

# AFFECTIVITY, VULNERABILITY AND LIMITS OF SCIENTIFIC REASON

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## Afectividad, vulnerabilidad y límites de la razón científica

ROSARIO GAZMURI BARROS\*

Pontificia Universidad Católica de Chile, Santiago de Chile  
mdgazmur@uc.cl

Orcid number: <https://orcid.org/0000-0002-9999-4521>

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### Abstract

The present paper analyzes the notion of rationality typical of our culture, marked by the scientific paradigm. According to this paradigm, the reason has the ability to decipher the laws imprinted in reality in a 'clear and different' way in order to dominate that same reality and transform what it reads. This formulation leads to the nonrecognition of humans' own limits. The first goal of this paper is to understand reason from a new paradigm. The second one is to study the connection between the issue of affectivity with the essential vulnerability of the human being and the consequences of this in moral action. The paper is structured in 5 sections. In the first one, the notion of reason will be analyzed as it is conceived from the scientific model. The second one will focus on the consequences that this notion has had on our culture. The third section studies the question that meshes all the others: the recovery of the cognitive value of affections, in order to rethink, in the fourth section, the issue of the practical use of reason and moral action. Finally, the model of the work of art is proposed as a possibility for reencountering the dimensions of the human being silenced by the scientist notion of truth.

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### Keywords

Rationality, vulnerability, affectivity, habit, deliberation, contemplation.

**Suggested citation:** Gazmuri Barros, Rosario (2022). Affectivity, vulnerability and limits of scientific reason. *Sophia, colección de Filosofía de la Educación*, 32, pp. 189-214.

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\* Doctor in Philosophy from the Universidad Complutense de Madrid, Spain. Master in Philosophy from the Universidad Complutense de Madrid, Spain. Bachelor in Philosophy from the Pontificia Universidad Católica de Chile. Bachelor in Hispanic Letters from the Pontificia Universidad Católica de Chile. She is currently an adjunct assistant professor of the Pontificia Universidad Católica de Chile and director of Kairós Academy ([www.kairosfilosofia.com](http://www.kairosfilosofia.com)).

### Resumen

Este trabajo analiza la noción de racionalidad propia de nuestra cultura, marcada por el paradigma científico. Según este, la razón tiene la capacidad de descifrar las leyes inscritas en la realidad de manera 'clara y distinta' con el fin de dominar esa misma realidad, y transformar aquello que lee. Esta formulación lleva al no reconocimiento del propio límite del ser humano. El objetivo primero de este trabajo es la comprensión de la razón desde un nuevo paradigma. El segundo, estudiar la conexión de la cuestión de la afectividad con la esencial vulnerabilidad del ser humano y las consecuencias de esto en la acción moral. El escrito está estructurado en cinco apartados. En el primero, se analizará la noción de razón tal como es concebida desde el modelo de las ciencias. El segundo se centrará en las consecuencias que dicha noción ha tenido en nuestra cultura. El tercer apartado estudia la cuestión que engrana todas las demás: la recuperación del valor cognoscitivo de los afectos, para, a partir de esta recuperación replantear, en el cuarto apartado, la cuestión del uso práctico de la razón y la acción moral. Por último, se propone el modelo de la obra de arte como posibilidad de reencuentro con las dimensiones del ser humano silenciadas por la noción científicista de verdad.

### Palabras clave

Racionalidad, vulnerabilidad, afectividad, hábito, deliberación, contemplación.

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## Introduction

The question of narrowing the fields of truth, a consequence of the path followed by modern philosophy, is today object of widespread criticism. The commitment to the mastery of the object of knowledge, typical of the scientific method, not only shows today its disastrous consequences in the field of ecology but, even more radically, in the loss of the possibility of truth in the realm of ethics and politics: once the truth has become synonymous of accuracy, any field where the mastery of the scientific method is not possible seems to be relegated to the field of mere opinion.

From the perspective of science itself, the subject rises as the dominator of the object, putting as the aim of his/her research the use of truth. The researcher seeks to have his/her object available, to ensure his knowledge, to walk on safe ground. This has been the path of science and also, which makes the gesture more dramatic, of philosophy. The latter, since Descartes' methodical attempt, has run parallel to science, and at equally alarming speeds, on this path towards the domination of its object. Although, as exposed by Heidegger (2010), the impulse begins already in classical ontology, modern philosophy takes it to its consummation.

Research has available the entity when it is capable of calculating it in advance in its future course or of calculating it a posteriori. In the anticipatory calculation, nature is almost established; in the historical a posteriori calculation, almost history. Nature and history become the object of explanatory representation. (...) This objectification of the

entity takes place in a representation whose goal is to place the whole entity before itself in such a way that the man who calculates can be sure of the entity or, what is the same thing, can be certain of it. Science becomes research only and exclusively when truth has been transformed into certainty of representation (pp. 71-71).

The experience of astonishment reverts in mastery, and then, one has the illusion that the being is available, illusion that, although it has founded a culture, is deprived, in its foundations, of that to which it aspires. And this depriving points to deeper processes: to those through which the human being loses himself/herself in the loss of the being.

The analysis of the problem of narrowing the fields of truth may be treated from different perspectives. The present study will focus on the reflection of what, we affirm, is prior, and meanwhile it is, it is the cause of what we have called the narrowing of the fields of truth: the notion of reason. And this is because today rationality itself is conceived from the scientific or positivist model. And this not only has consequences on the possibility of accessing to truth in nonscientific fields, but also on the theory of action that such notion of reason inspires.

This paper proposes a reprocessing of the notion of reason from the possibilities mainly offered by the thought of three authors of contemporary philosophy: Merleau-Ponty, Nussbaum and Gadamer. In addition, we turn to some notions of J. E. Rivera, who, making a synthesis of the thoughts of different authors of the phenomenological tradition, offers a compendium in “De asombros y Nostalgia (1999)”. The bibliography has been chosen according to the possibility offered by these authors, in the first place, to highlight the cognitive value of affections and, therefore, their importance in moral action. The question of the intentionality of the body, a central topic in Merleau-Ponty’s writings, makes possible the discovery of a sphere of configuration of meaning prior to the act of objectification, central to the revaluation of the affective dimension of the human being. Nussbaum, on the other hand, bases on the recovery of Stoic thought and the reflection on literature (so typical of her writings), to show the affective dynamics as central for understanding the human being. Secondly, the chosen authors make possible a rethinking of the notion of reason from the previous fact: if the affections are a source of knowledge, the very act of reason must be rethought. Thus, we turn to the ontology proposed by Gadamer (1993) from the experience of the work of art and the reflection on the centrality of Greek tragedy for classical thought, as shown by Nussbaum (1995).



