

EPISTEMOLOGY OF THE OVERLAP II

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Abstract. This paper re-thinks the concept of overlap as reconstituting, mitigating, and symbolic. Re-thinking has allowed the epistemological discovery of other logical implications. In a reconstituting overlap, the blurring of boundaries is re-categorized through the concept of productive pairs, which lead to a moving beyond or a break through thinking experience. In a mitigating overlap, the blurring of boundaries is an occasion to fasten or tighten the grip of conceptual territories. And in a symbolic overlap, the blurring of boundaries indicates the disjunction between the act and the lifeworld, which logically carve a space where they are gravitated to fill-in each other's lack.

Keywords: reconstituting overlap, mitigating overlap, symbolic overlap

Introduction

After publishing my first article on the epistemology of the overlap in 2012, I figured that it is time to re-think and re-introduce the notions that I previously laid down in that project.¹ And since this essay is an effort to represent previous reflections, perhaps it is only philosophic if I first attempt to articulate the presupposition that grounds this effort. In so doing, I can also demonstrate that the proposed relation between the previous and current article does not really involve a tweaking of positions but a re-packaging of some sort that will make my discussion on the meaning of an epistemic approach to the overlap more substantive – an allusion to being more thorough.

Hence, the query that marks my mind at this point is this: What makes this article possible? In other words, what presupposition warrants this article's intent to engage in re-exposition and re-rumination of thoughts? Also, since the article confesses that there are no substantive differences between the previous and current article, is it proper to say that this is an epistemology of the overlap II? Let us see where such questions will carry our reflections through.

The philosophic assumption for essay is encapsulated in the notion that thinking is re-thinking. I often use these three T's as a reminder of what philosophic thinking is always engage in: Thinking Things Through. This means that the philosophic mind will always want to un-pack meanings, un-cover the logic of reasoning, and inter-relate the known and unknown in the attempt to get hold of concepts, systems, philosophies, the inquiring self, and other objects of thought that philosophy might get its hands on. However, my reflection on the conduct of philosophy is telling me that thinking things through seems inadequate, since the mind appears to have a linear direction towards its objects of investigation. I figured that it is better to add a qualifier to the three T's: (Re). This consequently translates as Re-thinking things through. When one philosophically thinks, it is always a process of re-thinking and I realize that this is a better way of describing what thinking is. When I read a sentence, for instance, I am in the process of re-assessing what I have and have not cognized. It seems that the mind cannot proceed otherwise. It is always ready to re-assess and re-visit, and make use of re-thinking as a location to affirm, deny or construct ideas and/or propositions. This appears as philosophy's route to advance or progress in its effort to think well. That is, to regress and bring to the fore what the mind currently thinks of in light of what it has previously conceived as apprehensible.

Re-thinking as a trajectory of thinking also overcomes the linearity of the three T's approach given that the Mind is interested in at least two things: its object of interest and its conception of things. Hereon, the mind is always attentive to how thinking/grasping entails the re-claiming and letting go of meanings. This also re-affirms the role of one's thinking horizon and exercising its capacity to choose, that is, to re-evaluate, re-interpret and re-commit. In re-thinking, therefore, re-claiming and re-assertion are two of its fundamental structures, wherein re-claiming allows levels of re-interpretation, and re-assertion involves the re-presentation of what the mind still considers as logically tenable.

Another strength of the re-thinking approach is that it allows us to expand and perhaps move beyond the Collingwoodian stance on the meaning of the overlap. I am grateful for Collingwood for providing a philosophical reflection on the meaning of an overlap and for devoting an entire book, *An Essay on Philosophical Method*

(1933), in demonstrating why philosophy subsists in the language of the overlap.² More to the point, his notion on the precariousness of margins once an overlap is admitted remains crucial on how the concept of the overlap can be philosophically construed. This means that such a characteristic is indeed integral to an overlap's conceptual structure. However, I have also considered this query: Will there be another way of philosophically–structurally looking at the overlap as a concept?

In our previous article, I tried to provide almost three new ways of looking at the term: reconstituting, mitigating, and symbolic. There is this sense of reluctance in admitting, while proposing three new ways of philosophically construing the concept of the overlap, since such kinds appear to be necessarily faithful to Collingwood's notion. This being said, I am not sure if such forms of overlap truly departed from Collingwood's original notion. But it also appears that with the help of the social science of Anthropology, a philosophical anthropology of sorts have provided an interesting take on how the notion of the overlap can be re-thought.³ Also, it is this influence of Anthropology, which may allow us to re-carve our paths in re-interpreting the three ways of characterizing the overlap. Is this what the simple phrase as re-thinking things through can amount to, as moving beyond and moving back to existing or available ways of construing philosophical concepts, e.g., Collingwood's philosophic treatment of the overlap?

