingent facts such as the culture and material conditions in which we have been raised (Srinivasan 2015, 2019). Thus, the revisionist contends that, if we are committed to democracy and inclusion, then it is important, under certain conditions to be specified later, to have friction with people who hold different views, as this is part of what allows us to improve and reach coordination. By relying on Pinedo and Villanueva's discussion of the political turn (2022), we make the case for embracing a revisionist attitude towards the political turn, particularly in public settings.

Before discussing these three attitudes in detail, we reflect on the relationship between the political turn in analytic philosophy and the distinction between ideal and non-ideal theory. In particular, we consider whether certain conceptions of what ideal and non-ideal theories amount to are useful in differentiating between the investigations that fall into the political turn and the rest of analytic philosophy inquiries. While introducing their definition of the political turn, Bordonaba-Plou and colleagues discuss the Millsian conception of the ideal/non-ideal distinction. They argue that it fails to set traditional analytic philosophy apart from the political turn, essentially because it does not make sense to accuse the entire analytic tradition prior the political turn of being ideal theory (Bordonaba-Plou, Fernández-Castro & Torices 2022, 15-18).

Against them, we argue that this distinction captures something important of the political shift within the analytic tradition, and the label "non-ideal theory" is preferable to that of "activism". We agree with them in that all the analytic tradition cannot be accused of being ideal theory. Our point is rather that the tradition has not reflected upon, nor recognized, the particular standpoint from which theorization has been made, which can be identified as an oppressive practice. Certainly, many inquiries in analytic philosophy cannot be accused of being idealizations, but only by luck. In our view, part of what characterizes the political turn in analytic philosophy is a *commitment* to call into question the background assumptions that shape our perspective when theorizing, with the objective of avoiding idealized outlooks that distort the target of study and produce oppressive practices. We believe that non-ideal approaches, understood in this manner, facilitate giving voice to the disenfranchised, which is one of the main objectives of the political turn. Thus, this commitment to revising the perspective from which one theorizes is a way in which the commitment to intervening in the target phenomenon can be materialized. So instead of considering the political turn as philosophical activism, we prefer to conceive of it as a form of non-ideal philosophical inquiry, one guided by practical goals of detecting and intervening in socially and politically harmful situations.

The structure of the paper is as follows. In section 2, we discuss the appropriateness of understanding the political turn in analytic philosophy as a form of activism. In particular, we argue that it should not be understood as such. In section 3, we suggest that the political turn can be characterized as non-ideal theory in a very specific sense of the expression. As noted, we believe that the political turn includes a commitment to call into question the background assumptions that conform our perspective when theorizing, with the objective of avoiding idealized outlooks that distort the target of study, which in the end translates into incorporating the perspectives of historically marginalized groups. In section 4, we address the dilemma of what attitude we should take in the face of the different sensitivities we might have with respect to what constitutes an instance of injustice. We discuss three possible attitudes, and endorse what we call the revisionist attitude. This attitude is characterized by emphasizing the fact that the identification of particular cases of injustice as well as the values from which we perceive injustice is subject to error. We also suggest that this is the attitude that best fits with the political turn.

2. The political turn as philosophical activism

The purpose of this section is to introduce and discuss Bordonaba-Plou, Fernández-Castro and Torices' characterization of the political turn as a form of philosophical activism. In particular, we will argue that, even though we agree with their overall characterization of the political turn, it is preferable not to refer to it as a form of activism, because it is inaccurate, and potentially problematic, to call some research falling within the political turn "activism". Furthermore, in the next section, we will suggest that this characterization overlooks a key component of the turn itself, namely, its commitment to call into question the perspective from which theorization is made, which is a concrete form of producing non-ideal theory. Thus, the contribution of the first part of this paper is to provide a slightly different –and, we believe, more accurate– version of the definition of the political turn proposed by Bordonaba-Plou and colleagues. Let's start by introducing their definition.

Bordonaba-Plou et al. argue that the political turn in analytic philosophy "consists in moving from doing non-activist theory to activist theory" (2022, 19). Following Lippert-Rasmussen (2017, 10), they identify philosophical activism as a practice motivated by a desire to change the world. The type of philosophical activism that constitutes the political turn in analytic philosophy is distinguished by the following three conditions (Bordonaba-Plou et al. 2022, 20). First, philosophical inquiry focuses on particular cases of social injustice. Second, it employs the tools of analytic philosophy, such as the philosophy of language, the philosophy of mind, and epistemology among others, to understand, identify, and resist those injustices. Third, philosophical theories are evaluated based on their usefulness in identifying and resisting social injustice; a theory which fails to characterize and combat perceived injustice is deemed worse than one that does. Let's call these conditions "Injustice", "Analytic Philosophy Tools", and "Intervention", respectively.

> Injustice: The main objective of the philosophical inquiry must be to address some injustice suffered by disadvantaged groups

Analytic Philosophy Tools: The philosophical inquiry must make use of the tools, theories and concepts of analytic philosophy.

Intervention: The philosophical inquiry must be committed to intervene in these injustices in order to eradicate or alleviate them.

