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# Humanising research: the cares that drive researchers

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This article reflects on the provenance of “research” in Heideggerian “care,” and the nature of care as a complex of “cares” (interests/passions). We become researchers because care (concern for the future) fundamentally characterises our being. While care ensures that research becomes a never-ending “hermeneutic circle,” this only compromises research results if we remain unaware of its nature and uncritical of its effects. To specify its nature I identify particular cares (interests/passions) by means of Habermas’ account of the technical, practical/ethical, and emancipatory interests motivating research. Using Lacanian psychoanalytical theory I then map the multiple conflicting notions within each area of interest in terms of three future-orientated passions: “nihilism”, “narcissism” and “altruism”. The aim of this synthesis is an adequately complex framework for reflecting on our research passion.

## Vermenslikte navorsing: die sorg wat navorsers dryf

Hierdie artikel gee aandag aan die oorsprong van “navorsing” in Heideggeriaanse “sorg” as ’n kompleks van “sorge” (interesse/passies). Ons word navorsers omdat sorg (besorgdheid oor die toekoms) ons sinswysse grondliggend bepaal. Terwyl sorg verseker dat navorsing ’n nimmereindigende “hermeneutiese sirkel” word, kompromiteer dit navorsingsresultate slegs as ons onbewus van, en onkrities oor die aard van “sorg” bly. Meer spesifiek identifiseer ek besondere sorg (interesse/passies) via Habermas se weergawe van die tegniese, praktiese/etiese, en emansipatoriese interesse wat navorsing motiveer. Met behulp van Lacaniaanse psigoanalitiese teorie artikuleer ek vervolgens die veelvuldige botsende begrippe binne elke belangesfeer aan die hand van drie toekomsgerigte passies: “nihilisme”, “narcisme”, en “altruïsme”. Die doel van hierdie sintese is ’n genoegsaam komplekse raamwerk vir refleksie oor die menslike passie vir navorsing.

One could say that philosophical or critical thinking and research activity are synonymous.<sup>1</sup> What is philosophy, after all, if it is not quintessentially re-search; that is, an endless repetition of the search for wisdom? The word “philosophy” means the love of wisdom.<sup>2</sup> But, as Plato (1891a: 571, 574) cannily has Socrates observe, love is at best a drive towards the qualities that would, in his view, characterise the wise: the good, the beautiful and the true. In other words, they are the ones that a lover in principle “wants and does not possess”. If one loves because one does not have, then wisdom in principle eludes the philosophers. Hegel’s hubristic optimism notwithstanding,<sup>3</sup> philosophers are indeed characteristically never satisfied. Notably, philosophers are not always those who study the subject; more accurately, they are those discontented souls in all walks of life who justify the name “critical re-searchers” because they repeatedly search. If researchers in general have anything to learn from the philosopher’s discontents, it must be that passion for wisdom, or that is, interest or care, to which dissatisfaction gives birth, is essential to the very notion of research. In fact, the best researchers are those who are able to acknowledge and assess the multiple kinds of “cares” (cognitive interests and personal passions) that drive both their own research projects and those of other researchers.

This assessment of philosophy as the re-searching consequent upon congenital dissatisfaction, and therefore as necessarily involving “care”, or interests and passions, might seem surprising to some, for two reasons. First, “technical reason” has traditionally prevailed in research activity resulting in the opposing drive for dis-interestedness or complete objectivity. Secondly, thinkers such as Heidegger have placed the blame for the predominance of technical reason squarely

1 This text was first presented as a talk on philosophy and research in a series of workshops hosted by the Dept of Research Capacity Development, Nelson Mandela Metropolitan University, Port Elizabeth, 2 May 2007.

2 *Philia* — love, *Sophia* — wisdom.

3 Hegel (1977: 3) famously insisted that his aim in the *Phenomenology* was to convert the love of wisdom into actual wisdom. His aim, in his words, was: “To help bring philosophy closer to the form of Science, to the goal where it can lay aside the title ‘love of knowing’ and be *actual* knowing”.

on the shoulders of two of the earliest philosophers, Plato and Aristotle. This disjunction between my assessment of philosophy and Heidegger's may be resolved by arguing that Heidegger's assessment of traditional philosophy is accurate to the extent that philosophy loses its character of active re-search and becomes metaphysics. When philosophers lose their character as re-searchers and become metaphysicians, when they do not love wisdom but assume that they possess fixed knowledge of natures and essences, then they lose their power of thinking to technical reason, or as Heidegger puts it, to thinking as *techné*. In Heidegger's (1977: 197) words:

When thinking comes to an end by slipping out of its element it replaces this loss by procuring a validity for itself as *techné*, as an instrument of education and therefore as a classroom matter and later a cultural concern. By and by philosophy becomes a technique for explaining from highest causes. One no longer thinks; one occupies himself with 'philosophy'.

Notably, it is when philosophy has been lost to technical reason that various reductive definitions of the essential nature of humankind such as *animal rationale* emerge (Heidegger 1977: 202). In addition, it is only on the presupposition of this reductive definition of human nature that one can even begin to posit the ideal of disinterested or completely objective research. It is evident that philosophy, insofar as it has become metaphysics, runs directly counter to the kind of philosophy that remains a matter of thinking or re-search. But, as another canny philosopher, Jacques Derrida, has repeatedly demonstrated, there always was another Plato. In "Plato's pharmacy", for example, Derrida (1981) shows that the *Phaedrus* reveals a complex "Socratic" Plato who slips the self-imposed fetters of his metaphysics and keeps the space open for dissatisfaction and for the kind of thinking one may regard as re-search. The kind of philosophy I have tied essentially to the notion of re-search derives from that other Plato. Rather than replace the word "philosophy" with that of "thinking", I prefer to acknowledge the diversity that the notion "philosophy" has always had from the start.

Thus, when Heidegger rejects the label "philosopher" for that of "thinker" he rejects only the kind of philosophising that forsakes "care" in the name of metaphysics. In so doing, he promotes a different

philosophical approach, one which does not take research to be the aggressive attempt to know about things, but regards it as the appreciative attempt to “let things be”. Before I continue, I should again qualify my position, for the question of the meaning of this *Gelassenheit* or “letting be” remains highly contentious. On the one hand, “letting something be” may well inscribe an injunction to humanity to leave all things alone completely, and appreciatively watch as they unfold without invasive curiosity or interference. Some argue that “Heidegger himself” in his later works rejected the activity or even aggressivity implicit in the notion of research, in favour of a kind of poetic quietism. On the other hand, “letting be” could just as well function as a call to action, a call for human beings to let a thing come into its own full potential for being. This kind of “letting be” can only be achieved by a sensitive understanding of the nature of the things in question and an actively caring, nurturing, loving relationship with them that seeks to optimise the space within which they can emerge and flourish as exactly what they are. In his *Letter on humanism*, Heidegger (1977: 193) offers an inimitable description of such active letting-be:

The essence of action is accomplishment. To accomplish means to unfold something into the fullness of its essence, to lead it forth into this fullness — *producere*.

Again,

To embrace a ‘thing’ or a ‘person’ in its essence means to love it, to favor it. Thought in a more original way such favoring [*Mögen*] means to bestow essence as a gift. Such favoring is the proper essence of enabling, which not only can achieve this or that but also can let something essentially unfold in its provenance, that is, let it be. It is on the ‘strength’ of such enabling by favoring that something is properly able to be (Heidegger 1977: 196).

