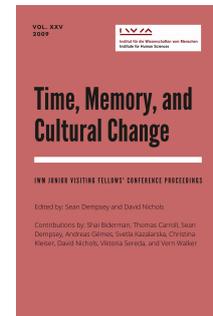


The Poverty of Pacifism

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IWM Junior Visiting Fellows' Conference Proceedings, Vol. XXV © 2009 by the author

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In 1972, the French journal *L'Arc* published a conversation between Gilles Deleuze and Michel Foucault entitled “Intellectuals and Power,” wherein they discuss the changing relation between theory and practice. There, Foucault says:

“The intellectual’s role is no longer to place himself “somewhat ahead and to the side” in order to express the stifled truth of the collectivity; rather, it is to struggle against the forms of power that transform him into its object and instrument in the sphere of “knowledge,” “truth,” “consciousness,” and “discourse.” In this sense theory does not express, translate, or serve to apply practice: it is practice.”[1]

As a practice, theory has its own demons to fight, which, as Deleuze shows throughout his work *The Logic of Sense*, threaten not only from below (the temptations of chaos, madness) but also from above (the attraction to the good, the ideal). Theory must be ever vigilant against itself; language is always tempted to go beyond its own means. It is perhaps fortunate when a theory strikes its own blocks and walls, guarding itself to a localized region. Otherwise it might become insulting and disastrous by encompassing practice. There is always a temptation to explain and to lead, to push into the sphere of practice. But as Gilles Deleuze once wrote, “good intentions are inevitably punished.”[2]

It is within these parameters that I am concerned most particularly with thinking what is at stake in the Catholic Worker pacifist practice of living in precarious poverty. As a practice that holds close the limit of falling into destitution by refusing to save or prepare for the future, it is one that pursues many risks. It defies both good and common sense; and in doing so, it resists rational justification. In deed, it resists thought as such and frustrates the construction of a concept. Yet through this practice, Dorothy Day, co-founder of the first Catholic Worker community, experiences poverty in its complexity. Poverty is itself far from being poor. In her written work *Loaves and Fishes*, which reflects upon the beginning years and struggles of the Catholic Worker, Day writes: “Poverty is a strange and elusive thing. I have tried to write about it, its joys and its sorrows, for thirty years now; and I could probably write about it for another thirty

without conveying what I feel about it as well as I would like. I condemn poverty and I advocate it; poverty is simple and complex at once; it is a social phenomenon and a personal matter. Poverty is an elusive thing, and a paradoxical one.”[3]

If Dorothy Day then turns to briefly outline what she calls the “many faces” of poverty, and in doing so tells several personal stories (as is her own powerful way), I would like to explore this question of poverty using a different means—that is, by means of various philosophical practices and literary experiences, each engaging poverty as problematic and challenged by the radical practice of precarity. If poverty itself is paradoxical (neither only this nor only that, but this and that at the same instant), it is the practice of precarity that affirms precisely this experience and discovers in it a creative force. Here in this paper, I would like to ask, what would it mean to posit the practice of precarious poverty as uniquely, most properly a pacifist act—that is, a practice that constantly, radically questions the concept of pacifism?

A Way in Which Life is Lived

How voluntary poverty is an anti-war action is, of course, in part answered quite simply through economical considerations. It is a fact that in the United States it is very difficult in daily living not to contribute to war effort: from material support through industries that employ many needed workers, to financial support through taxes as minute but widespread as sales taxes—food, cigarettes, gas, etc. All this leads Dorothy Day to say quite simply, “[...] but our whole modern economy is based on the preparation of war, and this is surely one of the greatest arguments for poverty in our time.”[4] The problem is, however, how is it possible to live otherwise?

1933, New York City, under the theological provocation of the nomadic, talkative, philosophical Frenchman Peter Maurin and driven by socialist journalist Dorothy Day, the Catholic Worker began as an “eight-page monthly tabloid” sold for 1 cent (still to this day), concerned with the merging between Catholic faith and social reform. To confront the terrible economic crisis of the depression, they plainly proposed the “works of mercy”—feeding the hungry, giving drink to the thirsty, sheltering the homeless, visiting the sick and imprisoned, and burying the dead. Because of this, the small and informal community that produced the newspaper suddenly grew into an open house of hospitality, practicing all of these works when needed. Later they received word of other groups of people opening similar houses across the country.

Despite its name, the Catholic Worker is not an organization of the Church. It is not an organization at all, intentionally resisting forms of legalized relations. They are each individual, autonomous communities (today numbering over one hundred known houses extending internationally) that seek to practice a kind of “constructive anarchy”—evident in the particular way they go about living in poverty and community, providing some kind of open hospitality to the surrounding neighborhood, and protesting all acts of brutality and war. It is through this specific figure of the Catholic Worker, who performs all of these practices together (distinct yet inseparable), that I attempt in my larger project to construct a concept of pacifism.

If it is clear that the life of voluntary poverty is an anti-war act—not just economically, but in deed, the outward works of mercy being essentially opposed to the works of war—it may not be so clear why Dorothy Day pushes this practice further to be one of precarity. Why does she insist on taking such risks? Could they not help more people, do better work, by establishing an institution and developing a secure financial base and work force? Or are these goals, although well intentioned and even reasonable, somehow linked to the larger problem? It is through the practice of precarity that I wish to locate the work of pacifism as differentiated from peace work.

Precarity is, in part, a practice in holding poverty close. Day quotes from a letter she received from a French Canadian priest: “True poverty is rare,” he writes: “Nowadays religious communities are good, I am sure, but they are mistaken about poverty. They accept, they admit, poverty on principle, but everything must be good and strong, buildings must be fire-proof. Precarity is everywhere rejected, and precarity is an essential element of poverty. This is forgotten.” [5]

Neither accepting money (including tax benefits) from the government, nor from the Church, Catholic Worker houses traditionally function on the basis of private donations. It was also Dorothy Day’s contention (and it was a point of contention even among other Catholic Worker houses) that it is simply easier to work the newspaper and house of hospitality in unemployment—the community workers neither worked outside the house nor received any wages for their work within the house. It is simply easier to beg for money, she believed and practiced, than it is to work for it. Then when a donation was received, only as much that was needed to get by was kept, the rest was passed on to others.

