Book Reviews

Gilmore, Jonathan, *Apt Imaginings: Feelings for Fictions and Other Creatures of the Mind.*
New York and London: Oxford University Press, 2020, pp. x + 258.

Jonathan Gilmore's *Apt Imaginings: Feelings for Fictions and Other Creatures of the Mind* provides readers with insights in three distinct and venerable philosophical topics—fiction, art, and imagination—and addresses the delicate connections between them. It is both a helpful guide for scholars and students interested in the former, and an original perspective on the latter.

The text is extremely reader-friendly. It offers a clear introduction which functions as a helpful guide to navigate the text. In addition, every chapter consists in a careful overview of the debate to which the specific section refers to, so that most chapters can be considered as self-standing pieces. From a stylistic point of view, not only does the text flow very naturally, but it always manages to maintain a balance between the accuracy and richness of the linguistic choices and the accessibility of the content. Word from a non-native speaker of English.

The book explicitly revolves around a fundamental question which haunts both the philosophical and the psychological debate about fiction, that is whether and how our psychological reactions to fictional objects differ from those elicited by real-world experiences. Gilmore phrases this question in a clever fashion, that is by asking if there is *continuity* or *discontinuity* between our engagement with fiction and with our life. Zooming out, one easily sees that he is interested in an even broader and possibly more fundamental task, i.e. finding out if life and art can or cannot be reasonably placed along some sort of continuum.

Ambitious as they may seem, however, these questions—the one about fiction and reality and the one about art and life—are addressed in the book by exploiting the tools of analytic philosophy combined with psychological insights, so that this brave endeavor is immediately presented as a manageable one. Notably and uncommonly in the analytic debate, Gilmore is deeply aware that, in so doing, he runs the risk of depicting a "too dry, too rationalizing, or too abstract" portrait of aesthetically relevant issues. Yet, as he himself acknowledges by quoting Wordsworth: we cannot but murder if we need to dissect (14).

What is particularly convincing in Gilmore's argumentative strategy is its point of departure, which consists in the distinction too often overlooked in contemporary aesthetics between *the normative* and *the descriptive*. In short, while a normative perspective assesses the kinds of reasons that justify our cognitive, emotional, and conative responses to art and life, a descriptive perspective focuses on possible neurological, psychological, and phenomenal explanations of such responses.

Relevantly, it is argued, psychological descriptions of our responses to fiction (and, more broadly, art) do not always respond to those rational norms that allegedly govern their epistemic justification. In Gilmore's own words: "psychology doesn't always respect ontology" (14), i.e. what happens in our mind and brains do not necessarily go hand in hand with the way we want to justify our judgments about what's in the world. Thus, what he names the "continuity question" can be dealt with in different ways or, better, at two distinct levels.

Such a discrepancy allows the author to advocate normative discontinuity between fiction and reality, in spite of the descriptive continuity one might observe when offering psychological explanations of our responses in the two realms:

> I argue for normative discontinuity: make-believing is not epistemically rational in the same sense as believing, and the norms governing our desires, emotions, and moral evaluations vis-à-vis what is internal to a fiction can be inconsistent with those governing our responses to relevantly similar things in the real world (8).

According to the author, premising the distinction between the two levels of analysis allows the proposed account to avoid, on the one hand, the potential reductionist drifts of continuism, i.e. the idea that experiences of fictional works and real experiences are, all in all, the same thing; on the other hand, it dodges the difficulties encountered by discontinuism in accounting for what our emotional and cognitive responses to fiction and reality have in common.

The structure of the book proceeds by introducing all the ingredients one by one, so as to provide the reader with every necessary tool to understand the recipe. It presents a broadly conceived and relatively uncontroversial *cognitive theory of the imagination* according to which imagination amounts to a cognitive attitude paired with a propositional content. Such an attitude is descriptively continuous with beliefs, yet distinguishable from them on the basis of its functional role within our mental architecture. On this background, the kind of imagination required to engage with fiction is shown to demand for a more specific explanation than the one provided by mainstream cognitive theories. In particular, it is contended that factors which are *external* to our psychological engagement with fictions contribute to determine what and how should be imagined as holding in a fiction. The readers' identification of the story's genre, her awareness of its author's communicative intentions, and her ends as a consumer of fiction "shape which imaginings—of all those that a work might cause—would count as appropriate responses" to that work (30).

The following chapter is devoted to a rather syncretistic theory of emotions. The proposed view tries to combine insights from appraisal-based accounts of affects, with empirically grounded theories of emotions considered as subdoxastic reactions to stimuli. Descriptive continuity between the nature of emotions felt towards fiction and the real world is explained and defended. Yet, paralleling the structure of the previous chapter, the need for supplementing what is available on the emotion-theory market with a more focused account of emotional reactions to fiction (and artworks) is expressed (83).

Once the premises are displayed, the discussion comes into focus as to what normative continuity can vindicate over discontinuity. Chapter 4 is indeed dedicated to individuate the common assumptions of these two perspectives, namely—and unsurprisingly—the fact that they all commit to the role of emotions' *aptness*, that is, the fact that emotional reactions respond to some normative standard. The author acknowledges that normative continuity can account for our tendency to consider people's emotional responses to fiction as revealing of related real-world attitudes. Nonetheless, discontinuity is convincingly defended in Chapter 5 via the argument that aesthetic evaluations have the power to make certain emotions apt towards fictions that would be inapt in real-world situations.

Where the argument becomes subtle and more technical (but that doesn't make it any less accessible), is in Chapter 6, which leverages on the possibility to distinguish between the cognitive or representational component of emotions and their purely affective side. The question raised about emotional reactions in this chapter and for conative, epistemic and moral attitudes in the next two chapters is, roughly: are make-belief attitudes governed by the same rationality we usually

ascribe to belief-involving attitudes? Notably, when this question is applied to conative states, it prompts the challenging issue of mutually inconsistent desires. Instead, when it is reformulated having moral evaluations in mind, it triggers another debated aspect of our experiences of fiction, namely the possibility to produce judgments that are in explicit conflict with what would be considered good or desirable in the corresponding real-world situations.