The incessant debates over whether Heidegger’s thinking remained consistent over his lifetime, notwithstanding — these are matters for philosophical or philological treatises — my interest lies in what one may take from a section of Heidegger’s text (if not from “Heidegger himself” — if there is such a thing) concerning the active sense of “letting be”, which resonates with the notion of research developed in this instance. An attempt to justify this preference for

active “letting be” would lead me far beyond the scope of this article; suffice it to note that the everyday world of human experience (“phenomenal reality” in Kantian terms) is always already an active interplay between what exists prior to and independently of any human beings, and, so long as there are human beings at all, our sensory and synthetic (interpretative) faculties. Accordingly, since we are always already (*a priori*) involved in the active constitution of our human reality, “letting be” in the sense of leaving absolutely alone is an impossibility and only arises as an ideal in the imaginary of certain religious or spiritual ideologies.<sup>4</sup>

As may be evident from the above discussion, it is all too easy to get trapped in the labyrinths of philosophical scholarship. This is perhaps the appropriate place to add a general explanation of my approach to, and use of philosophical ideas in this article. I do not aim to make any significant contribution to the already vast body of scholarship on Heidegger, Habermas or Lacan. The article is not at all about the philosophers named therein. Rather, it is an attempt to outline and draw inspiration from certain isolated ideas or conceptual frameworks that I find useful for stimulating critical thinking about research. It is, in my view, unnecessary to offer readers some form of orientation in the fields of scholarship of the figures in question, and I have consciously tried to avoid the temptations and traps of philosophical disputation.

However, before I turn to my main purpose, namely to outline a framework for identifying and reflecting on the cares (interests and passions) at work in all research activity, I do believe that it is necessary to elaborate on my conviction that one cannot think critically, or research well, without understanding the incessant, circular nature of the research process, which, in turn, means acknowledging the provenance of research activity in the Heideggerian notion of “care”. In the next section, therefore, I draw upon *Being and time* (1962), in which Heidegger undertakes a complex investigation of what it takes for human beings to give optimal expression to their humanity.

4 I have offered a more detailed account of this elsewhere, which includes an assessment of Heidegger’s contribution to this point of view (Hurst 2008: 19–45).

In a nutshell, he demonstrates that research is not just a part of human nature, it is human nature, since human being is fundamentally characterised by “care” (a general concern for the future).

## 1. Re-search as a function of “care”

In *Being and time*, Heidegger (1962: 182) explains that “care” is the basic human characteristic that holds not merely in this or that context, but by virtue of us being human. By “care” he means concern, or interest, in the broadest sense. We are the ones concerned about the fundamental question of the meaning of Being. In his words, a human is that being “distinguished by the fact that, in its very Being, that Being is an issue for it”. Unlike cats and other such creatures, “we” human beings are distinctively characterised by the ability and the desire to understand ourselves and our place in the world, as well as by a certain degree of freedom to change it. On Heidegger’s account, research is defined not only (although it is this too) as an ivory-tower intellectual activity, whose ideal end result is a journal article. Rather, research activity cuts across all walks of life, lofty to lowly, and takes as its subject matter everything from the “big bang” to cane cutting. Since there is research all the way across the spectrum of human experience, it is not, therefore, a matter of whether or not all human beings do research, but of how well this research is carried out.

According to Heidegger, the distinctively human capacity, desire and freedom for understanding, which underpins research activity, derives from the fundamental temporal constitution of human being (understood as a verb). Unlike the other creatures, whose being in the world is more immediate, human temporality stretches beyond retention and memory (short- and long-term) to a past that includes a sense of origin or birth. Similarly, human temporality stretches beyond anticipation and expectation to a future that includes hope and a sense of finitude (ending or death). In short, our care, our general concern for the future, engendered by the three modes of human temporality, is what makes us specifically human and drives us to become searchers (seekers of ways to actualise the future we are

aware of). We are, therefore, beings whose present moment (current existential situation) involves the freedom to project, from out of the limitations of a past (an inherited tradition, into which one is born), a future in which we may become more than we actually are right now. But something interesting happens in this instance, for in the process of self-actualisation, we are irreversibly changed, and this change calls for a corresponding re-adjustment of our surrounding social and environmental relationships, since the significance of familiar issues and entities is altered accordingly. It makes sense, then, that human actualisation is never a matter of “finding oneself” once and for all, for the finding immediately regenerates a future that calls for further actualisation. It is in this sense that human beings are natural born re-searchers, perpetually engaged in the endless repetition of a search that never ends.

## 2. The research process as a never-ending hermeneutic circle

In the above account of the existential circle, Heidegger offers an indication of what the research process would resemble if one were to start out from the notion that human beings are essentially characterised by the kind of care made possible by human temporality; for we may describe our mode of understanding things (ourselves, others and the environment) in a precisely parallel sense. In other words, our present understanding of the way things stand includes a sense of their future, inscribed in the potential for re-interpretation (for projecting a new interpretation) which explains, enriches or expands it, allowing it to become more than what it is at present. Accordingly, Heidegger (1962: 188-95) shows that the research process is best described as a “hermeneutic circle”, involving a perpetual circulation between the hermeneutic forces of past understanding (*Verstehen*) and future-orientated interpretation (*Auslegung*).

As a consequence of dealing with everyday events, he explains, we already possess an intuitive, pre-theoretical, or implicit sense of the “Real”, of the so-called “hyletic substratum” that supports all being. Our sense of “how things stand” is an understanding, not yet

articulated, but pragmatically demonstrated, of whom we are, what a thing is, and how to act accordingly (Heidegger 1962: 190-1). In our attempts to interpret, theorise or articulate, we aim to bring to light, or make explicit the implicit presuppositions formed from our concern in dealing with items and situations in everyday life.

In other words, I propose an interpretation (a system of explanation, a theoretical model) that I hope will prove in the future to be a “true” account of what I intuitively understand (*Verstehen*) about the nature of the “Real”. One should be careful at this point to reflect upon Heidegger’s notion of “truth”, given David Hume’s useful distinction between “relations of ideas” and “matters of fact” (Melchert 1991: 357). The *a priori* (universal and necessary) truths of reason describe the relations of ideas within a system. For example, within the system of Euclidean geometry it is an *a priori* truth that the sum of the angles of any triangle is one hundred and eighty degrees. Similarly, there is an *a priori* truth to the propositions “God is omnipotent” and “a daughter has a father”. Clearly there are many examples in all walks of life of such permanent, intra-system truths. Importantly, such propositions remain absolutely true independently of, in Hume’s words, “what is anywhere existent in the universe” (Melchert 1991: 357). The above propositions remain true, whether or not Euclidean triangles, God, or daughters do in fact exist in the universe, or ever have existed, or ever will.