Furthermore, it is simply easier to do the work they desire to do without the insistence of order or the regulations of bureaucracy. For instance, it is common practice with other social work organizations to demand a social security card (or even to go to religious mass) as a requirement to receive food or shelter, as a legal way to count the number of people served when preparing tax statements and grant funding. But how many are turned away in the process? How many prefer to camp in the woods rather than be forced to attend mass for food and shelter? As Mel Piehl writes of the Catholic Worker practice of hospitality: “When one or two Houses established restrictions so that they could provide better living conditions for those they served, they ran into criticism from Dorothy Day. “The Philadelphia House is not good,” she told another Worker group. “They fix it up so beautifully but they make room only for 25 or so and their breadlines are short. Some even admit that they don’t want anybody in the House who can’t contribute somehow to it.”[6]

Workers, traditionally, only contribute in whatever way and to whatever degree as they desire. And as it is their belief and practice, there is no need to preach to those who come in the backdoor, for that would mean preaching to Christ himself—even if that same welcomed guest will later throw out your food or throw a brick at your head.

If this is a basic description of the practice of precarious poverty of the first Catholic Worker community, it is performed within the distinction that Dorothy Day creates between destitution and poverty. It is the difference, she writes, between being the victim of “inflicted poverty” and the champion of “voluntary poverty.”[7] It is only the latter that she calls “poverty.” Curiously, what here seems to be Day’s way of resolving her paradoxical stance toward poverty—condemning destitution at the same time as advocating poverty—actually only leads to a more pressing complication: the way of “championing” poverty is to always threaten oneself with destitution. Precarious poverty is a practice of resistance against comfort, seeking to live precisely at the surface of need. It is a blurring of need and desire that has nothing to do with satisfaction or fulfillment, but of disruption. Precarious poverty demands a constant, ever revising practice that Dorothy Day repeatedly admits is so difficult to embrace. Where does one get the strength and the conviction to do this work? As one Catholic Worker said, “Usually if a person came who was a bit indifferent or even skeptical of the work then we could count on having him or her stay with us for a reasonable period of time. But if they arrived full of enthusiasm and gushing about our beautiful way of life then it was a foregone conclusion they would not last long.”[8]

It is perhaps this strange union inherent in the practice of precarity that drives the paradox of poverty to function. Simplicity becomes complex. Poverty becomes rich. Of course, it is rich in risk as much as it is in vibrancy and life. “We need always to be thinking and writing about it,” claims Day of poverty, “for if we are not among its victims its reality fades from us.” It is with this charge, which seeks to negotiate thought and practice of poverty, to embrace its paradoxical reality, that I would now like to turn to consider other practices of precarious poverty—Ludwig Wittgenstein’s practice of philosophy, Antonio Negri’s philosophy of *praxis*, and Ingeborg Bachmann’s character Franza discovering her rights in the desert. Turning to such theoretical and literary texts is not done to better understand the Catholic Worker practice of precarious poverty, for they confront their own problems. As François Zourabichvili reiterates the published conversation between Deleuze and Foucault: “[...] the time of the philosopher-guide to the masses is finished, it is likewise finished within philosophy itself, of which internal mutations lead the philosopher to think according to another statute. It is not that the role of philosophy in “becoming-revolutionary” would be null, it is only that the image of the philosopher as enlightener is null; but philosophy, as with other disciplines, plays its role such that its practice is not immutable and that its proper mutations resonate with the mutations of other practices, theories, or militants. In this sense, mutations—and their political potential—also pass by philosophy.”[9]

Because the relation between social practice and theory is, itself, problematic, my aim with turning to literary examples is only to further determine the problem of poverty within philosophy itself, and develop a practice of precarity within thinking that radicalizes it. That is, without justifying or condemning the practice of pacifism, I wish to mark what is at stake in certain social work and theory by sketching the generative paradoxes which, in each instance, then become both the block and the opening of the problem. In that way, it does not matter if none of these three thinkers were pacifist (as is the case). Their specific engagements in poverty through precarity allow me to think

pacifism otherwise—pacifism not as an idealism aimed toward a utopian state, but as productive of something other than peace; pacifism as problematic, and thereby creative in its very immanence.

Withdrawing from the Debate

It is not at all contradictory to take up the philosophical work of Ludwig Wittgenstein, a man whose philosophical practice throughout his life was driven by the desire for clarity. For Wittgenstein, the practice of clarity (which is how he strictly defined philosophy) strangely had nothing to do with producing any kind of theory. However, his aversion to theory was not in its practice, but in its assertions of truth, truth as absolute. This distinction led Wittgenstein and his work down a unique path. As Jacques Bouveresse wrote, “The way in which Wittgenstein openly renounced the prestige and richness of the intellectual tradition in order to preach and practice the spirit of radical poverty in philosophy is maybe what justly renders his position unique among the grand philosophies of our time”^[10]—but we should add, in so doing, Wittgenstein takes on many risks.

It is tempting to recapitulate from Ray Monk’s biography of Wittgenstein, *The Duty of Genius*, and Marjorie Perloff’s insightful opening essays from her work *Wittgenstein’s Ladder*, regarding Wittgenstein and war, because Wittgenstein’s life is so curious in light of the question of pacifism. But to try to situate Ludwig Wittgenstein’s stance towards World War I and World War II respectively would, of course, be misleading. In fact, it is so obviously misleading that it is perhaps permissible. Wittgenstein was neither a pacifist nor pro-war. However, Wittgenstein was far from holding a neutral position. He enlisted into the Austrian army during the First World War not simply because he was patriotic, but in the hope that such an intense, non-intellectual work would prove an experience that would turn him into a “different person,” to “*improve* him.”^[11] Indeed, he was to write in his notebook after voluntarily enlisting: “[...] I feel the terrible sadness for our—the German race’s—situation. The English—the best race in the world—*cannot* lose. We, however, can lose, and will lose, if not this year than the next. The thought that our race will be defeated depresses me tremendously, because I am German through and through.”^[12]

And after some 5 years—two years behind the lines, then at the front (where he was awarded a medal of bravery), and finally, in an Italian prisoner of war camp—he would later say that the war “saved my life; I don’t know what I’d have done without it.”^[13]

During this time he continually worked on his first (and only) published work, *Tractatus Logico-Philosophicus*; and both Monk and Perloff argue that if it were not for the war experience (and in particular his time at the front), “...the *Tractatus* would have remained what it almost certainly was in its first inception of 1915: a treatise on the nature of logic.”^[14] In other words, it would not have included the last five or so pages which suddenly begin to discuss “ethics, aesthetics, the soul and the meaning of life”—except, as it famously argues—it is precisely these things (that which is most important in life) about which we must be silent.