The paper is structured in five sections. The first one will analyze the notion of reason as it is conceived from the model of the sciences, especially the exact sciences. The second will focus on the consequences that this notion has had in our culture: the narrowing of reason in its practical use, the invalidation of the emotional sphere as a source of knowledge, the conception of freedom from the possibilities of rational domain; all of which leads to the nonacceptance of the vulnerability typical of the human being. The third section will focus on the matter that links all the others: the recovery of the cognitive value of the affections, in order to, from this recovery, rethink, in the fourth section, the matter of the practical use of reason and moral action. Finally, the model of the work of art is proposed as a possibility of reencountering with the dimensions of the human being silenced by the scientific notion of truth.

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## The reason from the model of the sciences

The model of the exact sciences and, in part, of the natural sciences, conceives reason as a faculty capable of capturing the laws inscribed in reality. The model is, above all, mathematical. Galileo, in 1623, affirmed that the universe is written in mathematical characters. And the task of reason is to discover this language. To read these characters. What is the purpose of this reading? Preponderantly, the transformation of that same nature for the benefit of the human being. If, for example, the law of gravity is understood mathematically, we can go against its force by applying a greater force by means of, for example, the propulsion engine. The mission of reason, from the positivist model (with its idea of progress) is to unravel the laws of the universe in order to achieve technical progress. In other words, science transforms human life in a technical sense, because it enables a certain technology that makes quality standards to be higher.

The scientific method that ensures such mastery is based on formulating a hypothesis, and then moving to experimentation and testing in pursuit of the formulation of a scientific law. Scientific praxis is experimentation. In other words: a hypothesis is proposed, a theory that is further put into 'practice', is put into practice in experimentation, and then proved and transformed into a law. Reason itself, therefore, is conceived as the ability to unravel reality in a mathematical way: exact figures, verifiable results. From this perspective, something is rational when our reason can account for the conditions of the possibility of its existence or the laws of its 'functioning'. And when it can be verified that such functioning is accurate.

This is what happens with the study of nature: although human reason is not the condition of possibility of its reality, it can be reason that reads its characters and, therefore, manages to dominate it. It achieves the 'rational explanation.' And this is extensive to every object that is a product of technique: the artifacts. They are rational inasmuch as it is a human reason that has created them and because this reason can come to understand the conditions of possibility of the existence or functioning of that object or artifact. Thus, for example, even if it is unknown how the Internet works, it is known that, if the necessary effort is made, its functioning can be understood and, what is more, with the appropriate dedication, even be able to elaborate those conditions of possibility. In this case, knowledge of the laws by means of which the Internet network (or a printer, or any machine) operates, could lead to the realization of that same artifact. It is a knowledge that can provide a technology: I can build something with that.

From this perspective, reason in its theoretical use is restricted and determined by technique, in pursuit of the mastery of that same reality that it scrutinizes. There is no uncertainty if reality can be mastered, because it can be rationalized. Rational is, thus, a phenomenon (whether natural, social, human) whose existence or whose functioning can be accounted for (even if we do not generally account for it). Confidence is produced by the perspective of the possibility of rational control over the phenomenon to which reason turns its attention. As will be seen, this notion of trust will have radical consequences when analyzing human praxis in society, since it prevents the acceptance of vulnerability, as an essential condition of the human being and of human relations.

From the perspective of moral action, rationality is also conceived from a scientific point of view. A decision is rational when it has been made after weighing the options, and after weighing them rationally, a phenomenon or an action has become a reality (performing a work, for example, a food recipe, or entering a university career). However, the very notion of rational deliberation has been tinged with the positivist gaze. Rational, in this sense, is the search for the best means, in this case the most effective means to achieve a result. In other words, a decision is rational when it provides me with greater benefits, more profit, but a profit that must be demonstrated as greater. Anything that goes beyond what we can prove (which often boils down to counting) makes us feel that it is out of control. And that, in our positivist mentality, is something we cannot stand for. Moral rationality is thus restricted to those decisions where I can, indeed, account for the greatest benefit for me. If not, it is

not a rational action, but we qualify it otherwise: emotional, passionate, irrational.

Reason, therefore, in its practical use is reduced to strategic rationality: seeking the means to achieve the most profitable ends. And it eliminates the moral gaze and what Aristotle called prudential thinking (1995). Because the efficacy of action is not the same as its goodness. In the words of De Tienda Palop (2011), this translates into a demand for optimization:

The rational necessarily possesses the maxim of “doing the best attainable”, according to the circumstances, the context and the other factors involved. Rationality has a solid normative component: that of doing not what is good, but what is best, under certain circumstances and limits, and this is its outstanding characteristic (p. 28).

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In other words, if something is rational only to the extent that I can prove the benefit it provides, I leave aside the kaleidoscopic world of freedom, where there are thousands of factors that come into play and that cannot be reduced in terms of benefit, or demonstrable quantification of that benefit. And which, therefore, are eliminated from the field of rationality.

## Issues deriving from the notion of reason from the model of science

Hereafter, it will be analyzed some of the problems derived from the notion of rationality outlined here, due to the narrowing of such reason both in its theoretical function and in its practical function.

From the theoretical perspective, the first problem to be analyzed will be that of the impossibility of reason, conceived from the scientific model, to account for those phenomena that cannot be converted, in an absolute sense, into an object of knowledge. In other words, although in a broad sense any phenomenon can be the object of reason, whilst it can be focused and attended to, in an absolute sense it cannot be all those in which the subject itself is understood by the phenomenon it seeks to understand. This is what happens with the human being himself/herself and all that derives from the study of his free unfolding: his/her culture, the social fact, his/her emotions, the aesthetic phenomenon, etc.

Given the impossibility of reason, seen from the positivist model, to fully embrace these phenomena, they are declared as irrational. If

something is not rational, it is irrational. Therefore, if I cannot rationalize, if I cannot give a clear, mathematical, precise, demonstrable, 'objective' explanation of something, it is not rational. The consequence of this is that any reality that cannot be the object of scientific reason is left without reflection. The construction of the social world is left to everyone's discretion, or to the sum of individual opinions. This is what happens when democracy is reduced to individual voting rights. Government is formed from the sum of wills, but not from the dialogical coordination of these. And this is a moral problem, which concerns reason in its practical use.