According to their proposal, analytic feminism is regarded as the paradigm of analytic-philosophical activism. They claim that the political turn in analytic philosophy should be understood as a generalization of analytic feminism (Bordonaba-Plou et al. 2022, 10). As an example of the political turn, consider Amia Srinivasan's (2020) critique of epistemic internalism. According to epistemic internalism, epistemic justification is based solely on cognitively accessible factors to subjects (see BonJour 1993, 132). In this sense, to say that someone is justified in believing something means that their beliefs are consistent with the evidence available to them. If my evidence shows that the cat is sleeping in the bed, then I'm justified in believing it. Nonetheless, Srinivasan contends that when oppressive contexts are taken into consideration, epistemic internalism loses its intuitive appeal. In doing so, Srinivasan provides three oppressive contexts as examples of epistemic internalism. In the first, an Arab girl is aware that her friend's father is racist towards Arabs, but she is unable to explain why. In the second, despite the Master's testimony, a working-class fellow at an Oxford college maintains his belief that his college is classist. The third is about Radha, an Indian woman who believes that she deserves to be beaten by her husband. Srinivasan describes Radha's example as follows:

Radha is a woman who lives in rural India. Her husband, Krishnan, regularly beats her. After the beatings, Krishnan often expresses regret for having had to beat her, but explains that it was Radha's fault for being insufficiently obedient or caring. Radha finds these beatings humiliating and guilt-inducing; she believes she has only herself to blame, and that she deserves to be beaten for her bad behavior. After all, her parents, elders, and friends agree that if she is being beaten it must be her fault, and no one she knows has ever offered a contrary opinion. Moreover, Radha has thoroughly reflected on the issue and concluded that, given the natural social roles of men and women, women deserve to be beaten by their husbands when they misbehave. (Srinivasan 2020, 398-340)

According to epistemic internalism, Radha's belief that she deserves to be beaten is justified; after all, her evidence points to that. However, our intuition is that it is not justified, due to ideological and oppressive factors distorting Radha's evidence. For this reason, Srinivasan argues that epistemic internalism is not a viable theory of justification, and that epistemic externalism, which holds that epistemic justification also depends on factors not accessible to the agents, is a better approach to justification.

Srinivasan's argument against epistemic internalism displays a form of philosophical activism, as she argues that it is an inadequate justification theory which serves to legitimize unjust situations. On the contrary, epistemic externalism is regarded as a more advantageous theory due to its ability to recognize oppressive elements that may be pertinent in deciding whether a belief is justified. Therefore, Srinivasan utilizes tools from analytic epistemology to elucidate and fight situations of injustice, as Radha's. Furthermore, a central feature of this argument is the critique of epistemic internalism as an *ideal*

philosophical theory that neglects the importance of the socio-normative status of the agents. In section 3, we will argue that the critique of this type of idealized philosophical theories is an important feature of the political turn.

Bordonaba-Plou, Fernández-Castro and Torices' characterization of the political turn successfully summarizes the features that make it distinct from other intersections between analytic philosophy and politics, i.e., the conjunction of Injustice, Analytic Philosophy Tools, and Intervention. On the one hand, the kind of activism that constitutes the political turn differs from that of those philosophers, such as Bertrand Russell or Michael Dummett, whose work on philosophy of language, epistemology, or philosophy of mind was unrelated to their activism. On the other hand, whereas analytic political philosophers, such as those of John Rawls and Robert Nozick, focus on general political issues, such as democracy or the requirements of a just society, the political turn is concerned with specific cases of injustice.

However, the term "activism" might not be an accurate label for the type of activity that characterizes the political turn, nor for all the philosophical inquiries that fall within it. It does not seem to us neither intuitive nor fair to speak of publishing academic papers that are read and discussed just by a small number of people, or giving talks at specialized congress and participating in seminars, as forms of activism, regardless of how politically engaged those publications, talks, and seminars are. Of course, one could argue that this activity is a subclass of activism, namely academic activism, and that some philosophical contributions are more likely to be considered as real activism than others insofar as they are successful in changing the world. For example, Medina and Whitt conceive their work as an instance of what they call "epistemic activism", which aims to "augment the epistemic agency of unfairly disadvantaged subjects, amplifying their voices and facilitating the development and exercise of their epistemic capacities" (Medina & Whitt 2021, 309). One could say that to the extent that their work succeeds in augmenting the epistemic agency of unfairly disadvantaged subjects, it constitutes a form of activism, one that is more likely to be considered as such than other politically engaged philosophical projects that do not advocate for any specific intervention. However, this does not seem sufficient to us to call *much* of the academic philosophical activity that constitutes the political turn "activism".