What makes these personal matters all the more interesting is that Wittgenstein's professor at Cambridge, Bertrand Russell, was an outspoken opponent of the First World War (though he too was not a strict pacifist), and wrote many anti-war pamphlets and treaties on ethics thereafter. Of these works, Wittgenstein once said in conversation, "Russell's books should be bound in two colours: those dealing with mathematical logic in red, and all students of philosophy should read them; those dealing with ethics and politics in blue, and no one should be allowed to read them." [15] And upon hearing that Russell was imprisoned for unpatriotically speaking out against the war, a friend of Wittgenstein's said of the latter's reaction, "he did withhold his respect for Russell's personal courage in living up to his convictions, but felt that this was heroism in the wrong place." [16]

With these brief glimpses of Wittgenstein's life and reaction toward the First World War, one may ask quite plainly: Why choose Wittgenstein to help create a concept of pacifism, when it is clear that he is obviously against it—as is the case with his relationship to Russell? And yet it is not so clear after all, for if Wittgenstein was involved in the First World War almost entirely for personal reasons, then we may begin to see his attack on Russell as not having so much to do with Russell's particular opinion of the war, but precisely his misuse of philosophy as a means to spout ethics and morality concerning the war. Wittgenstein was against any assertion of ideals that seek to apply to everyone in the face of the event.

We can see this point differently by taking up this passage wherein Wittgenstein is writing a letter to his student Norman Malcolm. It comes as a response (5 years after) to a conversation they had regarding a newspaper article addressing a British political scandal with Hitler, 1939: "Whenever I thought of you I couldn't help thinking of a particular incident which seemed to me very important... you made a remark about 'national character' that shocked me by its primitiveness. I then thought: what is the use of studying philosophy if all that it does for you is enable you to talk with some plausibility about some abstruse questions of logic, etc. & if it does not improve your thinking about the important questions of everyday life, if it does not make you more conscientious than any... journalist in the use of DANGEROUS phrases such people use for their own ends." [17]

We can begin to see here that what is at stake in an event such as War, for Wittgenstein, is the event itself and what it can teach us personally. There is always something to learn; but it is something other than the information we find in the newspapers—even perhaps something other than that which has a particular end. It is in this respect that philosophy is of use, as it works to perceive and clear away false propositions—equally against war (Russell) or for war (government propaganda). Such propositions, although disparate and opposing, are perhaps equally dangerous. What Wittgenstein presents is a way to withdraw from this (and all other) exhausted debates—even at the moment when one feels it is most urgent to summon up the strength to take them up again anew—in order to form a different perspective. Philosophy, then, is an act of sifting through language and discarding all opinion that is disguised as propositions or assertions. What is more, as Marjorie Perloff states so nicely, "The paradox is that, whereas Russell felt the need to

renounce philosophy because of the war, a war he studied from the sidelines, Wittgenstein's actual war experience became one of the mainsprings of his philosophy.”[18] For Wittgenstein, philosophy is a practice that attempts to be worthy of the events that happen.

Precarity and Clarity

For Wittgenstein, philosophy was above all a practice for clarity. Though the form of language in which he worked and resisted changed dramatically from the *Tractatus* to the *Investigations*, this aim for clarity and its implications remained rather consistent. We find this early on in Wittgenstein's *Tractatus*:

“4.112 The object of philosophy is the logical clarification of thoughts. Philosophy is not a theory but an activity. A philosophical work consists essentially of elucidations. The result of philosophy is not a number of “philosophical propositions,” but to make propositions clear. Philosophy should make clear and delimit sharply the thoughts which otherwise are, as it were, opaque and blurred.”[19]

Years later (1930) in the midst of working on what would posthumously be published as the *Philosophical Investigations*, Wittgenstein notes in a “Sketch for a Forward” how his practice of philosophy is against the general movement of society: “Our civilization is characterized by the word ‘progress.’ Progress is its form rather than making progress being one of its features. Typically it constructs. It is occupied with building an ever more complicated structure. And even clarity is sought only as a means to this end, not as an end in itself. For me on the contrary clarity, perspicuity are valuable in themselves.”[20]

If clarity itself, as method and not as the theory it revises, is what is valuable for Wittgenstein, then we may be tempted to ask, “What is it valuable for?” But would that not lead us right back into a trap? That philosophy was nothing but a practice of elucidation—an activity that does not put forth new theories, but only aimed at clarity itself—this is what frustrates the reader the most when confronted with Wittgenstein's work. Clarity does not imply answers, but something else entirely.

In his essay on reading Wittgenstein's *Blue Book*, O.K. Bouwsma begins by speaking of the inevitable frustration students of philosophy experience when trying to understand this work. The text itself consists of the Cambridge lecture studies which are now seen as a precursor for the *Investigations*. Bouwsma explains that because this work is generally considered “philosophy” and is read primarily by “philosophers” (or at least philosophy students), they approach the text with a number of expectations: “They are used to proofs, to arguments, to theories, to evidences, refutations, to infallibles, to indubitables, to foundations, to definitions, to analyses, etc.” He continues to write, “And if in these terms any reader should, having read, seek to turn his reading to some profit and ask himself: What has the author proved, for what has he presented arguments, what is his theory, what has he refuted, and what are his infallibles?, he is certain to be disappointed.”[21] At which, Bouwsma concludes, the traditional philosophical reader of Wittgenstein will dismiss this work as paradoxical insofar as it is “strangely articulate and irresponsible”

(meaning, articulate yet without setting forth any clear response). As Wittgenstein foresaw the criticism of his own work: “What we say will be easy, but to know why we say it will be very difficult.”[22]