This problem leads to another, which can perhaps be invoked as its cause, or at least one of its causes: to think that knowledge only comes from the act of reason and everything else is not knowledge. The very act of reason is an active moment: reason is used. Reason, in fact, is exercised. And it does so by focusing attention, objectifying, or making the object of attention something that has been opened, in a prior manner, in another way. In other words, what is the object of the proper act of reason is not, prior to such an act, something unknown, but something that has been understood in 'another' way. Rational knowledge is a mode of knowledge, or a moment of understanding. It is a moment: when attention is focused on something and it is decided to perform an act by means of which I stop from everyday life and contemplate that: it may be a problem, something I had not taken into account so far, weighing arguments in pursuit of a decision, or simply taking distance from everyday life to 'look' or 'observe' that which has provoked astonishment for any of the above reasons. The moment of objectivity is a moment of global understanding of reality. But before that moment, there is an understanding of the whole that surrounds the human being, in a way that is not properly rational, but that can in turn be the object of reason.

The matter is that the understanding of reality is not something that is made only from action. It is also made from passion: understanding is a game between what is actively made and what is suffered. It is here that the world of affectivity enters: there is a pre-rational or pre-objective knowledge that crystallizes in affectivity, as we shall see. And this affective crystallization, whose origin is not the proper act of reason, can be the object of reason and, insofar as it can be, it is 'reasonable', as we shall see. This, of course, only if we move away from the notion of reason as it has been characterized from the scientific point of view.

A third problem is the notion of freedom as consequence of this notion of rationality. If freedom keeps up with reason, and if reason has



as its characteristic feature the mastery of the reality it contemplates or studies, freedom, because of our rational being, is also considered as a possibility of mastery, control. And it is deeply disturbing that something impedes this control. As well as the fact of acting against what is rationally evaluated as the best. The problem is that moral action is not like the praxis of science: there is no law that can be claimed to be universally valid and that must be applied in all cases. No. It requires experience, which is not the same as the experiment that science does to test its theories. And that experience involves complex factors, which cannot be so easily reduced to universal laws. The problem with this conception of rationality is that, as Bown (1988) states, “a rational decision or belief must be based on an evident evaluation, by the appropriate application of certain rules” (p.7).

In this same line of analysis, a final problematic issue derived from all of the above is the consequent vulnerability of being human. The power that, in fact, science has given over nature has led us to believe that reason is absolute, that everything can become the object of its action. This has blinded the human being in front of the fact that reason itself is precarious, and not only because -as it was said- it cannot make the object of understanding those phenomena by which the human being himself is understood, but, even more, because reason itself, in its action, is precarious, according to Rivera (1999). In other words, it is not taken into consideration that the action of reason itself depends on assumptions that, as such, remain hidden to the objectifying action itself. That is why it is so profoundly surprising, for example, when one acts against rational convictions. And the problem is, then, that it cannot be accounted, from this notion of rationality, for human vulnerability. This problem is directly related to the already mentioned question of affectivity, as a crystallization of a way of knowing reality, and this for two reasons. The first, because it is not possible to have control over the way we are affected, and this is already a cause of vulnerability. The second, according to Nussbaum (2008): “emotion records that sense of vulnerability and imperfect control” (p. 66).

The matter is, then, what does reason mean, what are its real possibilities. And what is central: can self-understanding and understanding of the other human being claim an absolute domination? The vital situation seems to show that we are drifting from fortune, understanding by fortune, as Nussbaum (1995) states, “what does not happen to the human being by his/her own active intervention, but what simply happens to him/her in opposition to what he/she does” (p. 31). And that seems to be what makes vulnerable good human life and, therefore, its flourishing.



## The cognitive value of affections

The first problem that will be addressed in order to unravel the problem of reason is the issue of affectivity, since it combines two of the aforementioned topics: the matter of pre-objective or pre-rational knowledge and the matter of vulnerability, because it is notified by emotions. And, therefore, the deepening of the issue of affectivity involves reason both in its theoretical and practical use.

As Heidegger (1997) affirms, the attitude of ‘directing the sight’ typical of the rational moment of objectification, and which modern philosophy proposes as the very act of knowing, is not sufficiently original. The task is, therefore, to discover such original attitude, which is so from the existential point of view, not only from the chronological perspective. However, we believe that it is essential to resort to the chronological or genetic perspective in order to give an account of such originality. It is useful, for this purpose, to make a description that accounts for the own genesis of knowledge.

The process of world’s comprehension will be dated (for practical reasons) at the moment when the child comes out from the mother. Then, it is then when he/she opens to the world, and finds a dwelling. Slowly, this awakening will give him/her the capabilities to move around in the middle of world, to the extent that he/she conquers a space that he/she feels safe, in which he/she welcomes all helplessness. This shared space, this dwelling, is the first place where we are affected by reality. Body is own, but in the dwelling (be it the mother uterus, the body that embraces or the room), there is another one, and, as long as it is like this, there is a world. According to Merleau-Ponty (1971):

From the first moment I used my body to explore the world, I knew that this bodily relationship with the world could be generalized, that a minimal distance had been established between me and the being, that preserved the rights of a new perception of the being itself. There is nowhere to find the other in the being, it slips into my perception from behind: the experience I have of my apprehension of the world is what makes me capable of recognizing another experience and of perceiving another myself, only if, in the interior of my world, a gesture similar to mine is outlined (p.198).

To adequately understand the issue of affectivity, the perspective provided by Merleau-Ponty is crucial: the world is not a set of objects, but a universe of meaning, and it is so insofar as there is another, which I recognize as ‘another me’, and with whom a vital communication is estab-

lished, through which that which is apprehended is captured as something with meaning. The gesture of the other -in the first instance, of the mother- is the sign of a world that begins to open up for the child. The mother's gesture is an indication, an invitation, an invocation. This is central to understand that the stratum of the affective disposition, the primary stratum of reality valuation is essentially communicative. The world opens then from this invocation, from the affection that colors the inner map, the geography of affections, which are the first layer of knowledge.