Historically, activism has had a notorious impact on public life, and activists have frequently risked their physical integrity, and, in some cases, even their lives, for the cause they fought for. It is hard to attribute the core features of activism to *every* work that falls under the political turn, so one might complain that calling the political turn a form of "activism" feels like a betrayal of those who make political activism a way of life. To be clear, we are not against considering some approaches within the political turn, and more specifically the work done by some of the people who make up the political turn, as activism. We just think that not all of them qualify as such. This is not to say that the type of philosophical activity characterizing the political turn is neither necessary nor important. Of course it is. The political turn is partially the result of people with disenfranchised identities engaging in academic philosophy, and this is a kind of courageous resistance to academic forms of oppression in which some people have faced violence and risked their jobs and academic standing. It constitutes an important way of trying to make the discipline more inclusive and to make the world a better place. In this sense, this change in philosophy is not merely a method change; it is a moral and political commitment born out of a strong conviction in how things should be. Our point is simply that the term "activism" does not adequately describe

the type of activity that characterizes the political turn, basically because no clear-cut demarcation criterion for this "form of activism" can be provided to encompass all works that fall under the political turn.

For these reasons –the imprecision of the term "philosophical activism" and its potentially problematic nature–, we prefer to characterize the political turn as a shift in how we think about philosophical issues, leaving behind idealizations, concerned with the subjects' socio-normative status, that obscure the perception of injustices. The political turn is guided by practical goals related to detection and intervention, no matter how modest the contributions may be in this regard, even if they cannot qualify as instances of activism. In this sense, we follow Pinedo and Villanueva:

> […] what we take to be the defining novelty of the recent political turn in analytic philosophy is the centrality of the practical utility of our philosophical tools in bringing to the surface forms of injustice that may have remained invisible and, whenever possible and no matter how modestly, in contributing to the improvement of the social, political and epistemic standing of the oppressed. (2022, 111)

3. The ideal / non-ideal distinction

As we have seen in the previous section, Bordonaba-Plou and colleagues characterize the political turn as a shift from non-activist theory to activist theory, taking activism as a philosophical activity committed to elucidating and combating concrete instances of injustice. We have endorsed this characterization (i.e., Intervention, Analytic Philosophy Tools, and Intervention), but we have argued that the term "activism" is inaccurate to refer to the works that fall into the political turn. In this section,we claim that this characterization should be complemented with the idea behind a specific sense of "non-ideal theory", that is, a commitment to call into question the background assumptions that conform our perspective when theorizing, with the objective of avoiding idealized outlooks that distort the target of study. We believe that part of what characterizes the political turn is a commitment to questioning the social standing from which theories are formulated, which translates into incorporating the perspectives of historically marginalized groups. In this sense, the political turn can be considered as non-ideal theory.

Some philosophers of language (Lackey 2018, Beaver & Stanley 2019, Keiser 2023) have recently described part of what has been called the political turn in their field in terms of the ideal/non-ideal distinction. In doing so, they rely on Charles Mill's distinction, according to which non-ideal theories are those that construct models that abstract only the essential features of the phenomena under study, whereas ideal theories are those that construct models that capture the phenomena under study as they should be, rather than as they actually are. Ideal theories frequently overlook oppressive factors and injustices that may be important for understanding the phenomena under study (Mills 2005, 165). In this sense, ideal theories play a political role in perpetuating oppressive situations by rendering them invisible. But not only that, ideal theories are also ideological in the sense that they reflect the interests and experiences of those privileged who theorize (Mills 2005, 172). In contrast, non-ideal theories are characterized for debunking ideal theories as ideological and making explicit how our social positioning affects our perspective when theorizing. In this sense,

non-ideal theorizing requires that researchers experience *genealogical anxiety*, the fear that knowledge of the causal, contingent origins of our beliefs and values will undermine their justification (Srinivasan 2019, 129).

Jessica Keiser, in her book *Non-Ideal Foundations of Language*, exemplifies the kind of non-ideal, genealogical debunking activity described in the previous paragraph. She claims that viewing language primarily as cooperative information exchange is an ideal theory conditioned by the privileged social position of some of the twentieth century's most influential philosophers of language, such as David Lewis, Paul Grice, and Robert Stalnaker. Those who belong to disenfranchised groups are, of course, involved in cooperative information exchange too, but as they "are systematically subjected to various forms of hostility, violence, manipulation, and other kinds of injustice through the use of language" (Keiser 2023, 6), it might be more alien to them to claim that the main function of language is to coordinate information exchange among cooperative agents. In Keiser's words,

> It should be no surprise, then, that growing field of social/political philosophy of language has been spearheaded by members of groups who are accustomed to being barred from information exchange, whose ways of exchanging information do not conform to the practices of institutional science, who systematically experience harmful uses of language, and to whose linguistic contributions others systematically fail to respond in cooperative ways. (Keiser 2023, 6)

After debunking some of the background assumptions of certain theories in the philosophy of language, which were committed to the idea that language is mainly cooperative information exchange, Keiser proposes her own account of how language works, taking into consideration neglected injustices that may arise in the use of language, arguing that its main function is to direct the attention of others.[2]

Keiser points out that her proposal is non-ideal just in the sense that it rejects the picture of language as cooperative information exchange by acknowledging the importance of the social positioning of the speakers; there are many other factors involved in communication which she overlooks because they are inessential for understanding language. In this sense, all theorizing is congenital to some degree of idealization, since even non-ideal theories abstract only the essential features of the phenomenon under study, leaving behind other features. For this reason, we agree with Keiser that non-ideal theory should not be understood as an opposition to ideal theory in general, but rather to those pernicious idealizations which "prevent us from developing the hermeneutical resources needed to articulate the ways in which language can function to perpetuate unjust social systems" (Keiser 2023, 10). In light of this, we acknowledge that non-ideal theories may be ideal, but not ideal in the ideological, politically pernicious, way.