But this frustration is serving a purpose, these mental cramps are necessary, Bouwsma argues, to force the reader out of this particular philosophical laziness. Wittgenstein’s style is intentional, aimed to produce an effect. For this reason, Bouwsma turns to focus on something other than theories or assertions that we may learn from the essay: “I say what the author is *doing* rather than what the author is saying in order to prevent the misunderstanding that one could be told what he says and if one then remembered this, that would be what the author aimed at.” The *Blue Book* is useful insofar as we become active apprentices to various kinds of “arts”—to list a few that Bouwsma finds important: *the art of attacking questions, the art of disentangling, the art of finding one’s way when lost, the art of removal, of riddance, the art of freeing us from illusions, the art of the detective, the art of cure.*[23]

As an apprentice, it is more important to learn the *How* of the art form rather than the *What*. Toward this goal, as he was more intent on method than thesis, Wittgenstein was vigilant at frustrating the latter tendency; for it is a tendency that, more often than not, manifests itself in disguise as a need or necessity rather than a desire. Must we always have an answer or solution? Can a practice function without? Wittgenstein would also remind us again that we are not simply speaking about logical formulations. He is clear about what the problem is, as he notes in this passage now labeled under “Big Typescript” manuscript:

“DIFFICULTY OF PHILOSOPHY NOT THE INTELLECTUAL DIFFICULTY OF THE SCIENCES, BUT THE DIFFICULTY OF A CHANGE OF ATTITUDE. RESISTANCE OF THE WILL MUST BE OVERCOME.”[24]

It is the will that philosophy faces when dealing with language; but clarity is perhaps both the necessary first step towards this change, and also its limit—a limit to be respected despite our will otherwise.

Again, it is not simply matters of insignificance, of mere “language games,” that Wittgenstein is destroying. In this respect I would like to take up his “Lecture on Ethics” which he gave in 1929 to the Heretics Society (as the editors note, a non-philosophical audience).[25] Wittgenstein explains in the opening that he chose the topic to present in a way such that the audience will not find the hour a waste of their time. Given the form of the lecture, he decided not to talk about logic (a topic which demanded a lecture series), nor present on a popular-science issue (which would only be superficial), but, indeed, on ethics. For ethics is a subject that can be clarified within an hour’s time, wherein the ethical problem can be succinctly stated and seriously understood by anyone.

I would like to take up only one argument in this lecture. Wittgenstein differentiates between *absolute judgment* and *relative judgment*—absolute judgment, like that of ethics, is that about which we must be silent. Relative judgment, however, is simply a statement of facts, and should be presented so. As he says, “Every judgment of relative

value is a mere statement of facts and can therefore be put in such a form that it loses all appearance of a judgment of value.”[26] And if he then gives mundane examples such as how to give driving directions, or how to compliment another on his or her tennis skills, Wittgenstein does take up issues where there is much more at stake. He then gives this example:

“If for instance in our world-book we read the description of a murder with all its details physical and psychological, the mere description of these facts will contain nothing which we could call an *ethical* proposition. The murder will be on exactly the same level as any other event, for instance the falling of a stone. Certainly the reading of the description might cause us pain or rage or any other emotion, or we might read about the pain or rage caused by this murder in other people when they heard of it, but there will simply be facts, facts, and facts but no Ethics.”

In a situation such as a murder, it is clear how it would be as difficult (if not impossible) to hold back a judgment as it would be “to hold back tears, or an outburst of anger // rage//.”[27] His insistence upon seeing events of the world solely on the level of facts seems to be a reasonable, if cold, way of handling the problem. Wittgenstein’s move here would have its practice and place among lawyers and courts. However, above all it is important to take to heart how Wittgenstein ends the Preface to his *Tractatus*: Not only is he convinced that he has solved all of philosophy’s quandaries by showing it was merely a misuse of language (6.521 “The solution to the problem of life is seen in the vanishing of the problem”), all disagreements about ethics and aesthetics are, in the strict, logical function of language, senseless; but Wittgenstein was also wary that in doing so, the *Tractatus* “[...] shows how little has been done when these problems have been solved.” We are left to work only with the facts, but it is precisely these facts that do not matter much in life. In the very least, we can say that we are blinded by the temptations of ethical speech, and in the struggle with ethical debates we unknowingly fight against false problems which prevent us from engaging what is truly problematic. But is it possible to express another perspective? How do we gain perspicuity [*Durchsichtigkeit*]*—seethrough* the misleading traps inherent in language and form a practice that radicalizes this silence?

Wittgenstein knew what was at stake in his work, as we find in #118 of the *Philosophical Investigations*: “Where does our investigation get its importance from, since it seems only to destroy everything interesting, that is, all that is great and important? (As it were all the buildings, leaving behind only bits of stone and rubble.) What we are destroying is nothing but houses of cards and we are clearing up the ground of language on which they stand.” [28]

Wittgenstein was not a destroyer; and if he dismissed all that was seemingly important in our lives, he only did so to clear the ground in order to see anew. Forgoing the oversight of metaphysical thought, that which he claimed, only “leads the philosopher into complete darkness,” we are left with a practice of immanent thought. His aim was not to create a new building (as philosophy is mistakenly understood). For Wittgenstein, it was merely, but not simply, a matter of gaining a new perspective.[29] Is it possible to see Wittgenstein’s silence before absolute judgment as a dynamic, vital silence that is something other than a recourse to mere facts? There is something much more at stake in

his work. As Wittgenstein writes in the *Investigations*: “103. The ideal, as we think of it, is unshakeable. You can never get outside of it; you must always turn back. There is no outside; outside you cannot breathe.—Where does this idea come from? It is like a pair of glasses on our nose through which we see whatever we look at. It never occurs to us to take them off.”

Taking off the glasses of idealism only gets us out of misunderstanding the problem in the way we have always misunderstood it. What then? That is for us to practice, for the new perspective only comes in and through and with the practice, and not otherwise. Wittgenstein’s practice of clarity is something other than answers, but a constant engagement with the problem.