For the majority of us, the notion of “truth” includes far more than the *a priori* truths of reason; for we want to know whether or not it is true, as a matter of fact, that Euclidean triangles, and so on exist in the universe. However, concerning matters of fact, Melchert (1991: 357-358) notes, “we must consult experience”, and experience, at best, can establish a degree of probability that certain propositions are true. It is a matter of “truth”, established *a posteriori*, or through experience, when we ask whether or not a proposed system of explanation or theoretical model (a projected interpretation) genuinely matches the Real. The most “true” account of the Real, for Heidegger, will occur when my theoretical attempt to illuminate what is, or what happens, does not obscure the event with mistaken assumptions, but genuinely clarifies it. Such illumination, however, does not offer a permanent or



absolute truth about the Real, since it remains, in principle, partial or finite, and therefore permanently open to re-vision, looking again, or, that is, the endless process of research.

In the hermeneutic act, to elaborate, what is intuitively understood is converted into something about which we speak (an interpretation), thereby shifting into the mode of thematic assertion, which Heidegger (1962: 199) defines as “a pointing-out which gives something a definite character and which communicates”. Thematic assertion, according to Heidegger (1962: 196-7), is characterised by *apophansis* (pointing out); predication (giving the subject a definite, if partial and reductive, character by asserting predicates of it), and communication (conveying the articulated definition of an entity in its absence in “further retelling”).

In this act, however, we face a tension. Our intuitive understanding might be rich in context-specific, evocative significance, but it remains local, insular, singular, idiosyncratic, and sedimented. In other words, it takes the form of an inertial or static set of assumptions whose status as “fact” is taken for granted. By contrast, our thematic assertions, or interpretations, open sedimented presuppositions up to general examination and reflective questioning, and can, therefore, shake out dusty old assumptions, urban legends, and old wives’ tales. But in the process of bringing presuppositions to light as that about which we can speak, Heidegger (1962: 199-200) argues, interpretations risk becoming alienated from their subject matter, which, in extreme cases, would render them utterly insignificant. Assertions by nature “veil” the complexity of context-specific, pre-predicative understanding, since they single out and focus on limited predicates in order to define something and package it for communication. In other words, no longer taken “environmentally” or contextually, the significance of the entity, while universal and shareable, is dimmed down, simplified, and flattened out (Heidegger 1962: 177).

For Heidegger, our implicit understanding provides the measure against which all explicit interpretations, which try to uncover it, hold sway or falter. They falter if the assertions remain too narrow or thin to bring to light what is intuitively understood; they hold

sway if they remain rich enough to achieve this illumination. The obvious problem, as John Caputo (1987: 72) notes, is how to tell whether or not a new interpretation has the power to “elucidate these things, illuminate and disclose them”. Heidegger’s answer is that an interpretation can only prove its worth by being worked out in detail, through relentlessly reflective practice, where all old and new assumptions, are persistently subjected to the tests of experience and critical thinking (Caputo 1987: 67). The point of this effort is to develop an interpretation that strives to avoid what Heidegger calls the “fancies and popular conceptions” we adopt on the basis of hearsay (“idle talk”). In other words, working out an interpretation is a matter of undoing distorted presuppositions, misrepresentations, clichés, naiveties, and prejudices, replacing them with better projections, and recasting the interpretative model where necessary, until it is able to “retrieve” the things themselves (Heidegger 1962: 195). As Caputo (1987: 63) confirms: “Hermeneutics is able to ‘retrieve’ the primordial only insofar as it dismantles the overlaid accretions and derivative understandings”. The question still remains of how to tell when the “working out” has finally found the appropriate assumptions, namely those that have been drawn from the things themselves, rather than forced upon them to serve interests other than that of truth. For Heidegger, Caputo (1987: 72) argues: “Everything turns on the fact that we already ‘understand’ who we are”. If the explicit interpretation truly uncovers the implicit understanding, we should be able to recognise ourselves, or the event, situation, or thing, in the interpretation.

A good interpretation, then, is at best a complex interpretation that yields a moment of *aletheia* (retrieval, revelation) in which a match is finally achieved between the actual experience and its intellectual interpretation (a sense of *aha*, “that’s it”). However, a good interpretation is but the first moment of insight into the essence of a thing; now the interpreter must commit to it and try to secure its future by putting it to the test of intersubjective verification. The question in this instance is whether other researchers can, by entering into critical dialogue with an interpretation, recognise it and make it their own. But Heidegger warns that such commitment by

no means entails any hope of keeping the truth forever. In fact, given that being is experienced as more of a flux than anything, more of a verb than a noun, and therefore demands the persistent re-articulation of interpretations, one falls right out of the hermeneutic circle when one tries to hold onto the finite moment of truth for too long.

One cannot try to universalise a finite interpretation or preserve it forever except by elaborate artifice. To insist on the artifice is to operate in the domain of delusion rather than genuine wisdom, thereby converting the moment of truth into what Heidegger (1962: 211-4) calls “idle talk”. Protective preciousness about a limited theoretical framework is a matter of sinking back into a comfortable inertia, where the lifeless repetition of the same, the doom of a perpetual present without future prospects, precipitates an inevitable emptying-out or deterioration of significance. According to Heidegger, this is precisely what occurs when philosophers become metaphysicians. In addition, this increasing insignificance is usually accompanied by a correlative “power trip” where such pseudo-researchers expect others to rest content with a heritage of presuppositions, passed along and taken over as unquestionable truths. This reduces intellectual life to the thoughtless taking up of assertions, and communication of information about entities in their absence, in “further retelling” or hearsay, “without previously making the thing one’s own” (Heidegger 1962: 202-13). Intellectual life, in this instance, becomes caught up in the proliferation of empty catch phrases that everybody uses without question, and without knowing what they are really saying. It is hardly surprising that, in the environment of idle talk, educators succumb to depressed nihilism, vacuous boredom, cynical weariness, or ideological comfort, where they believe that there are no more questions still to be asked, no projects to be revitalised, and no truths to be retrieved.

To avoid falling out of the hermeneutic circle, it is essential to preserve the question of “truth”, or “truth” as a question. In fact, it is impossible not to, for those honest enough in their work. It is on the basis of good interpretations, which command full and honest commitment, that researchers, paradoxically, sustain the process of re-search. Why? Here again is the interesting moment: in the moment of uncovering or *aletheia*, something new happens. Uncovering

the truth about an entity immediately changes it; it becomes clearer, more nuanced and complex. This changed entity calls for a re-assessment of the surrounding environmental structures, for new things are only significant in light of the old, and old things take on new significance in relation to the new. It makes sense that human understanding is never a matter of finding wisdom or establishing ultimate facts, but remains a process of re-search, an endless repetition of the search for wisdom.

To sum up, Heidegger argues that human beings are fundamentally characterised by “care”, or a generalised concern for the future. We can only experience such “care” because we are constituted in terms of a specific kind of temporality that includes the three interrelated modes of past, present and future. Because we care, we are driven to understand ourselves and our world; this is why we are intrinsically searchers, or lovers of wisdom. But as the term “lover” suggests, the nature of the search is such that the finding generates more searching, creating a perpetual self-powered hermeneutic circle. This is what makes us unavoidably re-searchers. In what follows I unpack the notion of “care” further by asking the question: “for the future of what or whom specifically are we concerned”? In a footnote to Heidegger’s *Letter on humanism*, editor David Farrell Krell (1977: 199-200) offers a clue in his explanation of “care” as,

the sundry ways I get involved in the issue of my birth, life, and death, whether by my projects, inclinations, insights, or illusions. ‘Care’ is the all-inclusive name for my concern for other people, preoccupations with things, and awareness of my proper Being.