Bordonaba-Plou, Fernández-Castro, and Torices claim that the political turn cannot be characterized in terms of the ideal/non-ideal distinction. They argue that "it does not seem to make sense to accuse all the analytic tradition of being ideal theory in the sense attributing idealized capacities to humans or of silencing oppression" (Bordonaba-Plou,

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[2] Note that while this work falls under the political turn in analytic philosophy, it can hardly be considered an instance of activism.

Fernández-Castro & Torices 2022, 18). In this, they partly follow Cappelen and Dever (2021), who are skeptical of the distinction's utility in philosophy of language. According to Cappelen and Dever, it is nonsensical to speak of some theories of the field, such as Kripke's theory of rigid designators or Russell's theory of descriptions, as ideal theories. Furthermore, insofar as these theories are frequently employed in works in philosophy of language that approach political phenomena, perhaps, rather than speaking of non-ideal theories, we should simply speak of theories being extended to yet unexplored topics.

It is true that the entire analytic tradition cannot be accused of being ideal theory, at least in the sense that theories like Kripke's or Russell's do not seem to silence the oppressed. However, there is still a sense in which they can be considered as ideal theories. If these theories are non-ideal it is just by luck, not because the philosophers who built them were genealogically anxious and concerned with the way in which their social positioning could shape their theories. In other words, traditional analytic philosophy has been ideal theory in the sense that, until the arrival of analytic feminism and the political turn, analytic philosophers were not committed to call into question their social position while theorizing. They just assumed that their perspective was the common perspective, which in many cases led them to distort the target phenomenon.

Moreover, we believe that viewing non-ideal theory merely as an extension of theories to unexplored topics in a field, as Cappelen and Dever do, is a mistake. To begin with, we believe that it is inaccurate to refer to injustices and oppressions related to gender, sex, class, and race as "unexplored fields", given that, until recently, academic philosophy was primarily practiced by white-upper-class-cis-heterosexual men. Those injustices and oppressions are not simply "unexplored fields", but blindspots to privileged people. Second, although some instances of non-ideal theory apply politically unengaged theories to political phenomena, other instances, such as Keiser's critique of viewing language primarily as cooperative information exchange, do not. Consider Jennifer Lackey's (2018) critique of the assumption that silence indicates acceptance (see Goldberg unpublished) as another example. According to Lackey, this assumption is false, since silence is often the best, if not the only, possible reaction for those participants in linguistic interactions with lower status or power, as objecting may be costly or even impossible. A prisoner who is beaten by a prison officer, for example, may remain silent not because he agrees with what the officer is doing, but because he lacks the social status and power to do otherwise. Here, Lackey does much more than applying old theories to an "unexplored field". She criticizes an ideal theory which neglects the importance of the social status of the speakers for understanding the way in which silence works in conversations, as Srinivasan's example introduced in the previous section.

On the other hand, we think that Bordonaba-Plou, Fernández-Castro, and Torices' refusal to characterize the political turn in terms of the ideal/non-ideal distinction might be inconsistent with the claim that "the political turn must be regarded as a generalization of analytic feminism" (Bordonaba-Plou, Fernández-Castro & Torices 2022, 11). Analytic feminism has been closely related to non-ideal theory in taking as a central commitment the questioning of the social positioning and perspective of the researchers while developing their theories, with the objective of avoiding idealized outlooks that distort the object of study. This commitment is present in Robin S. Dillon's claim that feminist ethics is characterized by taking "seriously the social context of unequal power, opportunities, and possibilities into which we are born"

(Dillon 2018, 2) and in Nancy Daukas' observation that one of the main features of feminist virtue epistemology is that it "recognizes the social positioning or situatedness of epistemic agents as epistemologically salient" (Daukas 2019, 379). Although Bordonaba-Plou, Fernández-Castro, and Torices acknowledge this commitment of analytic feminism in recognizing the "emphasis on reclaiming the notions of analytic philosophy from androcentric biases" (Bordonaba-Plou, Fernández-Castro & Torices 2022, 11), we think that they do not fully capitalize on its potential and relevance for understanding the political turn, which can be understood as a form of non-ideal theorizing.

4. Three attitudes towards the Political Turn

So far we have discussed Bordonaba-Plou and colleagues' characterization of the political turn. More specifically, we have argued that it should not be understood as a form of activism, and can be complemented with a specific sense of producing non-ideal theory, that is, a commitment to call into question the social positioning from which we theorize.

In this section, we address the dilemma of what attitude we should take in the face of the different sensitivities we might have with respect to what constitutes an instance of injustice. In other words, we take issue with how we should interpret the condition *Injustice*. It is obvious that not all of us agree on our perceptions of injustice. Our disagreements range from issues such as offensive speech to pornography, to name two of them, which can lead us to have opposing views regarding what counts as unjust. Let's take an example of an issue that does not appear to be particularly central to any identity at the time we write.