It is not solely to ask, “What is left of pacifism after Wittgenstein?” For that is simply to apply Wittgenstein’s practice onto the concept of pacifism. It is, perhaps more interestingly, to try to conceive pacifism as a parallel practice to that of Wittgenstein’s philosophical practice of clarity—a practice that demands creating and holding a tension between the silence of the *Tractatus* and the complexities (in all their simplicity) of the *Investigations*. Because the limit of language in the *Tractatus* is one that is all too easily surpassed, this work calls for a practice of silence. In the *Investigations*, this silence becomes an enriched practice of precarity, the constant destabilization of ideals and values without rest. Forgoing the oversight of metaphysics, Wittgenstein’s philosophy is marked by an unclear clarity that is not a failing in his philosophical ability, but is practice constituted on a paradox. The task is to imagine an ethics that is not hinged upon judgment, but in the world and how it functions (and how it might function otherwise). [30] It now may be clearer why Wittgenstein noted to himself, “What I do think essential is carrying out the work of clarification with COURAGE: otherwise it becomes just a clever game.”[31]

Precarity and the Common

In his work *Kairòs, Alma Venus, Multitudo: Nine lessons to myself*, Antonio Negri writes: “One can summarize in the following manner the imperatives of the immeasurable for the singularities that constitute the multitude: do not obey, that is to be free; do not kill, that is generate; do not exploit, that is to constitute the common.” [32]

It is through the construction of a materialist logic—a philosophy of *praxis*—that opposes itself to transcendentalism that Negri reaches these three imperatives. The construction of thought that makes up *Kairòs* is an extremely dense text composed of nine lessons, one building off the other. It contains numbered sets of reflections that interweave various themes and concepts. Yet as structured as the text appears, Negri also openly admits that his thought in this text is marked by huge leaps; and, in fact, as he writes in the Introduction, it is a text that appears to him as “marked by the inconclusiveness and the sadness of a year inside [prison].”[33] Despite its faults, however, he decided to publish this personal text in response to the wars in the Balkan, “a strange war,” he writes, “they

called it a just war, an ethical action, a holy violence... I did not understand. One could call it (and so it was called by many western Talibans) transcendentalism in action, war of right.”

In turning to this text, I am interested in following this logic even if it is not sound; for paradoxically, Negri is constructing a logic upon that which is exposed to the immeasurable (it is essential, however, to grasp that by the concept *immeasurable*, Negri means that which is “neither indefinite, nor indeterminate”[34] and thereby, in a way, not logical): the concept of the common. I am interested in following this logic precisely because it exposes a series of paradoxes that become the passion for the logic; that is, a logic predicated on paradoxes and not upon assertions of truth values. More specifically, I am interested in this text because of how it engages with poverty as the “starting point,” the “location and motor” of the common in order for it to embrace its richness and power. [35]

Of course, I do not aim to argue that Antonio Negri was pacifist. But it is necessary to take up his work for he challenges the entire thought of pacifism by confronting the concept of peace. From his attack of transcendentalism, which he denounces as that which “[...] reveals itself also as a machination intended to dominate the social, to construct the juridical, fixing a theory of the legitimation [sic.] of Power in an efficacious practice of execution [...],”[36] Negri situates peace—State derived peace—as “legitimate violence,” war itself, brutal pacification of the social and political spheres.[37] It is with this reflection that Negri concludes the earlier, now companion, essay to the *Kairòs* text, *The Constitution of Time*, but he also develops it more fully and practically in the first part, “War,” of his collaborative work with Michael Hardt, *Multitude*. “Peace does not seem to me to be the solution to war but only the mystified value of the victor,” writes Negri. “If war is violence and the destruction of life, the paradox of peace, which appears in the fact that it is taken as the foundation and end of Power, is that in order for it to be efficacious peace ends up confirming war.”[38] Granted, Negri is not the first, nor the last, to make this claim. There is nothing novel about this position; except Negri takes up this challenge to think otherwise, to form an effective kind of resistance instead of falling into despair. The pacifist question becomes: is it possible to think a concept of peace that does not become the foundation or *telos* of the state form of order? That is, a pacifism beyond pacification?

It is for this reason that Negri collapses the War/Peace dichotomy into one, and poses in heterogeneity a concept of *life*, as that which is embraced by the common in taking up the struggle to practice the imperatives outlined above. Seemingly simple concepts—life, the common—become dynamic and complex in Negri’s thought, for he situates them as essentially antagonistic to any form of totality or unity. The state is a false image of the common. What is truly common is nothing that can take the form of ownership, of property or command. Negri gives these three determinations, each “absolutely equivalent” to the other, of what he means by this concept: the common is “linguistic-being,” “being as production of subjectivity,” and “biopolitical-being.”[39] For example, the way Negri understands language is no longer as a means for expression, but as a tool. Once it is used in this way, it cannot but produce the common. “Language is not born and

does not develop other than in the common and from the common.”[40] Language cannot be something that is claimed for one’s own, because it can only be used in common—thereby it is paradoxically singular and common at the same time, having nothing to do with, and, in deed, disruptive to totality or unity. “The common is anything but accountancy, compatability and systemization.”[41] It is the constant engagement of this precarity and the production of the common that Negri calls *life*.

I would now like to concentrate on his thoughts on poverty. The experience of poverty —“rooted in the present,” “exposed to the immeasurable”[42]—is almost impossible to think precisely because of its immediacy. It is nearly impossible to understand because its necessity is its very exigency. It demands a kind of abstract thinking that is literal even to the extent that it presents no image for thought. In this double bind, Negri claims outright, “If you are not poor you cannot philosophize [...] where in humanist thought it was ignorance that was the basis of philosophical questioning, in the biopolitical it is poverty that forms the ground. To the ‘learned ignorance’ of the humanists, corresponds the ‘powerful poverty’ that makes us amazed at the world.”[43] However, poverty is not equated to the common, it is only the starting point. In order to work with his concept of poverty, to work through the differentiation between poor and the common, I would like to sketch the various paradoxes he articulates concerning the poor. They are as follows:

The logical paradox : “The poor are excluded from within the biopolitical itself—in that same biopolitical in which the poor person produces and in which his subjectivity is in turn produced.”[44] One of Negri’s most important, revisionary arguments, developed more clearly in more practical terms in his collaborative work with Hardt, *Empire*, is that the poor, those excluded from the so called affairs and politics of the world, actually are at the center of the world. They constitute the work of the world. Thereby they hold incredible amounts of power. For not only do they produce most of the work in the world, but they, in their poverty are capable of producing the common. Though Negri is wary that the more the poor open up to the common, the more “violent the transcendental exclusion of the poor from the common,” he understands this phenomenon as evidence that the poor are a direct threat to the State. Their relation is inherently antagonistic, as resistance; to which, Negri calls for a refusal to work.