One way of specifying “care”, is to separate the notion into specific cares about the state of the world/things, my own ego, and interpersonal relationships. This is the schema adopted in Lacanian psychoanalysis. Habermas, in turn, offers a different schema of cognitive interests. My ultimate aim is to merge the two, thereby offering a suitably complex framework for identifying and reflecting on the specific cares (interests and passions) that motivate research. First, however, it is necessary to address the question of why it is so pressing and important to ask the question of the specific interests and passions that drive research.

### 3. Why take an interest in research interests?

After Heidegger, of course, it is really a matter of wilful delusion to argue that researchers should not allow interests to creep into their research and that research should essentially remain disinterested, value neutral, or objective. The appropriate question is not whether interests and passions lie behind all research activities — we can safely assume that they do — but why researchers should take a philosophical interest in the interests that motivate research. Some researchers may wish to hand this task over to the philosophers, leaving them free to get on with the pragmatics of their work. This can, of course, be done. But not without danger, for here lies the risk of becoming the kind of researcher who would happily ask the following kinds of questions: “How much of this chemical additive to nicotine will produce the optimum sense of satisfaction in smokers? What is necessary to produce a bullet that will penetrate the rib-cage without shattering it? How much of this genetically modified corn can a person ingest before the stomach lining is destroyed?” In the process you may well sacrifice what is best about you — the very critical, ethical, and reflective powers that are the basis, and highest achievement — of your humanity.

Moreover, you might find that, once you think about it, your research interests conflict with some of your other values. Without some reflection about the broader context of interests that guide your research, you could risk becoming a technocratic automaton, a slave to the economic or political “powers that be”. Alternatively, you might end up proposing grand normative systems of ethics, or pie-in-the-sky social utopias that simply do not connect with everyday reality. Moreover, knowing what interests can motivate and direct research equips you with the critical power to assess the research done by others — its strengths as well as its flaws and limitations. This, in turn, gives you a better sense of where to intervene, of where to initiate further research that is governed, perhaps, by different interests. I am not suggesting that this critical task is easy or infallible. One may safely assume that reflective researchers do hope to produce research that improves rather than destroys quality of life for human beings. Yet, since it is impossible to predict the future, even

research governed by less than altruistic interests may turn out to have salutary consequences and, of course, *vice versa*. Perhaps at best, one may strive to remedy known negative effects, or destruction that has already taken place.

It is all very well to insist that one must take reflective interest in specific research interests and passions, but this is of little use without some indication of how one might, in a structured way, go about identifying the possible interests and passions at work in a given research project. In the following section, I turn to the more specific purpose of this article, namely the development of a suitably complex framework for such reflection. Before I elaborate, I should sound a warning note. While philosophy can indeed help researchers identify and understand research interests by offering guidelines or frameworks for analysis, philosophers never stop making life difficult. This is what we are best at, as we can gather from the activities of our hero, Socrates. If the city-state of Athens was the horse, Socrates was the irritating gadfly that gave it no rest.<sup>5</sup> Philosophy makes life difficult for researchers because, as mentioned earlier, philosophers never stop re-searching the meaning of “life, the universe, and everything”, including the meaning of research. The problem with analytical frameworks is that they are in principle never finally complete — there are always overlaps, loose ends, omissions, and matters that just don’t fit. This is why, in the field of research methodology, for example, there are so many frameworks, labels, names, organisational charts, mind maps, all trying to sort out the mess once and for all, always relatively unsuccessfully.

5 In his defence against the accusations levelled against him, Socrates argues: “For if you kill me you will not easily find a successor to me, who, if I may use such a ludicrous figure of speech, am a sort of gadfly, given to the state by God; and the state is a great and noble steed who is tardy in his motions owing to his very size, and requires to be stirred into life. I am that gadfly which God has attached to the state, and all day long and in all places am always fastening upon you, arousing and persuading and reproaching you. You will not easily find another like me, and therefore I would advise you to spare me. I dare say that you may feel out of temper (like a person who is suddenly awakened from sleep), and you think that you might easily strike me dead as Anytus advises, and then you would sleep on for the remainder of your lives, unless God in his care of you sent you another gadfly” (Plato 1891b: 124).

I am well aware that an annoyed and impatient Athens finally swatted the gadfly out. Nevertheless, I shall take the multiple risks of offering yet another framework for analysis that, for a start, draws from Habermas's (1971: 308) familiar analysis of research activity in terms of technical, practical, and emancipatory interests. The limitation of his categorisation, in my view, is that it does not take into account the spectral complexity of these interests, and of concepts such as ethics, freedom and its correlate, power. Consequently, it does not provide adequate means to understand why researchers would, for example, direct their technical, practical or emancipatory interests towards answering questions specifically pertaining to metaphysics, self-edification, or social life. Having outlined Habermas's framework, therefore, I aim to nuance it, drawing from an account of the human drives, or passions, derived from Lacanian psychoanalysis. I hope that a more nuanced analytical framework will serve to either stimulate your thinking about research interests or help you organise the thoughts you already have. But I have no illusions that this kind of orderly thinking is entirely adequate. Life is messy, thinking is messy: if you expect to find a comfortable orderliness, perhaps your interest in "metaphysical security" is itself something that bears scrutiny.

#### 4. Habermas: technical, practical, and emancipatory interests

Habermas (1971: 308) argues that research consists of different "processes of inquiry", or "frames of reference". A frame of reference, in his words, "prejudges the meaning of possible statements [and] establishes rules both for the construction of theories and for their critical testing". Each frame of reference can be described in terms of a specific connection between a motivating and orientating interest that determines what counts as genuine knowledge, and the logical and methodological rules for knowledge production that follow from this interest. He outlines three such frames of reference, which he sums up as follows:

The approach of the empirical-analytic sciences incorporates a *technical* cognitive interest; that of the historical-hermeneutic sciences incorporates a *practical* one; and the approach of critically oriented sciences incorporates the *emancipatory* cognitive interest (Habermas 1971: 308).

#### 4.1 Research guided by a technical interest

Taking research into prison conditions as an example, researchers might be motivated to investigate a hypothesis that the size of prison cells has a direct effect on prison violence, because it affects stress levels in prisoners. Perhaps an investigation of prison diet is necessary to find evidential support that a certain intake of chocolate reduces the incidence of sexual assault among prisoners. Researchers might want to investigate whether Jeremy Bentham's panoptical layout actually works to improve discipline in a prison (cf Foucault 1977: 200). It is evident that this kind of research is situated within the frame of reference that Habermas calls "technical". Broadly speaking, one could define the technical interest as an insatiable curiosity about how things work, motivated by a desire to get things to work as efficiently as possible so that, ultimately, gaining greater control over things at less risk, pain, and expenditure, we aim to become, in the words of another hubristic philosopher, "the masters and possessors of nature" (Descartes 1972: 119).