In each chapter from 5 to 8, the question why the norms that govern our attitudes within practices taking place in real contexts differ from those that govern our responses within artistic (and fictional) contexts is convincingly answered by endorsing a functionalist view. In short: the kinds of reasons that justify our emotional, imaginative, and conative states would depend on the *functions* of the practices in which they are deployed.

Building on the rigorous architecture of the text, the author eventually manages to guide us to the very dense and conclusive Chapter 9. Here, the functionalist account the reader has familiarized with so far, finds its fulfilment in the delicate notion of artistic function. After admitting that artworks of any given kind can have a long and ever-changing series of functions—in light of which they can be evaluated as artworks (9.1)—Gilmore introduces *constitutive functions* as those essential to the artwork's identity (9.2). As such, constitutive functions normatively constrain our responses to art (and fiction), for they offer criteria against which our reactions can be considered apt or inadequate.

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On the just sketched background, and among the many issues raised by the book, there are two aspects of Gilmore's admirable work that I would like to focus on. The first point is more general and concerns the pivotal distinction between *art and life* once one endorses normative discontinuity. The second, partially related point, has to do with the nature of what the author names *criterial qualities*.

As to the first point, there seems to be a sort of fluctuation throughout the book between the concept of art and that of fiction—and fictional narrative in particular. These two notions appear to play the same functional role in the argument's structure. This is not necessarily problematic as long as, whenever these terms are used, the author introduces examples and contextual elements that allow readers to grasp whether the explanatory weight is on the fictional or on the artistic side. What remains only partially addressed, however, is where exactly we shall draw the line of normative discontinuity between art and real life. As a matter of fact, artefacts belong to a wide variety of categories and so do fictional narratives, so that a sharp distinction might be hard to demarcate. I see three options, each of which is partly consistent with the view presented in the book, but still leads to unwanted consequences.

One first option would be to insist on the much debated distinction between fiction and non-fiction so as to individuate the two domains to which normative discontinuity applies. Take narratives for example. In this reading, there would be normative criteria that apply to fictional narratives and allow us to evaluate the aptness of our responses to such works, while different criteria would apply to non-fictional narratives such as historical reports or documentaries. This is not only reasonable, but also does justice to Gilmore's view that our deep imaginative engagement with fiction, i.e. *absorption*, is governed by specific criteria. However, as a result, we would have to conflate the category of fictional narratives and the category of artworks, as opposed to the category of real life encompassing non-

fictional reports. I am doubtful that Gilmore himself would be happy to take this path.

An alternative solution would be to apply normative discontinuity to the categorical discontinuity between aesthetically valuable and non-aesthetically valuable artifacts. Provided that the class of the aesthetic valuable narratives overlaps with the class of the artistic narratives, this reading would do justice to Gilmore's fundamental project of accounting for the distinction between art and life. Suppose we can take this overlapping for granted: we would have a helpful criterion to place the demarcation line between the norms that regulate the aptness of our reactions to art on the one hand, and those that govern our reactions to non-artistically relevant situations, on the other hand. Yet, this would imply accepting an expensive trade-off. For while granting the discontinuity between art and non-art, we would have to accept that there is normative continuity between our attitudes towards non-aesthetically valuable narratives and real life experiences. Again, this outcome is not unacceptable *per se*, but it does not mirror the difference we normally seize between life and (some of) the ways in which it is narrated. On the contrary, we (and Gilmore) may want to preserve the normative distinction between our reactions to real-life contexts and our reactions to narratives *qua* artifacts.

Finally, if we keep our focus on the case of narrative artifacts, normative discontinuity might apply to the categorical discontinuity between narrative and non-narrative objects. This reading is fully consistent with the claim that—unlike other experiences or ways that give us access to facts—narratives present us their objects from someone else's perspective, in a relatively *opaque* way, exploiting narrative tools in order to emphasize or diminish the importance of certain features, and thereby requiring some specific sort of imaginative engagement (42). But if normative discontinuity applied to narrative versus non-narrative objects, then we would have to treat all narratives as governed by those same norms that govern art—as opposed to real-life experiences. Nonetheless, narratives seem to trigger our responses in a specific way which differs from the way we engage with other kinds of artefacts—namely through absorption and the subsequent deployment of a certain perspective. This makes me think that the demarcation line between different normative domains cannot be drawn without consequences, thereby leaving the question open for further clarifications.

The second aspect that I found particularly challenging and worth discussing is Gilmore's notion of what he names *criterial qualities*, understood as those evaluative properties that emotions, desires, and moral evaluations present their objects as possessing (46). As we have seen, *Apt Imaginings* endorses a form of moderate cognitivism for affects, according to which an emotion should be responsive to the presence (or the absence) in its intentional object of the related criterial qualities. The same holds, with due specifications, for all evaluative attitudes. Moreover, following Peter Lamarque,[1] the argument takes narrative representations to be opaque, in that events, characters, and states of affairs are inherently constituted by the way in which they are described and narrated. Therefore, evaluative properties depend for their instantiation on the perspective from which they are introduced by creators and accessed by recipients: from within or from without the narrative; from a first or third person perspective; from the point of view of this or that character. In sum, they are inherently *perspectival features*.

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[1] Lamarque, P. 2014, *The Opacity of Narrative*, Lanham: Rowman & Littlefield.

This amounts to saying that evaluative attitudes (emotions, desires, moral evaluations) are crucial for accessing and engaging with (especially fictional) narratives. Only if we feel, desire something for or about, or judge what is being narrated, we can actually grasp the perspectival features that constitute a work. However, this inherent perspectivalness seems to characterize evaluative properties of works independent of their being instantiated by fictional or non-fictional narratives. That is, all narratives are more or less opaque and present us with a perspective on facts, rather than with facts themselves. And all narratives require that we adopt the corresponding evaluative attitudes in order to get absorbed and to pick up their specific features.