The foundational paradox : “The production of the (physical and political) world and of its riches *to-come* is a ‘superstructure’ of the common. I say this as a paradox, because it is evident that in the biopolitical there is no up and no down, no inside and no outside. But it is important to insist, even paradoxically, on this—against the mystifications of economism, against the illusions of the ‘superstructure’—thereby demonstrating that only the common is foundational *in reality*.”[45] Because poverty is situated in the present, to produce the common by opening up to the immeasurable, one must forgo the future—that which is only predicated on the way things are and will continue to be (the mystification of the state as the only form of sociality). The common marks a change that is qualitatively different from this, our present moment; and because it is rooted entirely, eternally, in the present, and thereby anti-systematic or accountable, the future transforms into that which cannot be predicted—the *to-come*.

The creative paradox : “The poorer the body—that is, the more it is exposed and open to the immeasurable—the more it concentrates the power of living labour and of love within itself. [...] The body participates in this creative paradox: setting forth from poverty, it impresses the power of metamorphosis on the movement.”[46] In order for poverty to open toward the immeasurable of the common, it must practice love. Love is the “constitutive *praxis* of the common.”[47] However, one significant difference is this: where charity posits the poor as the object of love, Negri holds that the poor is the *subject* of love, the only ones capable of loving in such a way as to produce the common.

“Do not obey,” “Do not kill,” “Do not exploit.” Though this might be a way to understand how the common might function, it is nevertheless bizarre to speak in terms of imperatives in the midst of the common. How should we understand this gesture? *Kairòs* not only creates a leaping logic that constantly opens up to that which is illogical, but also at various important junctures, turns upon nothing but paradoxes. In that way, it is a logic that is not truly to be understood or comprehended, but to be practiced. It is true only insofar as it is realized. It constitutes a practice that is without model, “neither repetition nor imitation, and we cannot provide an example of it on the basis of pre-constituted values and realities.”[48] It is a logic that throws itself away once it has been “climbed out through them, on them, over them” as Wittgenstein concludes his *Tractatus*. The common is that which is engaged and desired at all moments, not controlled or coercive—enacting a politics that is no longer determined by command—that is, without imperatives, but functioning purely as a result of desire.

Precarity and the Desert

As Bachmann said herself of her unfinished novel, *The Book of Franza*, “This is a book about a crime.”[49] But the peculiarity and horror of this crime is that there is no proof, certainly no acceptable or justifiable evidence. As Franza explains: “What could I have said: My husband, please excuse how ridiculous this sounds, for it substantiates nothing, is murdering me. I am going to be murdered, help me. That’s what I would have had to say, but just imagine in this society someone coming along and saying: I am going to be murdered. Could you please say by whom and why, could you give us some facts, some evidence? I had no evidence.” [50]

The best that Franza can do is to call the crime a sickness, and she gives this sickness a name: fear, terror. “It is terror. The sickness of our time.”[51] Thus this crime without evidence, this sickness whose accepted manifestation was nothing less than World War II, remains the sickness of our time. Like a virus, Bachmann thought. “I’ve often wondered,” she said as a preface to a reading of this work, “and perhaps it has passed through your minds as well, just where the virus of crime escaped to—it cannot have simply disappeared from our world twenty years ago just because murder is no longer praised, desired, decorated with medals, and promoted.”[52] No, she claims, it has just infiltrated all of the social, and is thereby “so subtle that we can hardly perceive or comprehend them, though all around us, in our neighborhoods, they are committed daily.” How do we

diagnose such a sickness? How do we confront such a crime? These questions point to the political nature of Bachmann's literature—the necessity of her writing this conjecture as a novel.

Franza's story is this: Young during the war, but old enough to be aware of the events that were happening—both in the world, and the occupation of her home town in lower Austria (first the Germans then the Americans). Later marrying a Viennese psychiatrist, a man studying post war trauma, who then turns to analyzing her, his wife. Driven mad, sent to a sanatorium, then escaping to Jordan and the deserts of Egypt with her brother, then a geologist. There, at the foot of the pyramids, killed by a man, a stranger, who pounded her head against the stones. Such perhaps are the facts.

Though the psychological torture and fear inflicted by her husband drove Franza to flee, in this paper, I am mostly concerned with her experience in the desert—a space clear and free of all direction and relation. She describes it as thus: “Everything empty and yet more immediate than anything that claims to exist. Not simply nothingness. No, the desert has nothing to do with the nothingness speculated on by the holders of endowed professorships.”[53] In this space, empty but immediate, it is there that she learns how to struggle. It is there that she confronts herself for the first time and not in opposition to her oppressive husband. In the mistakenly barren desert, her I confronts the I of the desert: “neither having more to say than: I. I and the desert. Or I and the other. The absolute and no half-measures, I and I began to go at one another.”[54] She discovers a different kind of combat, one that is creative and not destructive. It is also there that she begins to experiment; but it is one that “she would perform on herself,” and therefore a creative process rather than the oppressive experimentation of her husband.[55] Franza attempts to regain her subjectivity, not in a struggle against her husband, but distanced from him and in the struggle within nothing more than immediacy.

Perhaps we can put it this way: in the desert Franza rediscovers desire—life as a force. It is desire, not in excess, but in the form of need, of necessity: “Hunger, thirst, discovered once again. The danger, discovered once again. The ears, the eyes, were sharpened, directed toward the outer world, a sense of purpose having been regained.”[56] And further, “There was no doubt that her skin had begun to heal as a result of experiencing real necessity. Something (what?) was helping her to gain control over herself...”[57] Finally, it is from out of this force of life, this desire as hunger, thirst, that she arrives at this thought: “You see, said Franza, there's something here that even I can't be denied. I am discovering my rights.”[58] But what kind of rights are these? The experience in the desert teaches us many paradoxical things—we discover our rights not in the satisfaction of need, but in the force of life (the force that arises like that of hunger).[59] Franza becomes overwhelmed by this desert experience. Is it possible to develop a practice out of this experience, that is, struggle as a constitutive practice? Only this kind of struggle transforms need into desire by learning how to will that very need at its radical point of it consuming us. But at what risk do we seek this precarity?