Within a technical frame of reference, researchers tend to draw primarily from the "empirical-analytical" aspect of various sciences (Habermas 1971: 308). Such researchers tend to expect the object of their research to be amenable to empirical observation, quantification, and measurement which, in turn, presupposes a world in which universal, calculable causality operates without fail. Imagine your scepticism if you experience sharp pains in your stomach, but the doctor tells you flatly that nothing can be done; there's nothing to cure because the pains are not caused by anything. Rather than quietly resign yourself to inexplicable stomach pain, you would probably change doctors, or see a psychologist. In addition, this step of asking for a second or third opinion is consonant with the general assumption in this instance that objects of research and the research process can only be thought of as appropriate if they can be intersubjectively validated (anybody must be able to repeat the observation or the experiment). This presupposes that researchers can be objective and neutral. Guided by a technical frame of reference, the research process is defined primarily as problem solving. In addressing a problem such as that of violence in prisons, the point of research lies primarily



in what concrete steps can be taken, here and now, to find a solution that would enable us to control or manage it. The research method, accordingly, is a matter of constructing theories that consist of, as Habermas (1971: 308) puts it, “hypothetico-deductive connections of propositions”; that is, “if . . . then” propositions and arguments that generate research hypotheses concerning the actual problem at hand. To test such hypotheses, researchers set up an experimental situation of “controlled observation”, which is “supposed to be reliable in providing immediate evidence without the admixture of subjectivity”. He adds, “we generate initial conditions and measure the results of operations carried out under these conditions”. From these results it becomes possible to make predictions concerning a wider context.

Habermas (1971: 309) sums this up as follows:

the logical structure of admissible systems of propositions and the type of conditions for corroboration suggest that theories of the empirical sciences disclose reality subject to the constitutive interest in the possible securing and expansion, through information, of feedback-monitored action. This is the cognitive interest in technical control over objectified processes.

There are countless examples to show that research guided by a technical interest is indispensable, since it enables us to regulate many life-promoting processes. We operate daily within the technical frame of reference when, for example, we enlist the help of a qualified mechanic to fix the brakes of the car, rather than calling upon the minister to “lay hands” on it, or following the advice of the sangoma to exorcise the evil spirit by drinking a special potion at full moon on a Thursday.

Research done from a technical interest does not necessarily conflict with ethical and critical interests. For example, a technical interest in the effects of cellphone radiation on children might enable one to raise an ethical objection to advertisements targeting children. Without technical back-up no ethical interest in the protection of the species would stand a chance. Conversely, one of the dangers of working within the limitations of a purely technical frame of reference, where ethical and emancipatory considerations are set aside, is that the research process tends to strip human subjects of their

humanity by reducing them to objects of calculation. Moreover, one of the limitations of this frame of reference is that one does not describe real life, which is usually messy, but the controlled environment of our experiments. One should not forget that, as Habermas (1971: 309) puts it, “the facts relevant to the empirical sciences are first constituted through an *a priori* organization of our experience in the behavioral system of instrumental action”. Moreover, because the meaning of the predictions we can make on the basis of experiments or controlled empirical observation is reduced to their technical exploitability (Habermas 1971: 308), we end up designing cars for the average man, shoes for the average foot, laws for the universal human being, biokinetic exercises for the general body type. But “human beings”, as an aggregation of more or less quirky individuals, are always more than what we can measure with our instruments. At the very least it can be said that each person has a unique history and future hopes that can never be factored into any manageable calculus that restricts itself to the here and now.

#### 4.2 Research guided by a practical interest

In the above example of research into prison conditions, the research questions mentioned were limited to solving problems that make the prison system work better. But what if the whole idea of imprisonment is itself an ethical problem? What if the very existence of prisons is a mark of the failure of ethics in the modern age? To answer this question researchers might wish to investigate what we can learn from history, or the various different cultures, in relation to crime and punishment. One might wonder when precisely imprisonment emerged as a form of punishment, and why? Some might accept the necessity of imprisonment in a civil society, but wonder whether an attempt to instill moral values in prisoners would reduce violence in prisons. One may propose that the question of imprisonment cannot be resolved until we gain a better understanding of criminal lives and minds, or of what makes people resort to crime.

These kinds of questions and proposals are situated within the practical frame of reference. Here, notably, Habermas uses the term “practical” in the traditional philosophical sense of “ethical”. It is true that, because we are human, we never stop worrying about the

problem of good and evil, and as a general rule — there are always exceptions — people have an interest in achieving the good, whatever they think it is. While this concern for morality is certainly part of it, the ethical interest is not narrowly focused on morality, but more broadly encompasses what Habermas (1971: 310) describes as the “interest in the preservation and expansion of the intersubjectivity of possible action-orienting mutual understanding”. The practical frame of reference emphasises interrelations between people, and concerns self-understanding at an individual level, as well as collective or shared understanding among human beings, which is directed towards the attainment of consensus; that is, a shared understanding of the human condition that would lead to the good of all.

It makes sense that within a practical frame of reference researchers tend to draw primarily from the hermeneutic sciences or the humanities, since the research subject is the human condition. This frame of reference covers the whole field of ethical interaction between the human self and others: other human beings, other animals, the environment, and the spiritual. Accordingly, the research subject is clearly not going to be completely amenable to empirical observation and calculation. Guided by a practical interest, the task of the researcher is not to observe, measure and explain, but to interpret and understand. As Habermas puts it (1971: 309): “Access to the facts is provided by the understanding of meaning, not observation. The verification of lawlike hypotheses in the empirical-analytic sciences has its counterpart here in the interpretation of texts”. One must understand the term “text” in this citation in a broad sense, covering all that can be made sense of as experience (or, that is, articulated in concepts and iconic or linguistic signs), allowing that certain experiences can be made sense of as nonsense. In this instance, both careful exegesis of ancient texts, for example, as well as an attempt to understand the meaning of cultural practices such as “trance dance” or *ubuntu* would count as valid research.

By what means are other human beings understood? In a practical frame of reference, the answer is not by means of objective observation and measurement, but empathetically, on the basis of a shared form of life; sympathetically, on the basis of your power to imagine

yourself in the other's position, and communicatively, on the basis of your ability to interpret the signs made by the other. Clearly, this kind of researcher is a very different kind of animal from the neutral observer guided by technical interests. The difference increases further when Habermas adds that one may define this researcher in a way that retrieves something from the traditional Greek sense of the theorist, which has been lost along the way. As he explains:

The word theory has religious origins. The *theoros* was the representative sent by Greek cities to public celebrations. Through *theoria*, that is through looking on, he abandoned himself to the sacred events. In philosophical language, *theoria* was transferred to contemplation of the cosmos [...] When the philosopher views the immortal order, he cannot help bringing himself into accord with the proportions of the cosmos and reproducing them internally. He manifests these proportions, which he sees in the motions of nature and the harmonic series of music, within himself; he forms himself through mimesis. Through the soul's likening itself to the ordered motion of the cosmos, theory enters the conduct of life. In *ethos* theory molds life to its form and is reflected in the conduct of those who subject themselves to its discipline (Habermas 1971: 301).

In contemporary terms, we might want to abandon the notion of cosmic order and replace it with the idea of cosmic tragedy, or, that is, the insight that human existence is a matter of irresolvable conflict, or of paradoxes and dilemmas that in principle cannot be overcome. In the face of this ontological "necessity" which, as Theodore George (2006: 118-9) sums it up, "refers to the recalcitrant resistance of the real that foils all human intention, effort, and skill", tragedy teaches us to surrender our human desire for control or mastery, and endure with equanimity "the painful fact that spiritual life is imbued with potentials for catastrophe, collision, and conflict over which we are powerless". With this humbling qualification, it is worth retaining what Habermas (1971: 304) describes as the notion of "mimetic conformity of the soul to the proportions of the universe", and accordingly the "conception of theory as a process of cultivation of the person". In this case, the idea still obtains that theorising changes the soul of the theorist, but the process of edification would be a matter of coming to understand "necessity" not as ultimate cosmic order, but as the inevitable errance of both universe and soul.