The worry is thus whether this speaks in favor of normative *continuity* between—at least—fictional and non-fictional narratives. For this suggests that the same criterial qualities we grasp in evaluative attitudes not only systematically correlate with similar psychological mechanisms underpinning evaluative attitudes towards both fiction and non-fiction (in line with the descriptive continuity defended in the book), but that they are also the *criteria based on which we evaluate the aptness of* our evaluative responses to both fiction and non-fiction.

Should this concern be well-founded, then one may simply reply that, rather than with a radical discontinuity, we are dealing with a graded scale of opacity. Such a scale would ideally range from evaluative features instantiated by fictional narratives—independently of the corresponding features in the real world—to evaluative features presented within a more transparent perspective, typically instantiated by non-fiction.

Or maybe the reply can be found in the last chapter, titled *Artistic functions.* Although Gilmore declares that his "appeal to functions in this chapter is detachable from [his] arguments for discontinuity" (202), such an appeal to artistic functions as what actually—metaphysically—identifies artworks, their criterial qualities and therefore the way we are expected to respond to them, hints at a viable route. If we define artifacts in general and artworks in particular based on their intended purpose, then normative discontinuity can be grounded in the kind of artifact that is in front of us. This avoids the problems stemming from the definitions based on intentional attitudes. On this view, for instance, imaginings would be *apt* only as long as the metaphysical structure of a work prescribes them, the same holding for emotions, desires, and moral evaluations. Thus, despite the tangible effort made by the author to provide an extremely balanced account throughout the book, some readers can eventually be tempted to look for more radical solutions, whose seeds are already present in the text. And this is an extra merit of this work.

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Torbjörn Tännsjö, *Setting Health-Care Priorities: What Ethical Theories Tell Us.* New York: Oxford University Press, 2019, pp. xiv + 212.

The problem of setting priorities for the allocation of healthcare resources is one of the most pressing issues in today's discussion on bioethics and one on which different ethical theories have relevant contributions to offer. Normative ethical theories pursue a systematic evaluation of several relevant considerations to establish which allocative decisions are justified, when not all medical needs can be

satisfied. Tännsjö's book provides a careful discussion of the most important theories in the field of distributive justice and an examination of their consequences in the context of healthcare allocation. Specifically, the book concentrates on four main theories, namely utilitarianism, the Rawlsian theory, egalitarianism, and prioritarianism; its main conclusion is that, assuming levels of well-being as the common currency for comparing them, the practical consequences of these theories for healthcare allocation tend to converge. All theories, that is, strongly suggest redirecting healthcare resources from the present attempt to provide marginal life extension to elderly and terminally ill patients to catering for the needs of mentally ill patients. However, Tännsjö concludes by noting that such a practical convergence is likely to prove ineffective in real life; in fact, the power of human irrationality is such that the good reasons offered by philosophical theory will very likely be disregarded.

Tännsjö starts his discussion from utilitarianism, or "the view that we ought to maximize the sum total of happiness in the universe" (9). Happiness is traditionally conceived as the surplus of pleasures over pains, and Tännsjö has famously defended such a classic, hedonistic account.[1] Moreover, he has also defended the traditional act-centered version of utilitarianism, and this is his favored approach also in this contribution, which completely eschews the hypothesis of rule-utilitarianism. Tännsjö is well aware of the several problems that have been raised concerning utilitarianism's capacity to deal with distributive issues and particularly to take into account the 'separateness of persons'. Nonetheless, he believes that utilitarianism is overall the most defensible normative theory and that some of its consequences which have been strongly criticized are defensible: for example, its ageistic implications, according to which the duty to maximize the sum total of happiness leads to a general prioritization in favor of the younger, or the fact that we should not consider starting points when distributing happiness, but simply go for the highest increase in happiness, even if this will benefit those who are already better off.

The view that the worst off deserve special priority in the distribution has been much popularized by Rawls' theory of justice as fairness, which Tännsjö calls the 'maximin/leximin theory'. According to this theory, everyone should be granted fair equality of opportunity, and distributive inequalities are justified only to the extent that they favor the worst off. Tännsjö blames this view for three main faults. For one thing, the 'maximin/leximin view' is much more ageist than utilitarianism. Conceiving early death as the worst possible outcome, this view justifies prioritizing younger people over elderly ones in all situations, including those in which the elderly may benefit more from being treated. This, of course, would not be allowed by utilitarianism. Moreover, the Rawlsian theory does not take people's suffering seriously enough. In fact, in comparing the respective claims of different individuals, it concentrates on their entire lives: therefore, it tends to downplay the present severe suffering of someone who overall is comparatively well off, prioritizing the less urgent needs of some other patient who has had a less happy life. Finally, it does not consider the ability of different individuals to transform resources into happiness; therefore, it allows that some people who are among the worst off (and therefore deserve priority) and who perform badly in that transformation drain most of the available resources without achieving any considerable happiness. In other words, the maximin/leximin theory may lead to

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[1] Tännsjö, T. 1998, *Hedonistic Utilitarianism*, Edinburgh: Edinburgh University Press.

the existence of individuals who may be called 'utility thieves', because they would cause a tragic waste of resources.