There is an ongoing debate about whether the attitudes of polarizing people are rational or not, and whether polarization is the result of citizens' negligent epistemic diets. Advocates of the idea that polarization is the result of irrational attitudes and flawed cognitive processes often invoke epistemic vices such as intellectual arrogance and dogmatism in their explanations, and make claims such as "Truth doesn't matter anymore", "People lack critical thinking", and "Partisans put ego and emotions over reasons". On the other hand, those who maintain that polarization is not the result of citizens' unsophisticated epistemic processes nor their irrationality usually take issue with the core claims of the irrational picture of polarization. For instance, they argue that the claim "The lack of cognitive sophistication makes us more open and gullible" is evolutionarily unsustainable (see Mercier 2020, 30-46), and that polarization stems from being exposed to too many good (enough) justifications for our initial views, which leads us to develop stronger positions. In fact, the works arguing that polarization is perfectly rational has been increasing in the last few years (Begby 2022; Benoit & Dubra 2014; Dorst 2021; Jern et al. 2014; Kelly 2008; Nielsen & Stewart 2021; Pallavincini, Hallsson & Kappel 2021; Singer et al. 2019).

Let us frame this discussion in the following way. Let's assume that those who support the irrational story of polarization hold that it is *unjust* to claim that polarization is rational, because the rise of polarization has to do with people's irrational epistemic attitudes, who act as if their preferred political parties were like their favorite football teams. On the other hand, let's suppose that supporters of the rational story of polarization believe that it is *unjust* to claim that the rise of polarization has to do with the population's negligent epistemic attitudes. To claim such a thing, they say, besides being false, is to blame citizens and

contribute to the increase in polarization. For the sake of argument, let's put this disagreement as simply and clearly as possible. Let's say that advocates of the irrational story of polarization hold that the rational story represents a way of justifying pernicious extreme positions, which is unjust and harmful for disenfranchised groups. Advocates of the rational story of polarization, on the contrary, hold that the irrational story ends up blaming and insulting people, which promotes polarization and in turn is unjust and harmful for disenfranchised groups.

If we take for granted that the parties involved in this debate make use of tools of the analytic philosophy tradition (Analytic Philosophy Tools), and are committed to attempting to alleviate and ameliorate the situations of injustice they focus on (Intervention), then the following question arises. Which side would be considered part of the political turn? Both? Based on what? Note that this example is just meant to trigger the intuition that we might have different sensitivities regarding what situations count as instances of injustice. And it is not only that people with different ideologies and values might tend to differ in their perceptions of injustice, but also that people sharing a similar ideology and set of values might disagree on whether a particular situation counts as unjust or not. So if one of the conditions a philosophical work should meet in order to count as part of the political turn is placing at the center of philosophical inquiry certain injustices, then how can we adjudicate? Which works will meet this condition? What attitude should we take towards this dilemma? Our worry is that while the political turn is aimed to shed light on social and political injustices, we might adopt an slanted attitude towards the political turn, which could ultimately undermine its original purpose. In this sense, there might be a slant of light.

Before getting to the substance of this section, a clarification is in order. We explore the pros and cons of three different attitudes towards the characterization of the political turn, but we are not concerned here with personal opinions in private contexts. Certainly, philosophers, as any ordinary person, can have personal opinions about whether certain philosophical proposals deal with situations of injustice or not. We are not interested in exploring whether philosophers should have some personal opinions or others in general. On the contrary, we are concerned with *public attitudes*, that is, those attitudes exhibited in *public contexts*. By public contexts we mean situations where there is a potentially varied audience, undetermined in size, and what is said is susceptible of affecting public opinion in unpredictable ways.

4.1. The neutral attitude

The first possibility we take into account is what we call the *neutral attitude*. According to this attitude, the political turn must be understood in purely aseptic terms, i.e., as fully independent of values. In the same way that dictionaries describe or reflect how words are actually used by the speakers of a linguistic community without taking prescriptive positions, the political turn in analytic philosophy must be defined along the same lines. Thus, the label "political turn" would only come to name something that is happening within analytic philosophy, without taking sides on whether it should be guided by some values or others.

Let's give a neutral definition of the condition that states that philosophical research must address social and political injustices to count as part of the political turn, i.e., Injustice:

Injustice Neutrality: Political turn is characterized by philosophical efforts to intervene in *perceived* social and political injustices.

Note that, according to Injustice Neutrality, it is sufficient for the subject of a philosophical analysis to be perceived as a situation of injustice by those who examine it. With this definition at hand, let's return to the example introduced above. Who would count as part of the political turn: supporters or opponents of the rational explanation of polarization? If we take the neutral attitude, then the answer would be both. Insofar as each party perceives their object of study as an instance of injustice, they both would satisfy Injustice Neutrality, and then might be part of the political turn. Thus, this neutral attitude towards the political turn would be similar to the attitude of an impartial sportscaster for a basketball game between, say, UConn Huskies and Texas Longhorns. Even though the sportscaster may have a preference for the Huskies and feel that they are being treated unfairly, their attitude should be to broadcast the game as neutrally as possible, simply reporting the facts and leaving their values and opinions aside.