The child, in the words of Rivera (1999), is overwhelmed when knowing the world, that is to say, is affectively absorbed in it. This radical openness, this comprehensive absorption of the world, is original. At a very early age, he grasps the meaning of things, of his parents' words, and before that, of gestures. Corporeal gestures, hugs and kisses are the first layer of communication. And the meaning of these is not intellectually conceived, but existentially grasped. The child understands in a vital way that to which he/she opens himself/herself: he/she is able, little by little, to move in the midst of the sense of the world, even when he/she has not asked himself/herself rationally what the world is, or what is its objective meaning. This implies that this opening, as pre-reflexive, is affective. The world, the senses lodged in the world, become body (in the word, in the gestures, in the tonality of the voice, in hugs), penetrate the child's body, forming his/her affective world. This implies that, as he/she knows the world, the meaning of things, the notions of good or bad, an affective landscape is forged in him/her that sediments this knowledge and through which he/she can move in the middle of the world. He/She cannot give a full intellectual account of what he/she knows, but he/she can show, affectively, how he/she values things, situations and people, the world around him/her.

The vital trajectory of the person is realized, in the first instance, therefore, not from rational objectification, but from the original affection, from which he/she emerges towards the consciousness of self and of the world. From full communion with the mother, he/she emerges towards the world, with which he/she enters in communion through the mediation of the parents, the family environment, the home or dwelling.

From this perspective, the body itself presents an intentionality that is prior to the intentionality typical of rational knowledge, and that is the original layer of knowledge not only during childhood, but throughout the entire life of the human being. It is what Husserl (1962) calls the operant intentionality, which is not only prior to, but foundational of the other intentionality, that of the act, which is properly rational. As Merleau-Ponty (1994) states:

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The movement of the body can only play a role in the perception of the world if it is an original intentionality, a way of referring to the object distinct from knowledge [meaning objective knowledge]. It is necessary that the world is around us, not as a system of objects of which we make the synthesis, but as an open set of things toward which we project ourselves (p. 396).

This intentionality implies an evaluation of reality. In other words, although in this first layer of capturing the world there are no purely objective acts, or, in other words, intellects about what things are in themselves, the affection presents an evaluation, i.e., taking a position, a tension of the person with respect to what is captured. This implies a vital projection, or, in Merleau-Ponty's words, a polarization towards that which is manifested, a polarization that will lead the child, by his/her developing motor capacity, to move in one direction or another. As it was said, this primary, original intentionality is an invocation, and, as such, it implies an evaluation in order to the own becoming, which has as a response attraction (lived as an impulse to approach and possess and to remain in it, from the corporeal dilation) and repulsion (lived as an impulse to flee, and in case it is not possible to flee, it is lived as corporeal contraction). This projection, not being voluntary, says Rodríguez Valls (2010), "(...) is referred to an instance that we could call intentionality of the body: a cognitive evaluation of the reality made by the body itself with respect to the organic situation in which it finds itself in front of the reality that is imposed on it" (p. 5).

The affections, or the passionate dynamics, are, therefore, a knowledge of the body, but cannot be understood as a mere capture of sensations, since they open up a world. The world, thus understood, is not the mere environment, but that which is detonated by the presence of another whose gesture gives sense to reality, to such an extent that it constitutes it as a 'world' or 'dwelling' in which is inhabited. The word and the gesture are introduced in the affective perception, and this causes that the perception of the world, yet in this original corporeal intentionality, is impregnated with values given by the word and its emotional valence. The categories of 'good' and 'bad', received in infancy, as well as the challenge that indicates to the child that something is bad; the parents' anger and joy, which are expressed linguistically and gesturally: all this permeates affection. This implies, as Husserl (1962) states, that the original intentionality is not an individual vital experience, even when the body itself is the zero point of any orientation and, therefore, the way in which the affection is gestated is always unique.

In this same line of interpretation, from a rereading of Stoic ethics, Martha Nussbaum (2003) shows that it can be affirmed that emotions are forged in two moments: that of appearance (a moment typical of affection) and that of judgment (which in turn generates an emotion):

(...) a judgment, for the Stoics, is defined as an assent to an appearance. In other words, it is a two-stage process. First, Nikidion thinks, or comes to his attention, that such and such thing is the case. (Stoic appearances or representations are usually propositional in nature). It appears to him that this is the case, he sees things this way, but at that moment he has not really accepted it. He may go ahead and accept or embrace the appearance, commit himself to it; in such a case, the representation has become his own judgment (p. 464).

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In her work *Landscapes of Thought* (2008), the philosopher distinguishes four elements in emotion, which enable to explain value judgment and which, in turn, show that emotions are not irrational, as are reflex actions and natural forces, such as wind or blood pressure. First, emotions are ‘about’ something: they have an object. And the way they relate to such an object is not the way a natural force relates to its object, nor it is the way a reflex action does. The knee reflex, for example, is activated no matter what activates it. The same happens with any natural force, such as the wind. Instead, emotions receive their identity from the object and the way they are directed to that object: fear is such with respect to that which is feared and for the reasons by which it is feared. The second essential element, according to Nussbaum, is its intentional character:

That is, it figures in the emotion as it is perceived or interpreted by the person experiencing it. Emotions are not about their objects merely in the sense of placing them in the crosshair and aiming at them, just as an arrow is shot at the target. The relation is more internal and involves a way of seeing (...) What distinguishes fear from hope, fear from grief, love from hate, is not so much the identity of the object, which may not change, as the way of seeing it (pp. 49-50).

Thirdly, in the way of perceiving the object, certain complex beliefs about the world and the meaning that such an object has in the construction of such a world are active. “To feel fear, as Aristotle already perceived, I must believe that some misfortune is imminent; that its negative character is not trivial, but serious; and that preventing it is beyond my complete control” (p. 51). And the last element of emotion is value, i.e., emotions ram or embrace the object because they apprehend it as having a value.

The valuation embedded in emotion is, therefore, primary, and original with respect to the judgment that later, at the moment of rational objectification, is made. This is today affirmed by the knowledge of neuroscience. In his study on the cognitive processes of emotion, Castaño (2017) states that:

The value judgments that are internally linked to the biological function of emotions bring the subjective that accompanies experiences, so that affective reactions give meaning to life and behaviors; they show us that we do not act without sense, and that each of our actions is linked to a feeling and its affective valence (p. 11).