Another approach to justice that departs from the maximizing attitude of utilitarianism is egalitarianism. This view derives from the equal value of persons the paramount value of equality in distribution; since equality is *per se* valuable, egalitarians tend to accept that more equal distributions are better, even if they require a sort of leveling down, that is, an action that makes someone less well off without bettering the position of anyone else. The point of this theory is that anyone's condition cannot be defined in absolute terms but is always relative to the conditions of other people. Accepting the common currency of happiness, we can say that, for egalitarianism, the value of an outcome for every individual must be weighted with a factor indicating her position on a scale that evaluates all-life happiness. The fact that disadvantaging someone for the sake of equality is better in one respect does not commit the egalitarian to any actual leveling down; this can be avoided if the egalitarian also takes into consideration the value of the sum total of happiness and refrains from equalizing when such sum would be thereby reduced. According to Tännsjö, egalitarianism has the advantage, compared to the Rawlsian theory, to limit prioritization of the worst off to the extent that this realizes equality; however, it shares the drawback of disregarding the importance of suffering, since it will give priority to alleviating the mild suffering of someone who is comparatively worse off over sparing intense suffering to another one who is better off.

The fourth theory discussed by Tännsjö is prioritarianism. This is the approach according to which what matters in distributive decisions is the absolute level of happiness or well-being that each is experiencing. People who are particularly unfortunate have a privileged claim to resources to enhance their situation; however, according to this view the fact that the condition of some individual B is worsened in no way confers a benefit to another individual A who is less well-off unless the resources taken away from B are given to A. Prioritarianism does not accept an unconditional priority for the worst off, but suggests that there is a limit to the quantity of utility that can be sacrificed to ameliorate their predicament: it justifies choosing a modest increase of the happiness of the worst off over a slightly larger increase of the happiness of the better off, but it does not sanction the loss of a large amount of happiness for the well off for the sake of a small increase of happiness for the worst off. According to Tännsjö, prioritarianism is as much plausible as it does not put excessive weight on the increments of happiness of the worst off, that is, it is plausible inasmuch it does not sacrifice too much utility. Moreover, the best version of the theory is the one in which the assignments of weights is made by reference to the present conditions of happiness, and not taking into account entire lives. In fact, if we compare the levels of happiness of entire lives, prioritarianism becomes extensionally equivalent to egalitarianism, and shares the egalitarian (and Rawlsian) insensitiveness to suffering. Overall, Tännsjö's idea is that prioritarianism should be conceived of as an amendment to utilitarianism: the theory "urges us to maximize a weighted sum total of happiness, where utilitarianism urges to maximize a sum total of happiness as such" (50).

Tännsjö believes that all four theories are at least highly plausible; however, there are powerful objections that can be raised against the maximin/leximin theory and egalitarianism. While utilitarianism has its difficulties as well, it is nonetheless the most defensible view; prioritarian amendments to it have intuitive appeal, but in most cases they should be discarded. At all events, Tännsjö suggests that, from a practical point of view, all the accounts discussed suggest that we

cease to raise the number of resources invested in healthcare, and that, within the healthcare budget, we redirect resources from the attempt to provide marginal life extension to elderly and terminally ill patients to cater for the urgent needs of mentally ill patients. At the same time, he suspects that this theoretical convergence is likely to prove irrelevant in practice. For one thing, all sorts of compromise will be necessary for implementing the theories in real life, and the result may be a convergence on the actual practice; secondly, even when the reasons for diverging from the actual practice are clear and accepted by everyone, most people will not comply with the suggested policy: not because the theoretical requirements are practically impossible to implement, but because of the superior power of human irrationality. The conclusion is a bit desolate: "in real life, all attempts at radically changing the system of health-care rationing in direction of what is demanded by ideal theory, be it the maximin/leximin theory, egalitarianism or utilitarianism (with or without some added prioritarian concern), are in most cases bound to fail" (199).

This book is an important and timely contribution to an urgent debate in practical ethics. It offers an in-depth analysis of several normative theories and insights into their practical consequences. It also provides rich information on relevant facts concerning issues such as assisted reproduction, mental illness, orphan drugs, or research on cognitive enhancement. In what follows, I wish to put forward three critical considerations, concerning the characterization of prioritarianism, the prospects for convergence among the theories, and the relationship of moral philosophy to actual practices.

As for the first point, it can be suggested that the prioritarian approach should be considered as an amendment to egalitarianism, rather than to utilitarianism.[2] The basic idea of prioritarianism, as originally suggested by Nagel,[3] is not the maximization of a weighted sum total of happiness, but the urgency of providing help to people who are badly off. This idea incorporates a reading of the egalitarian account that differs from 'the equity view', according to which we should give to everyone equal chances of getting a certain benefit (e.g. some medical treatment), from those forms of 'telic egalitarianism' that consider equality as *per se* valuable, and also from the maximin/leximin unconditional prioritization of the worst off. The specificity of the solution offered by prioritarianism lies in the attempt to take into consideration both the urgency of protecting people against basic forms of suffering and unhappiness and the requirement to provide for effective use of the available resources.

According to prioritarianism, the fact that someone is comparatively worse off is a *pro tanto* reason to prioritize in her favor. This poses limits on utilitarian aggregation because it prevents conferring small benefits to a very large set of better off people rather than bestowing a significant benefit on one worse off individual; however, it also differs from other forms of egalitarianism because it does not conceive of inequalities as inherently bad, and therefore does not accept any leveling down, nor any unconditional prioritization of the worst off. The view requires that a reasonable balance be struck between providing relief to people who

[2] For this suggestion, see for example Fleurbaey, M., Tungodden, B., and Vallentyne, P. 2009, "On the Possibility of Nonaggregative Priority for the Worst Off", *Social Philosophy and Policy*, 26, 1, 258-85.

[3] Nagel, T. 1978, "The Justification of Equality", *Crítica: Revista Hispanoamericana de Filosofía*, 10, 28, 3-31.

are particularly in need and maximizing the benefits obtained by the available resources. Prioritarianism's concern for those who are most suffering makes it come close to egalitarianism and makes treating it as an amendment of utilitarianism doubtful; for the theory does not attribute value only to the quantitative increase in welfare, but also to the fact that the benefits fall on individuals in dire need. In other words, prioritarianism presupposes a pluralistic account of value, contrary to the monistic conception defended by utilitarianism.