At first glance, one of the advantages of this attitude seems to be that it meets the democratic ideal of inclusiveness. We inhabit plural societies, and we have different worldviews and sensitivities. Therefore, including works developed by philosophers with different perspectives as part of the political turn might count as a way of fleshing out this ideal. Furthermore, the neutral attitude seems to be in accordance with an epistemic ideal, which states that knowledge acquisition requires reasoning with others. That is, in order to acquire and maintain knowledge, the argument goes, we must be exposed to the opinions of those who do not think like us. Thus, including different perspectives as part of the political turn might promote discussion, which is crucial for gaining knowledge. If we exclude some perspectives, our processes for acquiring knowledge might lose something important. In Mill's words, "If the opinion is right, they are deprived of the opportunity of exchanging error for truth: if wrong, they lose, what is almost as great a benefit, the clearer perception and livelier impression of truth, produced by its collision with error" (Mill 2009, 30).

However, there is a downside to this neutral attitude. The first thing to note is that neutrality is often only apparent and actually implies taking sides. Dictionaries, and the experts who compile them, are often used as a yardstick for determining how we should speak. For example, the Royal Spanish Academy has often ruled on whether the letter 'e' should be used as an unmarked gender suffix, appealing to the current norms of Spanish. Its position has been usually presented as neutral, one that simply points out how Spanish actually works. But it actually takes sides in the normative debate, insofar as it argues against one of the parties on the question of how words *ought* to be used. Moreover, presenting some issues as if they were subject to debate where it is not yet clear which side is right has been identified as a propagandistic strategy (Almagro, Osorio & Villanueva 2021; Osorio & Villanueva 2019). For instance, Dembroff, Kukla and Stryker co-authored a statement to denounce that their contributions for an article on philosophy and transgender were included as part of a "debate" without their consent, and asked for the retraction of their contributions. The main reason was that presenting the transgender experience as a "debate" is a straightforward way of casting doubts about its existence, and they weren't disposed to do so. Presenting an issue as a debate can serve the function of covertly undermining certain views on it. In other words, treating this as a disagreement between competing frameworks

gives too much legitimacy to transphobia. They called this "co-platforming". Thus, in many cases, neutrality is just apparent and actually favors one of the positions in contention.

If part of the goal of the political turn is to reveal some hidden forms of injustice and intervene in them, then the neutral attitude might be self-defeating, as it could ultimately result in new forms of injustice. In other words, the neutral attitude has a hard time to fit with the political turn mindset, to the extent that this neutral attitude can be identified as harmful (see Crary 2019).

4.2. The inflexible attitude

Another attitude we might adopt towards the political turn is what we call the *inflexible attitude*. According to this attitude, the political turn in analytic philosophy must be conceived as guided by a set of fixed values. This set of fixed values would work similarly to company values, that is, the set of guiding principles and fundamental beliefs that the members of a company follow in their activity as a team. For instance, in February 2022, Meta CEO Mark Zuckerberg updated his company values to include the following six: Move Fast, Focus on Long-Term Impact, Build Awesome Things, Live in the Future, Be Direct and Respect Your Colleagues, Meta, Metamates, Me. Meta's employees have to work guided by these values, they need to follow them in order to be part of the company. Similarly, philosophers' work will be taken as part of the political turn to the extent that they follow a fixed set of values. Thus, the expression "political turn" would depict a value-laden shift within analytic philosophy.

Let's give a perspective-dependent definition of the condition that states that philosophical research must address social and political injustices to count as part of the political turn:

> Injustice Inflexibility: Political turn is characterized by philosophical efforts to intervene in social and political injustices *according to a set of fixed values*.

What are these fixed values? The situations that matter to the political turn include those suffered by groups of people that are oppressed for reasons of gender, race, sexual orientation, and social status (Bordonaba-Plou, Fernández-Castro & Torices 2022, 11). What exactly these fixed values amount to is not actually important for our purposes here. So for the sake of discussion, let's take a set of any three concrete values represented by the expression {a,b,c}, which are at the core of a certain worldview V.

What about the debate between advocates and opponents of the rational explanation of the rise of polarization? If we take an inflexible attitude, then we must take sides. The approach aligned with the values {a,b,c} would meet Injustice Inflexibility, and therefore would be part of the political turn. Suppose that those who hold that the irrational explanation of polarization amounts to a sort of injustice share the values {a,b,c}. Then, their opponents, i.e., the advocates of the irrational explanation of polarization, would not be considered as part of the political turn. As it can be seen, this attitude is inflexible in the sense that it establishes a set of fixed values that serves as a threshold to discriminate every instance of what falls within the political turn. If you have a different worldview, say V', with a different set of fixed values at its core, say {a',b',c'}, then your philosophical work cannot be part of the

political turn, because what you perceive as an injustice it is really not, according to the values {a,b,c}.