Therefore, it can be affirmed that it is only because this first 'judgment' of value exists, that rational deliberation can then take place, since it is in comparison with this first evaluation that distance and taking a new position with respect to the valued object are possible. The moment of objectification, which is the act of reason itself, is that by which a stop is made in front of the reality in which the human being is daily immersed; attention is centered on something, and this is done intentionally, voluntarily, and that which is 'observed' with the intention of apprehending it for what it is in itself. It is important to emphasize the voluntary nature of the objectifying act of reason, since it shows a radical difference with the intentionality typical of emotions. The act of objectification may decide where to direct its attention. This is so radical that it is possible to voluntarily move attention away from some idea that it is suspected it is not convenient to discover as true, or that does not seem sufficiently interesting as to focus on it. It is not the same with emotions: in the presence of that which is emotionally embraced there is a vital polarization. Attention seems to be dominated by the presence of that which polarizes, and it is not possible to avoid at will the effects that this has on who is affected by it. Hence, from the linguistic perspective, the way of referring to both acts is different: one says 'I think', using the active form of the verb, and, on the other hand, 'I feel', using the reflexive form of the verb.

A final crucial issue for the subsequent analysis of practical reason is the issue of habit. The four elements typical of emotions are not enough to understand the cognitive complexity they carry. It is also necessary to consider the consequences of such structure. If emotions are bearers of an evaluation by which one tends to the objects towards which the human being is polarized, this implies that he/she makes movements for or against the objects towards which he/she is projected or which are rammed. And these movements are not deliberate, so they cannot be con-



sidered, in the proper sense, moral actions. But, as it was said, they are not irrational movements either, as reflex movement can be. In other words, they are movements through which the human being orients himself in the world, and which generate a habit, establish a set of tendencies as a response to evaluation, and which gradually crystallize as a way of being oriented to the world.

The habit is generally seen as a mechanical matter or as the result of a deliberate and repeated action. Merleau-Ponty (1994) adds a different characterization that accounts for its origin in the intentionality of the operating body, and affirms that habit is a form of understanding what has the body in relation to the world. Moya (2012) concludes, after studying the question of habit, that habit is a way of inhabiting, and integrates corporeal, psychic and metaphysical aspects. It is an access to the pre-objective world: it incorporates the lived everyday life, by which the person is anchored to the world in a certain way. It is about taking a position in front of the world, a corporealized consciousness prior to reflective consciousness, and that is acquired from the motor perspective and from the perceptive perspective. As Merleau-Ponty (1994) states:

The analysis of the motor habit as an extension of existence is thus prolonged into an analysis of the perceptive habit as the acquisition of a world. Reciprocally, every perceptive habit is still a motor habit and here also the capture of a significance is done by the body (p. 69).

In other words, the human being inhabits the world from a tendency crystallized in the body, which is what enables him/her to move in the middle of the world and enables him/her, in turn, the novelty in action, also of the deliberate action.

## The problem of moral action and reason in its practical use

From the perspective provided by the cognitive character of emotions, moral action is revealed in a new way. Practical reason, conceived from the point of view of positive science, has as its task to obtain the best means to achieve a specific aim. In this case, the best is equated with that which yields the greatest profit. Practical reason, in its deliberative exercise, has to focus on the calculation of that profit. This implies that the object of reason are the consequences of the act. That is to say, the morality of the act, as utilitarianism affirms, is determined by the greatest benefit that such act achieves, so reason has to calculate the consequences that the act in question will have. This conception of moral action does not



consider in its rational calculation the cognitive value embedded in emotions. Whoever deliberates in order to decide what action to take can only focus on the consequences of the act itself; personal dispositions towards the object evaluated by reason play no role, unless they can be added to the total satisfaction produced by the act.

Another way of thinking about moral action, also derived from the scientific view, is to make its goodness lie on the application of the universal law, as it happens in science as it has been conducted since the establishment of the scientific method. Something is validated as true inasmuch as it complies with a universal law. Or, rather, the same law is validated as such (and leaves the denomination of ‘mere theory’), when it is proven in practice. This, taken to the moral plane, means that an action is good when it sticks to duty, as a universal moral law. This is the claim of Kantian ethics. However, as Gadamer (1997) states:

Practical philosophy does not consist in the application of theory to practice [...] but arises from practical experience itself thanks to what is in it of reason and reasonableness. And it is that praxis does not mean to act according to certain rules or to apply knowledge, but refers to the most original situationality of the human being in his natural and social environment (p.183).

This situationality is the one that is accredited by emotions and is the one that must be incorporated in moral deliberation. This does not imply that what is valued and reported in the emotions should become, *per se*, the object of action. Emotions produce, as was said, two effects: the first is valuation and the second, motivation in pursuit of a conduct. There is no control over the first effect. There is control over the second. The human being has control over the action he decides to perform because he has control over the motor system. This fact has led the theory of moral action to focus its attention, almost exclusively, on moral action, its object, and its consequences, leaving backwards to the reflection the issue of the cognitive value of affections.

In fact, the classical doctrine of virtue takes into consideration two things: the rational (objective) evaluation of reality and the action that appears adequate in such evaluation. Emotions are considered as points of support or motivation for action, when the emotion is channeled towards the action. Although it shows the importance of modulating emotions so that they support or affirm the desire of the deliberate object as good, they are not considered themselves as carriers of knowledge. In other words, this doctrine overlooks the fact that the way in which this



reality is affected is also an evaluation (not objective-rational), which is primary, is original, and also provides extremely valuable information, because it not only says something about the reality evaluated, but also about the human being himself/herself, and that, therefore, has to be the object of interpretation and must be incorporated into moral deliberation. As stated by Nussbaum (2008):

Instead of conceiving morality as a system of principles to be captured by the impartial intellect and emotions as motivations that either support or undermine our choice to act according to those principles, we will have to consider emotions as an essential part of the system of ethical reasoning (pp. 21-22).