As for the second point, it can be suggested that Tännsjö's confidence in the theoretical convergence of the theories is far from warranted. To give just an example, Tännsjö's main suggestion is that all theories would converge on redirecting our resources to the treatment of people with chronic illness or disabilities. However, utilitarianism's endorsement of QALYs may justify that, in a case where competition between two individuals exists for the use of a single medical resource, priority be given to an otherwise healthy patient over a patient who suffers from a chronic disease if the former will allow a larger increase in QALY; moreover, the theory will generally suggest investing in the treatment of acute diseases, that are amenable to complete recovery, rather than of chronic ones, in which the therapeutic output will always be less than optimal. On the contrary, both maximin/leximin and egalitarianism will favor treating the patient who is initially worse off and will suggest granting more resources to chronic diseases, even if this may not yield optimific results. And, if my suggested interpretation of the theory is right, prioritarianism would side with these egalitarian perspectives, at least in many cases. Similar differences in practical conclusions may emerge, I suggest, if we consider other topics, such as the non-therapeutic uses of assisted reproduction or biomedical research on cognitive enhancement.

Finally, it seems to me that Tännsjö's thesis concerning the ineffectiveness of moral philosophy in bringing about changes in actual practices may be questioned. Just think of the profound modifications that the stress posed by philosophers and lawyers on such topics as autonomy and informed consent has caused in the patient-physician relationship in the last decades. The efficacy of the bioethical discourse in granting a pivotal role to patient's autonomy and in introducing the very notion of fair distribution of resources into the medical domain is difficult to deny. If Tännsjö's prediction nonetheless seems to make sense, it is probable that the failure of attempts to redirect medical resources must not be ascribed to human irrationality, but to a different cause; namely, to the influence of other ideas opposing the conclusions of the theories we examined. A decisive influence may be exerted, for example, by the equal chances view (one that the author excludes from the set of the most plausible approaches), according to which everyone, irrespective of age and prognosis, has a right to receive all the healthcare resources that may obtain even a marginal life extension. If this is true, the reason why elderly people do not want to let go of their lives may not be that they fail to bring their intentions and motivations in line with their theoretical beliefs, but that they are not convinced that giving up on marginal life extension is right and fair, to begin with; and the reason for this may lie in philosophical ideas that have achieved an exaggerated (if probably implicit) success in contemporary medicine. Attempting to change such deep-seated ideas is perhaps one of the most essential contributions of philosophical reflection in the present situation.

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Formato, Federica, *Gender, Discourse and Ideology in Italian.*
London, Palgrave Macmillan, 2019, pp. XX + 299.

1. A Summary

In *Gender, Discourse and Ideology in Italian*, Federica Formato provides an insightful examination of how Italian gendered expressions are used to convey and reinforce a specific gender ideology. In what follows, I briefly summarize the five chapters of the book.

In the first chapter, Formato argues why it is especially interesting to focus on Italy when studying gender. In particular, she argues that Italy is a *fruitful epistemological site*, namely "a physical space that can provide interesting and investigation-worth data" (1). Indeed, Italy is characterized by the cult of physical beauty and by a language with heavy gender marking that makes it easy to box people in fixed gendered categories, coupled with language ideology that represents a patriarchal cultural system and society.[1]

The second chapter is devoted to analyzing gender in Italian. Following Hellinger and Bußmann,[2] Formato identifies Italian as a language with grammatical gender and provides a taxonomy of Italian nouns according to their behavior with respect to gender. She identifies four categories: *lexical gender*, *morphological gender*, *syntactical gender*, also defined in Marcato and Thüne,[3] and *nouns with no gender*. Formato then briefly discusses the notions of androcentrism and sexism in language. She draws on Sara Mills' distinction between direct and indirect sexism, only the first being visible in linguistic forms.[4] According to Formato, Italian, being a grammatical gender language, is characterized by direct sexism. She then provides a further taxonomy, based on the previous, but adapted "to explain how the manipulation of grammatical forms can occur in practice" (54). This classification explores how the nouns, from all the categories presented above, are used with respect to social gender, namely "the extra-linguistic factors that speakers (and writers) generally associate with, and attribute to, language on the basis of gender, e.g. stereotypes, and, commonly held views of the societal and cultural arrangements of women and men" (50). Importantly, in this taxonomy, Formato distinguishes different usages of the generic masculine. In Italian, the masculine is not only used for men but also for mixed-gender groups, regardless of the proportion of members of each gender. For example, 'alunni' (pupils) in 'gli alunni sono 70% ragazze e 30% ragazzi' (pupils are 70% girls and 30% boys) is masculine. Formato labels these instances *versatile masculines* and she distinguishes them from *impersonal* and *personalized masculines*, where the masculine is used to indicate a general person and to express impersonal and personal experiences. Examples of these usages are 'non è venuto nessuno' (no one [masc] came), 'uno dovrebbe

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[1] Formato adopts the following characterization of *patriarchy*: "the subtle but accepted and promoted way to institutionalise the inferiority of women and their subordination within a 'male as a norm' order (through several linguistics and non-linguistic practices)" (7).

[2] Hellinger, M. and Bußmann, H. 2001, "Gender across Languages: The Linguistic Representation of Women and Men", in Hellinger, M. and Bußmann, H. (eds.), *Gender across Languages*, Vol. 1, Amsterdam: John Benjamins Publishing Company.

[3] Marcato, G. and Thüne, E.M. 2002, "Gender and Female Visibility in Italian", in Hellinger, M. and Bußmann, H. (eds.), *Gender across Languages*, Vol. 2, Amsterdam: John Benjamins Publishing Company.