In contrast to the neutral attitude, the inflexible has a specific political aim: they try to reveal certain forms of injustice suffered by the oppressed according to certain fixed values, and to intervene in them. This way of conceiving the political turn has some potential benefits. For instance, it prevents situations of co-platforming. That is, it avoids engaging in debates that ultimately serve as a form of undermining propaganda. If the values {a,b,c} are the ones everybody should submit in order to combat the injustice suffered by the oppressed, then the attitude of being inflexible towards the philosophical works that do not conform to {a,b,c} may be seen as desirable. Moreover, this attitude could promote the necessary space to foster the kind of philosophical analysis that is often silenced or does not receive the attention it deserves. In other words, this attitude seems to exert resistance against the injustice suffered by the disenfranchised, amplifying their voices and facilitating the development and exercise of their agency.

An initial concern with this attitude is that the fixed set of values can be interpreted in different ways. We might simply respond to this objection by saying that the values {a,b,c} are already specific interpretations of general values. For instance, if one of the values of the political turn is inclusion, then we are not committed to inclusion generally, but to a specific interpretation of it. Yet, this move does not fully avoid the concern. Two philosophers might share their perspective V and still disagree about whether a certain situation counts as a case of injustice or not. It is not surprising that disagreements arise within any group of people who have shared values, and not all of these disputes are going to be necessarily about how to understand these values. Sometimes, although members agree on the specific interpretation of their values in the first place, they may nevertheless differ on whether certain situations actually fall under the extension of them. So for each occasion disagreement arises, a new decision has to be made as to which side will be part of the political turn. Thus, this attitude would end up excluding a good number of philosophical works as part of the political turn. Note that it might exclude not only those that don't fit with the values {a,b,c}; even some of the works of those who in principle share the values {a,b,c} would be susceptible of being left out of the political turn, to the extent that they disagree on whether specific cases fall under the values or not.

Thus, this attitude can be accused of being biased and not very inclusive. This accusation might not be necessarily problematic. If being inflexible is the right attitude for achieving a certain political goal, then it might not matter much what those who have a different perspective would say of us. It is reasonable to expect them to accuse us of being biased and not inclusive. However, the worry is whether this is in fact the best attitude for trying to alleviate the injustice suffered by oppressed groups in a democratic system. Simply insisting the truth of one's perspective to someone already committed to an opposing view will likely not be effective in achieving the goal of reducing injustice and fostering cooperation. In fact, the very opposite might happen. A common reaction to this attitude is the augment in the division of public opinion, which affects disenfranchised groups to a greater degree (Mounk 2018; Wojcieszak & Garrett 2018). In other words, polarization of public opinion endangers democracy, and when democracy is at risk, those who suffer the most are the disenfranchised.

Another concern with this attitude is that it is deeply linked to an attitude of moral superiority, which is problematic for at least two reasons. First, the attitude of thinking that one's values are the right ones, and in this sense that one is morally superior to those who have other perspectives, seems to us morally objectionable. Of course, it is inevitable to think that one's values are the right ones. But not being willing to consider other perspectives entails a certain degree of arrogance, in the sense that it excludes the possibility that we could be wrong (Lynch 2019, 2021). Moreover, it overlooks the fact that the values we acquire are often the result of the circumstances in which we live and the experiences we have had. If our circumstances had been different, then we would probably have other values than the ones we have. So excluding those who have different perspectives on principle seems morally wrong. Second, taking a perspective as the correct one, and excluding those perspectives whose values are different from us, seems to be quite anti-democratic. We dig a bit more into these points in the next section.

4.3. The revisionist attitude

So far we have been facing a dilemma. We want to be inclusive in our characterization of the political turn. But we do not want to take a *neutral* attitude that eventually leads us to actually undermine the perspective of the disadvantaged. In fact, we want to be *inflexibly* committed to characterize the political turn in line with the goal of unmasking hidden forms of injustice and to intervene in them. However, we do not want this to lead us to sacrifice inclusion, nor to adopt an anti-democratic attitude of moral superiority. What other choice do we have?

In this section, we discuss a third attitude we can take in the face of our dilemma. We call it the *revisionist attitude*. This attitude is characterized by emphasizing the fact that the identification of particular cases of injustice, as well as the values from which we perceive injustice, is subject to error. In other words, our perceptions of injustice may be mistaken, and we may also be mistaken about what our values really are. We embrace this attitude, and suggest that it is the one that better fits with the political turn. But before arguing in favor of it, let us make an initial remark.

The first thing we want to note is that the normativity behind the inflexible attitude introduced in the last section is problematic. Pinedo and Villanueva (2022) have recently argued that when our evaluative practices are dependent on fixed values or standards, our judgments aren't actually evaluative, but descriptive ones. In other words, if something qualifies as an injustice *only* if it is in accordance with the values {a,b,c}, then our "evaluative" discussions will actually be descriptive disputes over whether something is unjust according to the values {a,b,c}. But they cannot be about whether a certain action is unjust *simpliciter* (Pinedo & Villanueva 2022, 114). This is problematic because there is an important difference between saying that something is right according to a certain value and saying that something is right. Another way to put it is that when we make explicit the standards that our evaluations rely upon, our judgments become descriptive ones (Field 2009). This is a consequence of a conception of normativity according to which the correctness of something is determined by a set of established norms or values. But that's not how we always behave. Sometimes, we disagree on the moral status of a certain action without being interested in discussing any rule, moral principle or value. In fact, we might share them and still disagree. Pinedo and

Villanueva conceive the political turn as crucially characterized by a conception of normativity that recognizes this:

> This way of understanding the nature of evaluative practices as not depending on general principles or rules is, in our view, both the key to the relationship between the political turn that we welcome in this paper and the pride of place we give to the practical utility of philosophical instrument over their purely theoretical virtues. (Pinedo & Villanueva 2022, 115).