When ethical reasoning only takes into consideration the evaluation made by reason in its objectifying function, it puts the human being in front of the problem that such evaluations come from an act through which it is sought to capture what objects are 'in themselves'. What remains backwards to the evaluation is precisely how the human being polarizes himself towards them, how they are 'in him', a polarization that says much about the human being himself, and which, therefore, is key for the recognition of his vital position in the world. For Merleau-Ponty (1994), when the own vital situation is not considered in the deliberation, one runs the risk of proposing a project that knows nothing about the own existential being. And the problem of the annulment of affectivity as a rich source of valuation has the fatal consequence that it is never an existential annulment. In other words, who pretends, from deliberation, to annul or obviate what he/she feels, does not for that reason stop feeling it and it does not stop to be constitutive of his being, even when he/she proposes to do so. What happens is that he/she does not become conscious of what is being forged in him/her.

On the other hand, Aristotelian theory of virtue presents the habit as a way to do things acquired by the repetition of acts, deliberate - mediate or immediate - in the case of the virtuous habit, non-deliberate in the case of a vicious habit. The notion of habit, instead, as conceived by Merleau-Ponty (1994) brings us to a central issue in the analysis of moral action: when we make a decision, there is no clear and distinct understanding of the situation itself, but rather an articulation between the habitual way of communicating with reality, of moving in it, and the new way of making a decision. We are not deliberating all the time, although we are always acting. And when we do it, we do it from what we are, from a perspective, given by our habitude, our background, our inhabitation.



Everything we do, our interaction with the world, conscious and unconscious, connatural and learned, is incorporated, is a body footprint. And that footprint is what allows adequate or inadequate relationships with the surrounding world. There is, therefore, a continuous adaptation from new perceptions, and the body responds by constituting or creating a relationship with the world that serves as a base or ground for its actions, which makes it inhabit as 'at home'. "When I assume a present, I recapture and transform it, my past, I change its sense, I free myself, I get rid of it. But I only do so by committing myself elsewhere" (p. 462).

As we said at the beginning, the problem of the notion of reason understood from a merely scientific perspective is that in its practical use it cannot account for the lack of control over one's own action, a control that is primarily assumed. This is what happens when the human being carries out actions that are not in accordance with the objective rational evaluation that he/she has made, as happens in maniac acts, in compulsive obsessions, or simply when he/she 'lets himself/herself be carried away' by emotion. In both cases, he/she loses control over his/her actions precisely because an evaluation of reality that has more strength in action than any rational evaluation has been encrusted. Hence the importance of incorporating the own emotional situation in moral deliberation. This is what Nussbaum (1995) affirms:

The investigation into our own passional geography constitutes an important element of the activity of knowing ourselves. Moreover, the response of the passions is a constitutive part of the optimal type of recognition of one's own practical situation (p. 44).

Now, to accept the possibility of this incorporation in moral deliberation, implies conceiving reason itself from a paradigm different from the scientific one, since it is evident that we cannot make a clear reading of the emotional situation, as we do of the laws that govern nature; we cannot claim a 'transparent' objectification of the situationality itself. In other words, if emotions, with their evaluative content, enter as a fundamental element in moral deliberation, this implies taking into account the fact that reason, in its practical exercise, is limited, and this for two reasons: the very act of evaluative objectification typical of deliberation is subsequent to the original evaluation notified by emotions. And it cannot take an absolute distance from that first evaluation. And, second, because emotions, at the moment of being objectified, cease to be 'felt', they lose their own emotional valence, or their emotional strength. In other words, in the objectification of emotions there is something that is lost, insofar

as it remains ‘backwards to’ the objectification itself. And all this has a radical consequence: the acceptance of one’s own vulnerability.

What has been reviewed so far leads us, therefore, to think about the moral act and the freedom of such act from a new perspective. Although freedom as autonomy depends on deliberation, before the very possibility of deliberation there is polarization towards certain projects, moved by the evaluation inherent in habit. This implies accepting that freedom, as stated by Merleau-Ponty (1994), is deep-rooted: it does not exclude the habitual, and pretending to do so is denying our way of being. The free act cannot pretend to destroy the situation itself, but what happens, in fact, is that it ‘meshes with it’. And this is not the same as denying freedom. We are free beings, but we are not absolutely autonomous beings. Indeed, the first ‘autonomy’ (that of the child who becomes capable of solving problems and moving in the world) is made possible by the pre-reflexive habit, which is the embodiment of synchronization with the world, and which is affectively notified. The practical reason can take charge of affective evaluations and put them in relation to those made by rational objectification, but it cannot claim to do so from a ‘perfect’, clear reading. In this sense, emotions, like the body itself with its habits, cannot be ‘objectified’ in an absolute sense. “The body is not, thus, an object. For the same reason, the consciousness that I have of it is not a thought, that is, I cannot decompose it and recompose it to form a clear idea about it” (p. 215).

The deliberate action has to count with the fact that it cannot apply to life what it sees intellectually (or rationally) as a scientific law is applied to nature. Because it must count with all that it has incorporated (which is cultural, familiar, past history, the language from which I pre-reflexively evaluate reality), and which is the way of inhabiting the world. And culture (which conditions our beliefs) or language cannot be ‘claimed’ to block freedom, because, as we have seen, without this ‘habituality’ we could not be free either. The free subject is not a subject self-constituted from scratch from itself, as the idea of the autonomous subject pretends. It is a subject in which habit and spontaneity are always at play. And the reason, in this sense, is precarious, so that the subject cannot avoid its vulnerability.

Moral deliberation is not, therefore, comparable to calculative action: the factors that enter the weighing cannot be reduced to digits, and data are neither there that are transparently presented to us before the objective conscience. A ‘correct’ action is not possible, just as the result of an equation is correct, or the sum of ‘pros’ and ‘cons’ in the analysis of the consequences of the action. The ‘profit’ of the action is not the adequate



perspective for discovering its moral value, nor, therefore, can the efficacy of the action be.

## The model of the work of art: theoretical and practical use of reason

From what has been said so far, we can conclude that reason has deeper and more radical possibilities than the mere act of scientific matrix, by which nature or artifacts are objectified. But at the same time, it must recognize its precariousness. When its object is the human being himself and his free action, from which culture, social organization, language, art, etc. are born, there is no possibility of reducing the kaleidoscopic world that displays verifiable data, to positive data. We cannot possess the world without residue, from reason, which does not imply that reason is barred from every field in which it cannot exercise absolute domination. As Merlau-Ponty (1994) says:

The error of reflective philosophies lies on believing that the meditating subject can absorb in his/her meditation, or capture without any residue, the object about which he meditates, that our being can be reduced to our knowing. We are never, as the meditating subject, the unreflected subject that we want to know; but neither can we become entirely conscious, reduce ourselves to transcendental consciousness. If we were conscious, we would have to have the world in front of us, our history, the objects perceived in their singularity as systems of transparent relations (p. 83).