Clearly, then, if theorising is understood as a matter of edification for the researcher, the process of research cannot be defined primarily as problem solving, but may be understood instead in terms of Gadamer's hermeneutic notion of a "fusion of horizons". This term, as Habermas (1971: 309) explains, should not be taken to suggest that "the interpreter transposes himself into the horizon of the world or language from which a text derives its meaning". This unjustifiably "eliminates from consideration the interpreter's pre-understanding". Rather, following Heidegger and Gadamer, Habermas insists that: "Hermeneutic knowledge is always mediated through this pre-understanding, which is derived from the interpreter's initial situation". In other words, from within the broad experiential horizon constituted by a social, economic, cultural, physical, and personal background, researchers confront new, alien horizons of meaning that they do not yet understand. This sense of disjunction or mystery triggers the desire to make sense of alien horizons. But the research questions put to them are necessarily formulated in terms dictated by the researcher's own horizon, and the answers offered by an alien horizon only make sense to the extent that they can be applied to a researcher's own situation (as confirmation and reinforcement, or disconfirmation and modification, of existing presuppositions). In the hermeneutic process, then, what was at first alien loses its strangeness and is brought within the ambit of the researcher's experiential horizon, which, in turn, is modified in some way. As Habermas (1971: 309-10) puts it:

The world of traditional meaning discloses itself to the interpreter only to the extent that his own world becomes clarified at the same time. The subject of understanding establishes communication between both worlds. He comprehends the substantive content of tradition by applying tradition to himself and his situation.

This implies, of course, that research findings will in principle never be final or conclusive, for a researcher's newly revised experiential horizon poses a re-integrative task in relation to other newly estranged horizons. Research endlessly remains open to re-vision: to looking at the new from old perspectives, and to looking anew at the old from revised perspectives.

### 4.3 Research guided by an emancipatory interest

What if prisons are there just so that those outside of their walls can pretend to themselves that they are free? As Foucault (1977: 293) has pessimistically argued, outside the prison walls there are all kinds of micro-disciplinary structures that restrict our freedom to the point that we are all really, at bottom, prisoners. Is this an accurate interpretation of the human condition? What kinds of social or economic structures oppress humanity and restrict our freedom? Or what kind of relation to authority must we have for these structures to become powerful?

These kinds of questions and proposals are situated within the emancipatory frame of reference. One might safely say that human beings by nature have an interest in achieving their own freedom (however such freedom is conceived), and that this interest is intimately associated with the idea of empowerment. For Habermas, the interest in human freedom and empowerment implies the exchange of a one-sided freedom, commandeered by the already powerful at the cost of oppression, for the shared freedom reflected in universal autonomy and responsibility, which is the effect of critical self-reflection.

Within the emancipatory frame of reference, researchers tend to draw primarily from the social sciences, but, notably, not in their role as systematic or positivistic social sciences, for here the primary interest is technical, and what is produced is “nomological knowledge”. As Habermas (1971: 310) notes: “A critical social science, however, will not remain satisfied with this”. The emancipatory interest, in other words, is reflected in the social sciences by virtue of their capacity for critique. A critical social science is concerned with going beyond the goal of nomological knowledge, and concentrates on the task of determining “when theoretical statements grasp invariant regularities of social action as such and when they express ideologically frozen relations of dependence that can in principle be transformed”.

In this case, the field of research covers the countless disciplinary ideologies — capitalism, consumerism, administration, religion, politics — that threaten to reduce adherents to automatons who dare not and, in the end, cannot think for themselves. It also covers propositions

concerning what would constitute a society in which, through critical self-reflection, subjects are emancipated, to the greatest degree possible, “from dependence on hypostatized powers” (Habermas 1971: 310). In other words, there is a normative assumption guiding this interest, namely that human beings should actualise their freedom, their power of autonomy. In this case, societies are functional to the extent that such autonomy is promoted, and dysfunctional to the extent that there is a predominance of unreflective consciousness, servitude and oppression.

A similar normative injunction concerning self-reflection and autonomy applies to researchers, who again are acknowledged as an integral part of the research field, whether empirical or hermeneutic, and therefore bring their own interests to the research. In this case, researchers believe that they should do research that would promote a free society. There is always a utopian element embedded in the emancipatory interest. But, since the nature of freedom is a highly contested term, knowledge in this battleground is not neutral. On the one hand, the research process, again whether empirical or hermeneutic, is primarily one of carefully argued and activated ideology-critique, derived from the suspicion that all ideologies tend to imprison adherents. Yet, inevitably, that in the name of which one ideology is criticised turns out to be another ideology. It is shocking to hear prominent Western political figures confidently pronounce the end of ideology, when speaking about the Middle East, as if capitalism is not itself an ideology. Within an emancipatory frame of reference, there is the permanent danger of imposing a utopian vision on others, which would undermine the emancipatory interest right from the start: to force people to be free, is not to free them. Researchers can only preserve a critical distance from their own interests (which might be unconscious), and counter their possible negative effects, by accepting the inevitability of personal ideological prejudices, striving as honestly as possible to lay these out on the table, remaining engaged in a process of self-questioning, and encouraging criticism from others (Habermas 1971: 311).

## 5. Lacanian psychoanalytic theory and the passions

While Habermas offers a useful and illuminating key for understanding the human interests that are intimately tied up with knowledge production, his framework nevertheless calls for further elaboration. Research that is driven by the practical interest, for example, stretches across a wide field of topics as diverse as these: investigation of the effect that a *Bildungsroman* might have on reader edification, or on the cathartic effect of Greek tragedy on contemporary individuals; a study of the nature of evil, or on the effect that war has on social cohesion; an attempt to understand the effect of global communication via the Internet on intercultural tolerance levels. Why is it, then, that within the general field of the practical interest, researchers become interested in investigating certain topics rather than others? Is there any way of categorising or organising these intra-ethical interests? I think that there is, but before I elaborate, it should be noted that the technical interest is similarly directed towards subjects as diverse as nature, the individual self, and society (other people). A correlative question may be asked, namely what motivates researchers to interest themselves in, for example, culture rather than nature, or, further, in individuals rather than groups? Again, within the general field of the emancipatory interest, there are multiple ways to define the concept “freedom”: for example, one could argue that freedom is possible only in the realm of the spirit, since material bodies must obey deterministic laws of nature. One could, alternatively, construe freedom as sovereignty (or, that is, the power to do exactly what I like); self-mastery or autonomy; the power to negate things; creative power; the power to control others, or a condition in which oppression has been eradicated. What interests, passions or concerns press researchers to adopt certain conceptions of freedom and not others?