One of the central features of such a conception of normativity, where the normative status of something is not determined by a fixed set of norms, is that there is room for the possibility of error. Maybe I am not following the rules I believe I follow. Maybe I am wrong in what I sometimes perceive as an injustice, and maybe the values I think that guide my behavior are not the ones that actually guide what I do. So we need friction with others to think better about these normative issues, because from one's own perspective one cannot distinguish between what one merely believes and what one knows (Frápolli 2019). In order to know whether something is just or unjust, we need to be exposed to others' reasons, we need to think together. That's the hallmark of the revisionist attitude.

Let's propose a revisionist definition of the condition that states that philosophical research must address social and political injustices to count as part of the political turn:

> Injustice Revisability: Political turn is characterized by philosophical efforts to intervene in social and political injustices *while recognizing that our perceptions of injustice are subject to error*.

Note that Injustice Revisability does not imply a neutral attitude. The revisionist rejects to understand the political turn in purely neutral terms, i.e., as fully independent of values. They acknowledge that the perception of injustice is value-laden, and promote their own perspective V with the values {a,b,c}. However, they recognize that they might be wrong in their perceptions, so they are open to consider other perspectives, and to take into account other points of view.

Let's return to the debate between advocates and opponents of the rational explanation of polarization. Even though the revisionist would take sides and believe, e.g., that the advocates of the rational explanation are right in perceiving a situation of injustice, they would say that the other side must also be publicly considered as part of the political turn. After all, we might discover that they were right. The revisionist is committed to the idea that where value is concerned, there are no experts above any of us, not even ourselves. This is a necessary condition for improvement, inclusion, and democracy.

Is the revisionist then doomed to be cannon fodder for propagandistic strategies such as co-platforming? We don't think so. Recall that the revisionist is not neutral, they take sides. They just accept that those who perceive injustice where they don't might be right. But from this it doesn't follow that the revisionist is obliged to engage with every philosophical work dealing with situations they don't take as instances of injustice. As Dembroff, Kukla and Stryker said in their statement "We welcome *genuine dialogue and mutually respectful exploration* of the complex and contentious social realities that characterize contemporary

transgender issues." (Dembroff, Kukla & Stryker 2019). If a discussion is meant to be genuine and fruitful, i.e., if the conditions to judge together really obtain, then it might be worth it discussing with those who have different views. But if we perceive that a certain discussion is not really genuine, or that it is meant to push a certain political agenda rather than to think together, then we have the right to not get involved in the discussion, as they did. The revisionist doesn't necessarily think that every position must be heard, they just acknowledge that we are fallible, we have different circumstances and experiences shaping the way we see the world, and there are no experts on value matters, which plays a pivotal role in democracy. Thus, the revisionist can adopt the epistemic policy that has been called *epistemic de-platforming*:

> When confronted with new evidence, it is not the case that everyone has an a priori right to turn their opinions into epistemic possibilities that cannot be properly ignored. Being able to take part in a meaningful epistemic discussion is a right that can be earned, and it can be lost as well ... When the preservation of knowledge is crucial for your community to survive and thrive, epistemic de-platforming becomes a form of resistance. (Pinedo & Villanueva 2022, 123-124)

Again, recognizing that we might be wrong in our perceptions of injustice and that philosophers with different perspectives and values must be taken as part of the political turn doesn't force us to engage with every philosophical work that argues against our political view. There can be many situations in which we can simply ignore them for the sake of good.

We believe that the revisionist attitude is in fact at the core of the political turn. If it is proven that neutral and inflexible attitudes can generate forms of injustice affecting the oppressed, then we should reconsider them.

5. Conclusion

In the first part of this paper we have taken issue with the characterization of the political turn in analytic philosophy. After introducing the characterization proposed by Bordonaba-Plou and colleagues, we have argued, against them, that the political turn should not be conceived as a form of activism. We have endorsed the defining conditions of their proposal, i.e., Injustice, Analytic Philosophy Tools, and Intervention. However, we have pointed out that many philosophical inquiries that fall within the political turn cannot be considered as instances of activism in any substantial sense. Moreover, we have argued that the distinction between ideal/non-ideal theory might be helpful to describe one of the features that seem to be essential for the political turn: the commitment to call into question the socio-normative position from which philosophers elaborate their philosophical analyses.

In the second part of this paper we have addressed one of the questions raised by the political turn, namely, what attitude we should take in the face of the different sensibilities we may have regarding what constitutes an instance of injustice. We have explored some advantages and disadvantages of three possible attitudes towards this dilemma: the neutral, inflexible, and revisionist attitudes. We have maintained that the revisionist attitude retains the advantages of the neutral and the inflexible stances, while getting rid of the detrimental outcomes associated with them. Moreover, we have suggested that this attitude fits naturally with the political turn.

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