The issue that remains to be resolved is which is the real possibility of the reason. Here Gadamer's reflection on understanding is illuminating. The consideration of emotionality as an integrating part of our knowledge, as well as the consideration of the precariousness of reason, leads us to understand our own capacity of knowledge in a new way. The first: the understanding of reality is not only carried out from the action of reason (in its objectification act), but also from passion, in which it resides the reception of language, of family and cultural beliefs, and habit, as a mode of synchronization between what is received and motor action. This precariousness leads to the fact that the act of reason is better qualified from the notion of contemplation or observation (to rescue the Latin prefix *ob*, which means that something is put in front). And this is because the very notion of objectification resonates the idea of manipulation, domination, control, and verification, acts to which reason cannot aspire in the domains we have analyzed. The human being who sets out to

understand the world (not to act in it) would then be conceived as a spectator who participates, from that very contemplation, in the spectacle.

Gadamer (1993), in order to show what understanding implies, resorts to the recovery of the notion of theory, as the Greeks understood it. Theorós, for the Greeks, was the person who participated in a festive embassy, in which his function was determined by the sole attendance. This concept refers to the spectator in the truest sense of the word: he/she participates in the festive act and such participation determines its sacral juridical character. Greek philosophy understood, therefore, theory as attending what is, but this contemplative attendance was not determined from the action of subjectivity, but from what is contemplated.

Theory, from this perspective, was true participation, suffering the drag of contemplation rather than a doing. The objective of theoretical activity consisted, therefore, not in the control of the observed, as in science, nor in the transformation of the observed, but in the participation of the manifest truth. From this perspective, theoretical reason would have as its own act to stop or move away from daily action, from the pragma, to commit to the contemplation of the spectacle of reality, but not to transform it, but only to contemplate it, affirms Rivera (1999). Now, this assistance is not purely passive, but there is, as we said, an action. Or, rather, two: the first would be to get ready for contemplation itself and the second, to pay attention to what is contemplated. As it happens in a theatrical play, for example, those who are ready to be spectators know that they do not have to act in the face of the events presented as they would act in everyday life. He/She does not have to solve problems or deliberate on moral action in pursuit of a decision. In other words, his/her action must be limited to contemplation, not to intervention on what he/she contemplates. In this sense, it is a contemplation that happens 'in itself', not 'for me'; it is not a contemplation with a view to action. The paradigm of contemplation as participation thus serves, for Gadamer, to characterize the own act of reason in its theoretical use.

The paradigmatic example, for this author (1993), of this type of contemplative participation is given in Greek tragedy, since the objective in it is not the simple presentation of events, but the catharsis of the spectator. The effect of the play on the spectator is, therefore, part of the essence of the tragic. For this reason, the participation of the spectator in the tragedy is constitutive of the tragedy itself, and its contemplation is strict participation. The presence of the spectator is not added to the work as something accidental. Now, this participation of the spectator is not an action that interferes with the story presented by the tragic play:



he/she can only accept the events. However, the events presented are there to achieve the effect on the spectator. His/Her role as observer, not player, is crucial, otherwise the tragic play would not exist. He/She is the one for whom the play is acted, for whom tragedy is made. But what is of interest is the play itself. From this perspective, the notion of theoretical reason recovers what for Aristotle was an exclusively human desire: to know for the sake of knowing.

Now, the model of tragedy provides us with yet another element for our reflection: the human being, when he contemplates the world from the 'distance' of observation, engages with it and does so also from his affective dispositions. In other words, if in life itself the first sphere of valuation is emotionality, the exercise by excellence of reason cannot but engage that same sphere of value, but now from the distance provided by the act of theoretical reason. When reason sets out to observe the human world without acting in it and without the objective of using it, the sphere of emotions also comes into play, as happens in tragedy, which aims at the catharsis of the spectator. In this sense, the very contemplation of reality would imply an existential catharsis, a liberation. The spectator of the play, moreover, knows that his/her own understanding of it depends on the interpretation made by the players and, beyond that, by the own director. And not only that: in front of a play it is evident that this same interpretation is impregnated with emotional valuations, with the inherent beliefs that they entail. There is, therefore, no neutral or clear understanding, reducible to data. It is neither of the world.

Nussbaum (1995), on the other hand, also uses the model of Greek tragedy, but with a different objective than Gadamer. As in all his work, his interest is focused on practical reason, on the issue of moral deliberation. For this author, tragedy is essentially about the vulnerability of the human being, of the problem of his/her freedom, which shows, on the one hand, the rationality of man, who pretends and believes to dominate the course of his life, and the confrontation with fortune, with everything that happens to the person without his/her active intervention, what simply happens to him/her. What tragedy is about is precisely to show the failure of "(...) the aspiration to rational self-sufficiency in Greek ethical thought; this aspiration can be characterized as the desire to make the good of human life safe from fortune through the power of reason" (p. 31). The seduction of the spectator's soul points precisely to participation in this failure, which implies a knowledge of human vulnerability. This vulnerability occurs on three levels: the first is that of activities and relationships which, by their nature, are especially vulnerable to change and to moving. All



inter-human relationships are subject to this unmanageable vulnerability of the person who exercises them and of the person with whom he/she enters the relationship. The second level is that of the mutual relationships between the activities that the human being carries out, activities that, in fact, at more than one moment are opposed to each other, and require incompatible courses of action. The third level designates the relationship between the self-sufficiency of reason and the less governable parts of the inner structure of the human being. The effect of purgation, the seduction of tragedy, will not only, says the author, show these three levels of conflict, but will make the spectator participate in this vulnerability.

The type of knowledge to which tragedy invited, for the Greeks, was not, therefore, according to Nussbaum (1995) only that of a thematic reflection of the ethical matter, but a display of the ethical problem of vulnerability and participation of the problem from the cathartic effect, which manifested that same vulnerability. For the Greeks there was no radical separation between what we today consider philosophical texts and literary texts: both were equally important reflections of the ethical issue: "For them there were human lives and their problems, and, on the other hand, various genres in prose and verse in the framework of which such matters could be reflected upon" (p. 40). The importance of the exhibition of truth is shown, then, in the dynamics of tragedy, in which the spectator encounters a truth, which is manifested to him. Participation, therefore, is in the strictest sense of the word. Not only is the truth exhibited to the spectator by showing him/her a world that 'refers to' or 'opens a new sense' to his/her world, but he/she himself/herself participates in that open world and understands its truth from his/her own experience in front of the play. For the one who makes sense, he/she makes an experience of the truth that he/she has in front of his/her eyes, joining to the cognitive activity an emotive response.