[4] Mills, S. 2008, *Language and Sexism*, Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.

leggere le notizie' (one [masc] should read the news), and 'un sindaco ama la sua città' (a mayor [masc] loves their city), respectively.[5] Moreover, it is common to find the masculine form of certain (usually prestigious) job titles, even when the person holding the role is a woman. Formato refers to these instances as *unmarked masculines*. By distinguishing these cases, Formato equips us with a powerful tool to understand how the masculine works in Italian and what sexist assumptions each usage relies on.

In the third chapter, Formato discusses the proposals of language reforms that have been put forward for Italian. She focuses in particular on the famous *Il sessismo nella lingua italiana* (1987), written by Alma Sabatini under the commission of the Italian Minister of Equal Opportunities, summarising Sabatini's recommendations to avoid sexist expressions.[6] She then surveys more recent publications on the topic and guidelines for gender-fair language use issued by various institutions. Formato also presents her own research concerning speakers' attitudes towards gendered terms in Italian. The research was conducted through an online survey and revealed a widespread misunderstanding of how gender marking works in Italian. Concerning the use of feminine job titles, respondents held diverse standpoints, heavily influenced by their personal experiences. Based on these results, Formato suggests that for a language reform in Italian to be successful it should be promoted not by women alone and has to be systematic.

The fourth chapter explores how gendered language is used to talk about women in public spaces, especially in politics. Here Formato presents a corpus analysis of the gendered forms of 'sindac-' (Mayor) to talk about three women running for Mayor in 2019. The corpus consisted of three high-selling Italian newspapers from three months before to six months after the elections. Semi-marked forms as 'la sindaco' (the [fem] mayor [masc]) and 'candidata sindaco' (candidate [fem] mayor [masc]) are especially frequent before the elections, while the feminine form 'sindaca' is increasingly used after the voting for the two elected candidates. The forms also vary depending on the newspaper considered and on the candidate. The latter might, according to Formato, indicate that journalists took into account each candidate's preferences when choosing which gendered form to use. Formato further presents an analysis of sexual terms and innuendo used to attack women in politics. According to Formato, sexual terms and innuendos "constrai[n] female politicians within a social domain of sexual activities, therefore, foregrounding their (factual or alleged) private life" (164). These include explicit and implicit reference to sexuality and sex work, as the use of "prostitute" (prostitutes) or "orgasm" to refer to female politicians and to the Italian Parliament with female MPs, respectively. These expressions, thus, are used to undermine women's right to have a role in politics by reducing them to their bodies and suggesting they belong to the private rather than to the public sphere. Formato closes the chapter with an investigation of how first-person plural forms are used to construct the group of women in parliamentary debates concerning equal opportunities. She concludes that women Members of Parliament, aware of the uncertainties concerning their role, used these forms to seek legitimization and visibility within the Parliament and the various political parties.

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[5] Following a common linguistic convention, I use 'masc' for 'masculine' and 'fem' for 'feminine' in square brackets after a term's translation to indicate its grammatical gender in the source language.

[6] Sabatini, A. 1987, *Il sessismo nella lingua italiana*, Presidenza del Consiglio dei Ministri.

Finally, the fifth chapter concerns gendered violence and how it is addressed in the media. Formato discusses several positions according to which gendered violence is a device that works to keep the current gender order usually enforced by men that perceive a threat to their manhood towards women that defy traditional gender norms. Formato focuses in particular on gendered violence that results in murder, which in Italian is called 'femminicidio' (femicide), and on how it is addressed in Parliamentary acts and the media. She presents three studies on the word 'femminicidio' conducted on different corpora: parliamentary acts on gendered violence, newspapers coverage of femicides between 2013 and 2016, and newspaper articles concerning Sara Di Pietrantonio's femicide. For the first corpus, Formato discusses the *word list*, namely the most frequent words in the corpus; *keywords*, namely the words that in the target corpus are significantly more frequent than it would be expected by chance; and *multi-words* that could stand for 'femminicidio', namely the expressions consisting in multiple words that were used in place of 'femminicidio'. Based on these data, Formato concludes that femicide in Parliamentary acts is 'seen within a broader understanding of violence as an abstract phenomenon and its main focus is on women (as victims) rather than men (as perpetrators)' (219). She bases the analysis of the news corpus on *keywords*, *multi-words*, and *collocations*, namely words that are more likely to occur together with another word than otherwise. For example, the closest and most frequent word that collocates with 'gelosia' (jealousy) is 'per' (for), which, according to Formato, indicates that jealousy *caused* the killings. The results show a strong weight being placed on the *reasons* to kill, characterizing the action as sudden and uncontrollable, rather than on the killers' responsibility. Moreover, a systematic difference emerges in how men and women are referred to, the former through their professions, thus foregrounding their public position, while the latter mainly through their roles within relationships, hence restricting them to the private realm. Based on these observations, Formato concludes that women are treated asymmetrically even in the private sphere, where they have traditionally been relegated. The third and final corpus is analyzed with specific attention to how Sara Di Pietrantonio is referred to and to how much agency she is given in newspapers articles. The results are in line with findings concerning the news corpus. In particular, the victim was mainly referred to through her first name, a strategy which signals proximity, and described according to her young age, which, according to Ulrike Tabbert, could "emphasise [the person's] vulnerability and innocence" (Tabbert 2016: 76, cited in Formato 2019: 257).[7] Moreover, the sentences where Sara Di Pietrantonio was the doer described her breaking up with the killer or talking about the relationship they had. Hence, her agency was always depicted with respect to her relationship with the murderer and not as autonomous and independent of him.

To sum up, *Gender, Discourse, and Ideology in Italian* constitutes an original dissertation of how gender is realized in Italian and of the ideological stances its use is based upon. Formato used various research methods, from a theoretical analysis of gendered nouns to a survey to corpus linguistic studies, and she investigated different loci where gender unfolds, from noun usage to Parliamentary debates to newspaper articles. The topics studied are also diverse: they span from

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[7] Tabbert, U. 2016, *Language and Crime: Constructing Offenders and Victims in Newspaper Reports*, London: Palgrave Macmillan.

grammar to how women are addressed in the public sphere, in particular in politics, and in the context of femicide. As any interesting work, Formato's book raises questions. I will consider those that came up to me in the next section, along with a couple of criticisms and suggestions.