Lacanian psychoanalysis, I propose, offers a productive heuristic for answering the question of the interests or concerns internal to each of the broad categories outlined by Habermas. Freud (1968a: 52-4) argued famously in “Beyond the pleasure principle” that all human action is motivated by the drive for pleasure/satisfaction. Like all important philosophical concepts, the concept “drive” is incoherent, in the sense that it brings together multiple passions that are both



incompatible and irreducible. It is this complexity that allows us to make what Žižek (2002: 70) calls a “spectral analysis” of such concepts. Notably, the allusion here is not to the term *spectre*, but *spectrum*. A spectral analysis serves in the place of a traditional definition (where one fruitlessly strives to simplify, reduce and clarify the concept, and for this reason, ends up destroying its veracity, and therefore its applicability to the complex stuff of our experience). On the basis of a spectral analysis of the notion “drive”, one discovers that all human action, including research, is driven by one or more of three motivating forces or passions: nihilism, narcissism, and altruism.

Predominantly from two of Lacan’s texts, namely *Écrits* (1977) and *The four fundamental concepts of psycho-analysis* (1981), one may piece together a Lacanian theory of development, according to which these passions emerge sequentially, whereby narcissism takes over from “nihilism” (or metaphysical desire) as the predominant passion, without eradicating it, and altruism takes over from narcissism, again without eradicating it. The developmental process may be outlined as follows: Newborns experience life as a fully satisfying “pleasure circuit” between the needing being and the “horn of plenty”, the *Nebenmensch* (Copjec 2002: 50-3). But due to the fact that pleasures (like breasts or bottles) can be withdrawn without sanction and do not always reappear on demand, infants are soon forced to acknowledge that something is amiss: the *Nebenmensch* is actually outside the pleasure circuit, cannot be reliably controlled, and consequently poses a mortal threat.<sup>6</sup> The *Nebenmensch*, then, becomes an ambivalent figure of both pleasure and terror, engendering an intolerable state of anxiety or dread. From the first brush with dread onwards, we become desiring beings, and desire first manifests as an infantile scream for the restoration, at all costs, of a secure state of perfect pleasure (*jouissance*) without external threats. Our desire, therefore, is both metaphysical (a desire for a lost paradise that is not of this threatening world) and nihilistic (this threatening world must be

6 In Freud’s (1968b: 87) words: “You will realize how real a situation of danger is indicated by this anxiety. If a mother is absent or has withdrawn her love from her child, it is no longer sure of the satisfaction of its needs and is perhaps exposed to the most distressing feelings of tension”.

rejected or negated in order for the desired restoration of paradise to take place). But we are, of course, screaming for an illusion, since the state of perfect pleasure was never really there in the first place. So, precisely because we desire what we cannot have, the break in the pleasure-circuit persists; something is always amiss and we constantly have to take restorative action. Desire, therefore, becomes a constant state.

Extended into adult life, nihilistic metaphysical desire is triggered, often repeatedly, by the existential anxiety (dread) we experience when the grounds of our being are rendered precarious, usually by a traumatic event. Such desire takes shape as the correlative search for the alleviation of existential anxiety by re-establishing a founding “truth” that we imagine must lie at the origin of all things, and re-forming the framework of our existence accordingly. Interestingly, this “founding truth” that we seek can take opposing forms, based on bottom-line assumptions which can be summarised as follows: the universe is at bottom a cosmos (an ordered unity), within whose system everything ultimately does make sense, even if we do not yet know how; the universe is at bottom a chaos, where nothing ultimately makes sense. Both positions provide an answer that would, albeit in different ways, alleviate existential anxiety. Yet neither answer really does the job, because each challenges the other and there is no secure way of choosing between them. As Kant (1933: Axii) reminds us, concerning the origin and fundamental nature of the world-whole (and, of course, the other ideas of reason, the soul and God), we are in over our heads, and metaphysical desire seeks knowledge of things that is in principle impossible to ascertain. Such desire, therefore, never ceases.

The persistence of desire erodes our infantile confidence in our power to restore pleasure by controlling the *Nebenmensch*, or what it comes to represent to an adult, namely the underlying “real” state of affairs, and the power of the *Nebenmensch* correspondingly increases. But the *Nebenmensch* remains an ambivalent figure: both the source of pleasure and terror. Unable to tolerate this ambivalence, the infant, in a “sour grapes” gesture, finally rejects the anxiety provoking *Nebenmensch*: it becomes, as Kristeva (1997: 153) puts it, “abject” — since it cannot reliably produce pure pleasure, infants no longer

identify themselves with it, but wish to “spit it out” and draw up self-protective barriers against its power. It becomes the mysterious, disgusting, noumenal “Thing”, in contrast to which the correspondingly newly formed infant ego will now define the pleasure circuit that is “individual identity”. According to Freud (1968b: 63), however, an infant compensates for the loss of the Love object, that is, the *Nebenmensch* as the “horn of plenty,” by setting it up internally by means of the process of identification.

Because of the inevitable frustration of metaphysical desire via a complex story of abjection and introjection (rejection and identification), we enter into a new “imaginary” mode of being — from about six months, at what Lacan (1977: 1-7) calls “the mirror stage” — in which the pleasure circuit is re-constituted, but now as entirely internal. In this case, we set up in our psyche a powerful ideal ego or alter ego (mirror image), modelled on the lost *Nebenmensch*. This alter ego represents the beautiful soul that I identify with as the “real me” whom I lovingly hope to become. At this point in development, other human beings are not regarded as individual egos who possess an integrity of their own, but as representatives of the alter ego. I regard you as another like me, a reflection of me, and I love “you” to the extent that you represent what I would like to be. You become a role model: someone to imitate, or to avoid imitating. Notably, in the corresponding switch from metaphysical desire to narcissism, such desire is never erased; rather, we can now switch between two passions.

The narcissistic imaginary mode is initially characterised by infantile megalomania, which reflects the experience of a fully satisfying “pleasure circuit”, a relationship of loving identification, between the actual ego and the alter ego. But the pattern of loss and abjection repeats itself. I again soon realise that something is amiss in this circuit, for the actual ego persistently falls short of the alter ego (if I am honest).

Narcissistic desire, or self-love, is also engendered by anxiety, in this case the anxiety we experience when our actual ego does not match up to our ideal ego (self-image). Again, the desire to “become who I am”, that is, for self-edification or self-mastery, can take opposing forms, depending on whether I identify my genuine being

with the actual ego or the ideal ego. If the ideal ego is identified as the genuine “me” towards which I must strive, then my interest in self-edification is directed towards improving, training, modifying, and educating the actual ego until it matches the ideal. Yet, paradoxically, the harder I work at self-edification, the more I experience myself as lacking; for again, just because I have to make an effort to “become who I am,” a break in the pleasure circuit remains; the ideal alter ego is always too big for the actual ego, and the anxious drive to try harder, practise more, and so on remains constant. As my confidence in my power to match the alter ego decreases, its power correspondingly increases. But like the *Nebenmensch*, the alter ego becomes ambivalent: it functions both as a loved prosthesis that encourages me to work harder, and a harshly oppressive judge who demands from me an excellence that I cannot give, and in front of whom the actual ego increasingly becomes the devalued subject of guilt, shame or loathing (Lacan 1977: 4).

However, alternatively, if the actual ego is identified as the genuine “me”, then the ideal alter ego is experienced not as a judge, but as the figure of restrictive constraint, imposed from the outside. In this case it is experienced in the form of alien requirements that must be resisted and broken down in order to allow the genuine “me” to emerge. A person’s interest in self-edification is directed towards emancipation from constraining external demands, and making room for the “inner voice” to speak.