The very fact that the spectator's response involves emotivity is, for the author, a crucial fact, since contemplation itself leads us to bring into play the psychophysical device that human beings have to access the sphere of value. In this way, both tragedy and any literary work provide us with an experience of our own emotional situation, but in a different way from how this is put into play in everyday action: it does so from the distance of representation. What the spectator contemplates arouses an emotion, which is therefore linked to his or her intimate sphere of value. The fact that these emotions emerge in the face of the narrative work or tragedy has the advantage that they do so outside the sphere of action, in which an immediate response is demanded. In other words, in the midst of pragma,



emotions are often motors of action, and, in many cases, of non-deliberate action. Or, in deliberation itself, the compulsion for a response in the face of the demanded action often leads us to disregard the cognitive content of the emotion. Precisely because what is demanded is an action.

For Nussbaum, therefore, literary works are presented as an opportunity for human beings to discover what they really value or believe. They are, therefore, privileged occasions for moral deliberation. When we access to the narrated story, we engage, as we have seen, as reader-spectators, with the narrative. But the commitment is not, in the primary sense, moral, but fictional. This enables a less risky scenario, more controlled, than the vital scenario for the emergence of emotion. And it enables taking distance -of a relative distance- necessary for deliberation, while at the same time it enables us to take charge of the sphere of emotionality, without attempting to control it. Literature, therefore, enables us to contemplate our own emotionality in a freer way, i.e., in a moment of freedom that is not urged by the need to decide. This freedom, therefore, favors a profound reflection of our own being, which has in front of it not only the future, the future action that we must carry out, but also the past, because in the emotion there is a recognition of our history and of our cultural situation, our way of inhabiting the world, which is essential for genuine moral deliberation.

One last issue, which we will not deal with in-depth but which we feel it is important to point out, is the relevance that the author gives to literature in the education of democratic citizens. For her, narrative imagination allows us to forge empathy, since through the exercise of being readers or spectators we can put ourselves in the situation of the other from the place of our own vulnerability to commune, in that place, with the vulnerability of the other. In other words, through imagination, literature leads us to occupy positions that are not those we have in real life, and in those positions, emotions emerge that transfer us, from our primary sphere of value to the sphere of value of those who indeed occupy that position in real life. This makes us capable, therefore, of a genuine dialogue with the other more human, because it is propitiated by empathy. And it makes us, even more, to discover common values, because if we can empathize, it is because there are, latent in the emotions, shared primary values of the world.

## Conclusions

The very fact that the first layer of valuation is not deliberate, implies that the very action of reason is much more complex than what is usually be-



lied from objectivist theories. In emotionality, which is the first device of valuation, there are embedded beliefs and ways of embracing reality that are not trivial, and that cannot be ignored in moral deliberation. We can only access to the plane of value from the emotion, so this plane must not be suppressed, because if we do so we limit this same deliberative act.

Now, understanding the own act of theoretical reason from the paradigm of contemplation and participation is, therefore, fundamental for a reorientation of the act of practical reason. Only because the act of theoretical reason, which is the act through which the human being seeks what the world is 'in itself', can, from the perspectives reviewed here, have as its object the human being himself and the world that he/she constructs, it is possible to understand the act of moral deliberation by including in it the own emotionality. In other words, only if emotion itself can be brought to contemplation, can moral deliberation include the valuations embedded in it as part of its weighting. This possibility, as we have seen, is limited itself by the complexity of factors involved in emotion and because reason itself, in its action, depends on presuppositions (presuppositions that are also inscribed in emotionality and that cannot be possessed without residue in reflection). This limitation implies the acceptance of the own vulnerability, inasmuch as deliberation cannot assume in its reflection all the factors that influence the construction of the world. And not only that, it implies being willing to experience that vulnerability, since in the exercise of contemplation of our own emotions we are confronted with those same emotions in which the lack of control over ourselves is accredited.

The challenge posed by the topic addressed here has multiple edges. One of them points directly to education. And this, from different perspectives. One of them is the one proposed by Cepeda (2021) in his study on the subject in the cognitive sciences:

Emphasizing emotions as a process of human development is a task that can and should be inserted into the educational field, the functioning of the brain is closely linked to the emotional dimension, and this in turn, with the experiences that are recorded from the contact with the environment, therefore, retaking this consideration is not only conceived as a favorable scenario for the subject, but also for society (p.131).

Very congruent with the above is the perspective addressed by Nussbaum in Nonprofit (2010): the task that is urgent is the education of democratic citizens, and for this purpose education in arts and literature is crucial, since these disciplines enable the formation of empathy. The



acceptance of the own vulnerability and the encounter with the other from that vulnerability leads to, as we said, a profound dialogue with the other, since the natural attitude of defense towards the other is demolished. Moreover, this reestablishes confidence, no longer understood as the result of absolute control, but as faith in another who is at the same time vulnerable. Nussbaum (1997) states:

The literary works that promote identification and emotional reaction break down these stratagems of self-protection, force us to look closely at many things that can be painful to face and make this process digestible by giving us pleasure in the very act of confrontation (p. 30).

Now, not only is education in arts important for this purpose. It is also important to the extent that artistic education leads to recover an activity typical to reason: contemplation. The implementation of this attitude in the process of education leads to the development of the capacity to be freely interested in truth. In the field of arts, this gratuity is essential, and thus it presents itself as a propitious scenario to return to a relationship with truth that is not marked by utility or profit. In other words, it is not only necessary, as Nussbaum proposes, to recover literature and art as a place of recognition of one's own situation and that of the other, in pursuit of a richer deliberation and the recognition of the own vulnerability, but also to recover the very exercise of gratuitous contemplation, to return to the exercise of knowing for the sake of knowing, which detonated philosophy.

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Document receipt date: Abril 3, 2021  
Document review date: July 15, 2021  
Document approval date: September 10, 2021  
Document publication date: January 15, 2021