2. A Few Observations

As mentioned above, I will devote this section to a few remarks and questions about Formato's work. I start with three minor comments concerning the taxonomies provided in chapter two. Within the category of syntactical gender, Formato distinguishes *epicene* from *semi-epicene* nouns, where the latter are invariable for gender in the singular only while the former in the plural as well. She writes that epicenes end with '-e' in the singular and with '-i' in the plural, and semi-epicenes end with '-a' in the singular and '-i' (for the masculine) and '-e' (for the feminine) in the plural.[8] However, most of these nouns have derivational suffixes and while some epicene nouns do end with '-e'/'-i', as 'preside' (headteacher) and 'giudice' (judge), most of them are derived from present participles and end with '-ente' or '-ante', as 'cliente' (client) and 'vigilante' (custodian). Similarly, most semi-epicenes end with the derivational suffixes '-iatra' and '-ista', like 'pediatra' (pediatrician) and 'fiorista' (florist), while only a handful terminates with '-a', like 'atleta' (athlete), 'profeta' (prophet), and 'stratega' (strategos). From a linguistic point of view, it is more accurate to indicate the whole derivational suffixes and not simply the last vowel.

My second remark concerns the label 'nouns with no gender', which Formato uses for those terms that do not reflect their referent's gender. I find this label deceiving as these nouns do have grammatical gender, as all Italian nouns do. For example, 'persona' (person) is grammatically feminine and 'individuo' (individual) is grammatically masculine. The peculiarity of these terms is that they can refer to individuals of any gender regardless of their grammatical gender. To me, 'nouns with no gender' incorrectly suggests that these terms are genderless, while "nouns with their own gender", "with stable gender" or "with insensitive gender" seem to better capture the distinctive trait of these terms without misleading the reader that they lack gender altogether.

The third minor point also regards a label belonging to Formato's second taxonomy: 'versatile masculines', which indicates masculine plurals referring to mixed-gender groups. For example, the masculine plural 'alunni' (pupils) is used for a group of pupils of various genders, regardless of the proportion: even if the boys are 30% and the girls 70%, they would be referred to by the masculine form. According to Formato, this convention shadows women as it does not reveal whether any woman belongs to the group. Indeed, the plural masculine is also used for all-male groups and the presence of one man in a mixed-gender group is sufficient to require the masculine form. However, even though Formato herself deems these instances problematic, the label 'versatile masculines' has a positive flavor as it expresses flexibility, which is usually appreciated. A different name, like 'overextended masculines', might highlight that using masculine forms for

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[8] I here only talk about masculine and feminine not because I believe these are the only two genders for human beings, but because these are the only options in Italian. While other languages, such as German or Greek, have also a third gender, the neuter, Italian only has two grammatical genders: the feminine and the masculine.

mixed-gender groups is unwarranted and problematic and it would better express the author's own critical stance towards these forms.

I now turn to more substantial remarks. The first one concerns another category of the second taxonomy, that of *unmarked masculines*. These are masculine terms used for women, as 'Ministro' (Minister) in 'Lucia Azzolina fu Ministro dell'Istruzione' (Lucia Azzolina was the Minister of Education), where the masculine 'Ministro' refers to a woman, Lucia Azzolina. This usage is common for certain (usually prestigious) professions and it is usually considered sexist by feminist scholars and activists as it conveys that men usually occupy such roles and women who do are an exception. However, one might hold that these professional titles are actually *nouns "with no gender"*: their grammatical gender does not reflect the referent's gender. They are grammatically masculine but can refer to individuals of all genders, just like 'individuo' (individual). While I do believe this is not the case and professional titles like 'Ministro' (Minister) are not *nouns "with no gender"*, the author does not discuss this possibility. Consequently, she does not provide reasons why such professional titles should reflect the referent's gender and occur in the feminine when referring to a woman. To hold that unmarked masculines are sexists, Formato should rule out the hypothesis that they are in fact *nouns "with no gender"*. One possibility is to argue that professional titles like 'Ministro' (Minister) should reflect their referent's gender because that is usually the case with professional titles. However, there are a few exceptions to this generalization: the job titles 'guida' (guide), 'sentinella' (sentinel), and 'spia' (spy), for instance, are grammatically feminine regardless of their referent's gender. There is, though, a linguistic reason why these terms are always in the feminine: they derive from the expression 'fare la guida/sentinella/spia' (to act as a guide/sentinel/spy), where 'guida', 'sentinella', and 'spia' in Italian do not designate a person, but an action, which is in the feminine. This explanation, however, does not apply to 'recluta' (recruit), which can nonetheless be accounted for on linguistic grounds: it is a loan word from Spanish, and loan words are kept unaltered. Other *nouns "with no gender"* that are not job titles exist in one gender only for similar reasons. For instance, 'testa' (head), as in 'la testa dell'organizzazione' (the head of the organization), is grammatically feminine, regardless of its referent's gender, because it is a catachresis. 'Personaggio' (character), on the other hand, is always masculine for the same reason 'recluta' (recruit) is feminine: it is a loan word and it retains the grammatical gender it has in the source language, namely French. To summarize, the argument could be that professional titles like 'Ministro' should reflect the referent's gender as it is usually the case for Italian personal names and there are no linguistic reasons why these job titles should constitute an exception.

Formato further discusses *semi-marked forms*, namely job titles composed of one masculine and one feminine element, such as 'medico donna' (lady [fem] doctor [masc]) or 'signora medico' (Mrs. [fem] doctor [masc]). Formato writes that "semi-marked forms do not occur for men" (61). While I agree that no one would say 'medica uomo' (male [masc] doctor [fem]), it seems to me that *semi-marked forms* could be used for men with feminine job titles "with no gender" as 'guida' (guide) and 'spia' (spy): 'guida uomo' (male [masc] guide [fem]) does seem acceptable to me.