How do we learn such a practice, especially when any kind of community in the struggle is not a given, let alone even a possibility? At least Franza had her brother, who throughout their trip tried to encourage her and gave her strength. But in this position, Franza turns

to will only one side of the paradox. Her experience in the desert taught her that if in this empty yet immediate space she benefits from a failure of power (where the domination of her husband cannot reach her), then Franza not only discovers her rights, life as desire, but in doing so, she also discovers her right to death. How close, if not paradoxically the same, is the desire for life and the right to death?[60]

And yet when she insisted upon enacting the latter, it was, in the strictest of senses, unjustly denied her. Soon after, in Cairo, she comes across an old Nazi doctor that was familiar to her from her husband's research. Yet when she asks him to give her a lethal dose of poison, he refuses. This encounter and request is decidedly different. In her disbelief, she thinks to herself, "I'm only asking for something that he used to do willingly and without being asked to do it, and yet now someone comes along and is not allowed to beg for it and pay for it. What kind of world is this?"[61] The danger of such a question is this: that suddenly it becomes obvious that the way the world (society) functions is different from how we comprehend it—a brutal realization. The task then becomes, how to match (complicate) our conception of the world to the way it actually is.

To begin (and only to begin) to work with this last question, I would like to briefly take up one last revelation that comes to Franza in the desert. What astonishes Franza about her encounter with this Nazi doctor is that for the first time in her life she was capable of inducing fear.[62] The doctor disappears when she returns to his office, he flees from being exposed. But she does not become enamored by this power, she does not begin to wield it against everyone she confronts. It is only later, in the midst of getting her head fatally bashed against the stone, that she comes to this realization: "She began to mutter to herself, Poor devil, he only wanted to frighten me, as she again grabbed hold of the large stones and pulled herself up. And in Vienna, she continued, he too only wanted to frighten me. Still, I was pretty frightened already. They needed this."[63] Just as she discovered her rights to be awakened at the level of need and desire, and not as determined by an idea of humanism, so too she realizes that such brutality is also done at the level of need. Perhaps the wars too, have nothing really to do with ideology. Perhaps rational arguments and justifications are strange misconceptions. Such a direction of thought leads us to ask, "How do these desires function?" Is it possible to think of it as a different manifestation of fascism? As Franza is provoked to think earlier: "You say fascism, but that sounds strange, for I've never heard that word used to describe a personal relationship. No, forgive me, I have to laugh, no I'm not crying at all. But that's an interesting idea, for it had to begin somewhere. Why does one only refer to fascism when it has to do with opinions or blatant acts?"[64]

We now have another, more visible name for the sickness: fascism; the sickness that pervades all of society (in an acceptable way until it bursts into war) and is constitutive of the relationships between men and women (but where is the proof?). Or, is the proof all around us? Is it just that we have misinterpreted the signs, led astray by superficial concepts? Perhaps we have the wrong glasses on, see all too clearly through reason and ideology that we are blinded from the workings of desire.

Franza experiences (suffers from) the problem otherwise. She articulates the problem differently. “I think differently,” she had once pleaded to her husband, “I don’t think like you, although I knew there was no context for it, but that was what ran through me, this helpless sentence with which I suddenly wanted to stand up for myself.”[65] Is it possible that fascism dominates thought as well? Where would it take us to at least question in the direction of desire rather than reason even though we might not yet be able to comprehend it in this way, nor are prepared to handle such a problem?[66] Again Franza will say, “I can only say what is, the same way that historians can only say what is, and you simply have to swallow what is and was. Otherwise no one questions it, even when no one has the means to digest this history.”[67] She too is dealing with facts, but they are paradoxically facts without consistency, proof, or definition.

Who Wants to be a Pacifist?

What connects each of these three theoretical texts is their engagement with a variation of a practice of precarious poverty: thinking within poverty, thinking through poverty, and an attempt to think out inflicted poverty, from destitution. Each hit their own blocks and even present any thought of pacifism as an impossibility: can we think pacifism as a practice and not as a set of ideological assertions? Can we think the pacifism outside any belief in peace? Do we dare to take up a practice of pacifism that is not enamored with fear and power, knowing that it is perhaps a helpless thought, exposing one directly to brutality?

The blocks are apparent. But each of these thinkers is attempting to think the present otherwise, and in thinking the present differently they seek to show that there are other possibilities here and now. It is not so much predicated on reason, but seeing that the problem is one of desire, and then struggling to somehow change one’s will, redirecting one’s desire toward that which might not even seem possible. The difference is this: that none of these thinkers dare to pose an answer or solution to the problem, for that is precisely what returns to brutality. They only seek to develop a practice wherein we might respond to the problem differently—a ceaseless practice that will always remain a struggle. Again in the conversation with Foucault, Deleuze states the collaborative relation between theory and practice, a collaboration that respects each other’s domain: “Practice is a set of relays from one theoretical point to another, and theory is a relay from one practice to another.”

It is never a question of whether or not such a different way of living is even possible, but whether it is desirable to envision the social working otherwise: Nergi’s demystified vision of the common is that of a functional dystopia; Ammon Hennacy, one of the most challenging and respected of Catholic Workers, once said of such communities: “People shipwrecked on an island—that’s not a community: that’s a disaster—that’s the Catholic Worker!”[68] Knowing that such a lifestyle is not (and therefore, should not) be for everyone alike, such communities continue to function and thrive, simply because those who are there want to live in this way, want to do this work. Negri’s theory will not happen until nothing less than everyone wants it to happen, and thereby creates it—whether the experiment is attempted on a local or global scale.

From these texts we gain a new method for the study of pacifism, a new starting point. The question to ask is not, “What is pacifism?” for that is a question that presupposes absolute essences and ideologies; but, “How might pacifism work, beyond all reasonableness and against all ideologies?” How might the practice of pacifism confront brutality on the level of desire? To think what is at stake in such a question demands a completely different practice of thought, one that also takes up a practice of precarious poverty.

Notes:

1. Michel Foucault and Gilles Deleuze, “Intellectuals and Power: A conversation between Michel Foucault and Gilles Deleuze” <http://libcom.org/library/intellectuals-power-a-conversation-between-michel-foucault-and-gilles-deleuze>. First published in *L’Arc* 49 (1972): 3-10.

2. See Gilles Deleuze, *The Logic of Sense*, ed. Constantin V. Boundas , trans. Mark Lester , Charles Stivale (New York: Columbia University Press, 1990), 202-209.