In general, this ambivalence in the relation between ego and alter ego produces intolerable anxiety. In a self-protective gesture, the alter ego now becomes the “abject” — I no longer identify myself with it, but wish to smash it up or break out of its constraints. This effort at “self-destruction” or the rebellious resistance of individualising or singularising boundaries, in which, notably, the ego distances itself from narcissism, is necessary as a precondition for flexibility, adaptability, and universalisation. Such self-effacement first manifests developmentally in a strong desire to be like everyone else, and not to stand out. In an inclusive gesture, then, the lacking ego turns outwards, towards the other half, seeking completion, satisfaction or *jouissance*, in union with the rest of humanity. This

is how narcissism, whose object is the individualising alter ego, is overlaid with the altruistic (or sexual) passion, whose object is the universal community, or humanity as such.

It is roughly when we learn to speak to others that we enter what Lacan calls the symbolic order, associated with the universally communicative self. In this case, our primary concern is with the other whose humanity we share, which signifies the emergence of an altruistic passion to engender a global belonging together, which is layered upon the other two passions, without erasing them. Initially, we imagine that in belonging to a universal human community — where each person recognises, and equally is recognised by, everybody else as intrinsically valuable — we will finally regain the fully satisfying “pleasure circuit” we long for, since the rest of humanity is viewed as the complement that will make the lacking “me” whole at last; hence the tendency towards altruistic self sacrifice for the sake of saving the community or species as a whole.

But, again, the pattern of loss and abjection repeats itself, for the idea of a global community becomes ambivalent: it is not just a source of altruistic self-sacrifice and sharing. Rather, the utopian dream of equality becomes a claustrophobic threat of sameness. The human whole becomes the irrational object of unreflectively applied universal rules (the “automaton”), the global media becomes the source of superficial idle talk concerning the things that everybody knows, and it all threatens to suffocate the singular “me” if left unchecked. Altruistic desire, expressed as concern for others in its myriad manifestations, is again associated with a form of anxiety, namely the angst that we experience when the recognition of individuals (whereby personal power and freedom is established) is rendered precarious by the very existence of other people (community). Again, to the extent that I recognise this ambivalence, I lose confidence in finding peace at last through my empowering identity with the universal community. Instead, to the extent that I value my autonomy, the other half/community must become the object; that from which I take a reflective distance.

## 6. The interests and passions that drive research

By putting together Habermas's cognitive interests, and the Lacanian passions, I believe that it is possible to offer a more nuanced framework for understanding and defining the complex array of interests that drive research.

### 6.1 The technical interest and the passions

Driven by nihilism or metaphysical desire, the technical interest in getting things to work efficiently manifests as the striving for control over nature. We tend to hope that, through ultimate technological know-how, we will gain control over the environment (which extends to so-called "outer" space and micro-level events), thus serving the quest for what one could call metaphysical security. This desire extends notably from classical physics and traditional metaphysics across to so-called "chaos theory" and complexity models, for if not mastery and control, then at least the means to cope in the world, depend on an accurate assessment of complexity. Alternatively, driven by narcissism, the technical interest for control over nature turns "inward", so to speak, and focuses on the control and manipulation of human nature. This desire manifests as the quest for self-improvement, or self-actualisation, through technology, and can take the form of research into matters ranging from physical fitness, through psychological self-help and motivation, to psychedelics and depression. By contrast, driven by altruism, the technical interest manifests as an interest in the quest for social improvement through technology.

### 6.2 The practical interest and the passions

For Habermas, to reiterate, the practical interest is expressed as an interest in investigating the interrelations between people for the sake of constructing a shared understanding that will ultimately benefit all of us. Driven by metaphysical desire, this practical interest manifests as an interest in establishing the foundational principles of social interaction for the sake of securing the social world against its own aggressivity. In this case, research is focused on philosophical questions concerning, for example, whether these principles presuppose an

underlying social order or chaos; whether they promote the possibility or impossibility of proper inter-human understanding; whether social interconnectedness is a matter of collective consciousness (engendering community spirit), or an articulation of discrete individuals. One might also, for example, direct research towards understanding the nature of evil, nihilism, aggression, war, violence, and other sources of disruption and dis-connection in social life.

Alternatively, driven by narcissism, the practical interest is expressed as an interest in defining or identifying the individual in relation to others. In this case, general research questions would relate to the effect the community of others has on individuals and *vice versa*. How, for example, are individuals saved from annihilation as members of society? In this case one might investigate the nature of social anarchy, understood not as a matter of chaos, but as a community of autonomous beings. Research may also be focused on the nature, and perhaps the very possibility, of individual self-understanding, edification, decision-making and ethical responsibility in relation to a person's cultural context. By contrast, driven by altruism, the practical interest is expressed as a general interest in the human other, and more specifically, in how the human other may be served. One may ask, for example, how the community of others may be saved from the aggressivity of individualism (perpetuated, for example, by consumer capitalism).

### 6.3 The emancipatory interest and the passions

Driven by metaphysical desire, the emancipatory interest is expressed as an interest in the nature of and prospects for human freedom in general. One may investigate the very possibility of human freedom, given the deterministic laws of matter in motion on the one hand, and a conception of the sublime on the other. One may wonder whether laws free people from chaos, or imprison them in systems. If freedom is construed, with Sartre, as the power to negate things, one might consider the relationships between gods and human beings, finitude and power.

Alternatively, driven by narcissism, the emancipatory interest is expressed as an interest in the nature of and prospects for individual

freedom, given the presence of others. Research in this case would tend to focus on questions of individual freedom insofar as it is promoted or repressed by certain political forms, or insofar as it manifests itself as power, sovereignty, authority, or self-mastery. Researchers may ask how much freedom must be tolerated in the market, or at what point freedom of speech leads to relativism and social breakdown. Driven by narcissism, these questions would serve to preserve individual freedom against the demands from others. By contrast, if one is driven by altruism, one may ask the same questions, but the emancipatory interest is directed towards a different purpose, namely liberation of the oppressed. The question remains one of establishing the nature of a free society and finding ways to engender it. In this case, questions of freedom revolve around the emancipation of workers, women, certain classes and communities, freedom from poverty, and community empowerment as the collective resistance to authoritarian control.

## 7. Concluding remark

In this article I have tried to initiate a process of reflection concerning the “care” and cares that drive research, during the course of which I have attempted to indicate the sense in which “care” is the most general fundamental concept underpinning research activity as such and why we should be interested in the various specific cares that motivate particular researchers. I have also suggested a way of synthesising or articulating Habermas’s framework of cognitive interests with an account of the fundamental human drives or passions drawn from Lacanian psychoanalytic theory. The purpose of this was to propose the outlines of a suitably complex framework for identifying the cares, interests and passions that influence, drive and guide research. Of course this framework offers, at best, a place to start thinking about our interest in research, and our research interests. It is by no means an end-product but a proposal for a structured, albeit complex, way of thinking that bears further critical elaboration. I hope, however, to have offered enough to seduce you into the labyrinth, and that once you enter it, its charm will work sufficiently to quell any accompanying desire to swat me out of existence.



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