As mentioned in the book summary, one of Formato's most interesting analyses concerns the distinction between *versatile masculines* and *impersonal* and *personalised masculines*. That is, she distinguishes between masculine forms used to

refer to mixed-gender groups, as in 'gli alunni sono 30% ragazzi e 70% ragazze' (the pupils [masc] are 30% boys and 70% girls), and to indicate a generic or unknown person, as in 'uno dovrebbe leggere le notizie' (one [masc] should read the news) and 'qualcuno ha perso questo' (someone [masc] lost this). Formato, hence, provides a fine-grained analysis of various usages of the masculine in Italian beyond referring to men. However, it is not clear where certain usages fall into: if the masculine refers to a generic or unknown mixed-gender group, would it be a *versatile masculine* or an *impersonal* or *personalised masculine*? Take for instance 'dall'anno prossimo i genitori avranno un congedo più lungo' (starting next year, parents will have an extended parental leave), where the masculine 'i genitori' (the parents) refers to generic individuals of arguably different genders. It is not clear to me which of Formato's categories it should belong to. I see three possibilities: the current categories could be defined to make clear where cases like this belong to, or the taxonomy could be supplemented with a further category to account for these instances, or, again, the categories might not be mutually exclusive and these usages fall in their overlap.

In closing chapter two, Formato briefly discusses the difficulties of avoiding binarism in Italian. As she observes, certain strategies, like substituting gendered suffixes with an asterisk, are only possible in writing but cannot be used in speech as they lack a corresponding sound. She then writes that "Italian counts 5 vowels (*a*, *e*, *i*, *o* and *u*) and -*u* would be the only one that could be introduced as neutral" (73). Even if she does not state it explicitly, the focus on vowels depends on the fact that Italian terms end with vowels. Hence, an alternative suffix has to be constituted by vowels to maintain word structure and prosody. While Formato correctly observes that '-u' is the only non-gendered vowel in the Italian repertoire, she does not point out that two vowels would be needed: in Italian, the plural is not marked adding an '-s' to the singular form but with a distinct suffix, typically constituted by a different vowel. For instance, the plural of 'persona' (person) is 'persone', where the singular ends with '-a' and the plural with '-e'. Thus, gender-neutral word endings in Italian should be composed of one vowel for the singular and another one for the plural, but four out of five vowels are already employed for gendered suffixes. Besides Formato's concerns over speakers' resistance to such innovation, then, I would add that the question is complicated even from a mere linguistic point of view.

The most problematic point of Formato's book, to me, concerns the term 'femminicidio'. She writes that "[t]he term relates to women killed by their ongoing or former partners, husbands or boyfriends" (200). However, Formato quotes other sources that provide the more appropriate definition of femicide in terms of *motive for murder* rather than of killer-victim relationship. According to the Parliamentary Committee on Gendered Violence, cited on pages 206-207, "proper femicides" are murders of women "in which the motive for the crime is that of gender" (Impact Assessment Office 2018: 8).[9] Michela Murgia, cited on pages 249-250, writes that '*femminicidio*' "indicates the reason why they have been killed. [...] *Femminicidi* only concern women who are killed because they rejected the expectations of how women should behave set by both men and a patriarchal

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[9] Impact Assessment Office 2018, *Femicide: The final report of the first Italian Joint Committee of Inquiry, Data and Statistics*, Senate of the Italian Republic, https://www.senato.it/application/xmanager/projects/leg18/UVI_Focus_Femicide_1.pdf [accessed 20 February 2022].

society".[10] Importantly, these characterizations are not equivalent to Formato's: if we take into account *motive*, a husband killing his wife to inherit her money does not qualify as femicide, while a man killing an unknown woman because she defies gender roles does. Having (had) an intimate relationship with the victim is neither sufficient nor necessary for a murder to be femicide. On pages 246-247, Formato reports as femicide a murder committed by a man that had never had a relationship with the victim: a janitor killed a teacher because she did not reciprocate feelings that he had not even expressed her, and with whom he had no relationship. It seems, then, that Formato fluctuates between the two understandings of femicide without realizing their difference.

Finally, I raise a concern on the analytic framework Formato employs to investigate the news corpus reporting femicides. The author categorized the newspaper headlines into three groups: *blame on the killer*, *a male perspective*, and *blame on the woman*. She includes in the last category headlines focusing on "[w]omen reporting the killers to police prior to the *femminicidio*" (242, table 5.13). However, it is not obvious to me that reporting the victim pressing charges against the killer necessarily puts the blame on the woman. On the contrary, it might show that the victim, far from being blameworthy, tried to prevent the murder. It can also be a way to expose institutional inaction. The details of each headline seem crucial in determining what that focus conveys.

To recap, I suggested a few different labels and I sketched an argument as to why professional titles should reflect their referent's gender unless contrasting linguistic reasons. I also pointed out that Formato's taxonomy may have overlapping or unclear categories or has to be supplemented and that introducing gender-neutral endings in Italian would require more vowels than the repertoire contains. Finally, I objected to Formato's characterization of femicide and raised a concern on her analytical framework to investigate news headlines. These remarks notwithstanding, *Gender, Discourse, and Ideology in Italian* is an insightful and rich book that provides an analysis of gender in Italian across different domains.

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[10] Murgia, M. 2016, "Dillo che sei mia. La trappola fatale dell'immaginario" in *Un altro genere di rispetto* (blog), https://unaltrogeneredirispettoblog.wordpress.com/2016/11/23/dillo-che-sei-mia-la-trappola-fatale-dellimmaginario-di-michela-murgia/ [accessed 20 February 2022].