3. Dorothy Day, *Loaves and Fishes*, (New York: Curtis Books, 1963), 67.

4. Ibid, 82.

5. Ibid, 83.

6. Mel Piehl. *Breaking Bread: The Catholic Worker and the Origin of Catholic Radicalism in America*, (Philadelphia: Temple University Press, 1982), 105.

7. Ibid, 78.

8. Ibid, 100.

9. François Zourabichvili, “Les deux pensées de Deleuze et de Negri: une richesse et une chance” (posted June 2002) <http://multitudes.samizdat.net/article38.html>; my translation from French.

10. Jacques Bouveresse, *Herméneutique et Linguistique, suivi de Wittgenstein et la philosophie du langage*, (Combas: Editions de L’Eclat, 1991), 11. I must thank Marjorie Perloff and her reference in *Wittgenstein’s Ladder* to this interesting essay that is not yet published in English.

11. Ray Monk, *The Duty of Genius* (New York: The Free Press, 1990), 111-112.

12. Ibid, 114.

13. Marjorie Perloff, *Wittgenstein’s Ladder* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1996), 27.

14. Monk, 135.

15. Perloff, 45.

16. Ibid, 40.

17. Ibid, 1.

18. Ibid, 27.

19. Ludwig Wittgenstein, *Tractatus Logico-Philosophicus*, trans. C.K. Ogden (New York: Routledge, 1922), 77.

20. Ludwig Wittgenstein, *Culture and Values*, ed. G.H. von Wright, trans. Peter Winch (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1980), 7.

21. O.K. Bouwsma, *Philosophical Essays* (Lincoln: University of Nebraska Press, 1969), 178-179.

22. As quoted by Monk, 338.

23. Ibid, 183-186.

24. Ludwig Wittgenstein, *Philosophical Occasions 1912-1951*, ed. James Klagge, Alfred Nordmann (Indianapolis: Hackett Publishing Company, 1993), 161.

25. *Philosophical Occasions*, 37.

26. Ibid, 39.

27. Again we find in the “Big Typescript” manuscript:

As I have often said, philosophy does not lead me to any renunciation, since I do not abstain from saying something, but rather abandon a certain combination of words as senseless. In another sense, however, philosophy requires a resignation, but one of feeling and not of intellect. And maybe that is what makes it so difficult for many. It can be difficult not to use an expression, just as it is difficult to hold back tears, or an outburst of anger // rage //. (161)

The difference that Wittgenstein marks between *abandoning a certain combination of words as senseless* and *abstaining from saying something* is clearly a matter of use. It is not a renunciation of ideals and morals, per say, but a realization that they do not function in the way we mean them to function. If the analogy is useful, that meaning of the word is given in its use, this still does not presuppose that they function only superficially (and even in their falsity). Words do not always do what we mean or intend them to do (see, perhaps, Novalis’ “Soliloquy”). This is more clearly drawn in the case of emotion.

28. Ludwig Wittgenstein, *Philosophical Investigations*, trans. G.E.M. Anscombe (New York: The Macmillan Company, 1958), 48.

29. *Culture and Values*, 7. “I am not interested in constructing a building, so much as in having a perspicuous view of the foundation of possible buildings.”

30. See, *Tractatus*: 6.4321 “The facts all belong to the task and not to its solution” (my translation, for in the English edition, Ogden translates *Lösung* as “performance”) and 6.44 “Not *how* the world is, is the mystical, but *that* it is.” (187)

31. *Culture and Values*, 19.

32. Antonio Negri, *Time for Revolution*, trans. Matteo Mandarini (New York: Continuum, 2003), 258.

33. *Ibid*, 145. Negri was imprisoned for a number of years on two different occasions (but for the same accusation) by the Italian government for allegedly orchestrating a terrorist action. Foucault once wrote of Negri, “Isn’t he in jail simply for being an intellectual?” from “Le philosophe masqué” in *Dits et écrits*, Vol 4 (Paris: Gallimard, 1994), 105.

34. *Ibid*, 167.

35. *Ibid*, 195.

36. *Ibid*, 142.

37. *Ibid*, 122-123.

38. *Ibid*, 122.

39. *Ibid*, 189.

40. *Ibid*.

41. *Ibid*, 222.

42. *Ibid*, 194.

43. *Ibid*.

44. *Ibid*, 199.

45. *Ibid*, 229.

46. *Ibid*, 246.

47. *Ibid*, 208-209.

48. *Ibid*, 235.

49. Ingeborg Bachmann, *The Book of Franza & Requiem for Franny Goldmann*, trans. Peter Filkins (Illinois: Northwestern University Press, 1999), 3.

50. *Ibid*, 84.

51. *Ibid*, 72.

52. Ibid, 3-4.

53. Ibid, 89. It is those same professorships that misunderstand fear as well: “Close all the books, the abracadabra of the philosophers, the satyrs of fear who manipulate metaphysics but who do not know what fear is. Fear is no mystery, no end in itself, no existential condition, nothing noble, not a concept, and, God willing, nothing that can be systematized. Fear is indisputable. It is an assault, it is terror, a massive attack on one’s life. (84)

54. Ibid, 92.

55. Ibid, 95.

56. Ibid, 98.

57. Ibid, 103.

58. Ibid, 102.

59. For a different articulation of this connection between life and hunger, see Antonin Artaud’s preface to his work, *The Theatre and its Double*.

60. Is it even possible to raise such a question? I do so only because I hesitate to call it otherwise—to see this attempt at suicide as driven by the same desire as her earlier experience of throwing herself into the river.

61. Ibid, 135.

62. Ibid, 136.

63. Ibid, 138.

64. Ibid, 75.

65. Ibid, 65.

66. This might be the exact point from which Gilles Deleuze and Félix Guattari begin their work, *Anti-Oedipus*.

67. Ibid, 84.

68. Ammon Hennacy, *The Book of Ammon* (Baltimore, Maryland: Fortkamp Publishing Company, 1994), 420.

Preferred citation: Walker, Vern. 2009. The Poverty of Pacifism. In: Time, Memory, and Cultural Change, ed. S. Dempsey and D. Nichols, Vienna: IWM Junior Visiting Fellows’ Conference Proceedings, Vol. 25.