(Re) Diagramming the Overlap

In this section, I will try to apply what re-thinking things through could mean and show its capacity in re-presenting the epistemic meanings of the overlap as Reconstituting, Mitigating, and Symbolic.

The Reconstituting Overlap happens when two entities, practices, beliefs, or concepts blur each other's identity. I would have to admit that this meaning fundamentally upholds Collingwood's stance on the principle of the overlap—that when the overlap is admitted, the logical consequent is that of the precariousness of margins between/amongst interfacing entities, practices, beliefs or concepts. However, it is important to note that this blurring of boundaries necessarily reaches a point when the precarious state is replaced by a sense of stability. This is made possible by an assumed and hybridized identity that may last for a

considerable space and time so it can carve and assert a recognizable presence which the human faculties – empirical, rational, imaginary, and/or emotive, can get acknowledge and get hold of. I have thought of a few examples of a reconstituting overlap.

If applied to a furniture, a table can be reckoned a hybridized entity between/amongst various planks of wood. A reconstituting overlap took place given that the identity of the table is given existence by the interfacing wood planks. Between planks of wood, a precarious state takes place when the initial combination and arrangement of various planks of wood is yet to be determined. This is an example that actually reminds me of Aristotle's discourse on matter and form. In Aristotle, however, the notion of the overlap is not construed as a pre-condition to the table's figuration. The overlap, to my mind, is interpreted within the fold of potentiality (and actuality).

Another familiar example of the reconstituting overlap is Karl Marx's hybridization of Hegel's dialectics and Feuerbach's materialism. The interface between such concepts allowed Marx to carve a conceptual stance that is different from Hegel's and Feuerbach's philosophical positions. It is again important to stress the significance of the blurring of boundaries between dialectics and materialism as that which pre-conditioned Marx's novel philosophical standpoint. It is the blurred boundaries or precariousness of margins that enabled the carving of a stance out of available philosophical perspectives.

Given the examples, we may infer that a reconstituting overlap favors the precariousness of margins as its conceptual or ontological foundation, and that it privileges results or outcomes as it looks forward to the birthing of entities, concepts, or experiences. As in the case of planks of wood, the blurring of its boundaries conditioned the re-thinking of its identity, which logically enables the indeterminacy of possibilities. This goes to show that when the planks of wood interface, these items surrender, in a way, their state(s)/condition(s) as the condition of the overlap is admitted which also grounds, hence, opens up a possibility against which the interfacing planks of wood may become. In view of our example, the table is an outcome or a result of a reconstituting overlap. At this point, it appears that the indeterminacy of boundaries between and amongst planks of wood is contained and closed. Is this the only result of a

reconstituting overlap? Ruminating on this case suggests that the perceived closure is temporary. The blurring of boundaries is still at work, remains operative, which shall also act as a presupposition for the other trajectories, which may result to a reconstituting overlap.

In re-diagramming the reconstituting overlap, what we have accomplished in this article is that we have initially figured the way Collingwood's notion of the precariousness of margins condition and dispose the reconstituting overlap. In re-thinking things through, the interfacing entities, objects, and/or concepts are logically enabled by the blurring of boundaries, which still subsist even if a tangible result has been acknowledged or is now perceived. By metaphysically affirming the role of the precariousness of margins, the simple method of re-thinking things through has helped us un-pack the crucial role and influence of the notion on the precariousness of margins in making a reconstituting overlap possible (and not possible).

The mitigating overlap is another way of describing the conceptual relation between two or more entities. The term mitigate is used to highlight the role and sense of control that pervades and regulates the inter-action of beings, activities or concepts as the interface ensues. Unlike the reconstituting overlap wherein the precariousness of margins is not conceptually and structurally constrained, the mitigating overlap locates itself in the tension between entities that seek to assert the cogency of each other's meaning and space. Thus, tension arises out of the apparent antithetical disposition that the coupling of such entities/concepts brings. Consequently, the blurring of boundaries is reconfigured as the further delineation of connotations and denotations marked by the presence and nature of the tension. This is one reason why analogically the interface is reinterpreted not as the blurring of boundaries but as the interlocking of pairings, which subsists in resisting each other's influence and possible infiltration to each other's hold.

While the precariousness of margins in the reconstituting overlap has liberty in affecting and changing territories of meanings, the mitigating overlap is interested in magnifying and describing the kind of control or assertion that unfolds as entities/concepts secure respective spaces of meaning. The overlap takes place since certain pairings produce a threatening situation, which unleashes concepts'/entities' desire to defend its

self. In this case, a concept articulates its logical defense mechanism, which is fundamentally anchored on its willingness to remain clear in the way it understands and locates itself. Self-preservation is its grammar, which a mitigating overlap seeks to explore, observe, and possibly cognize.

Does a mitigating overlap aspire for a reconstituting stance? A disciple of the mitigating overlap understands that what is revealed in the context of the tension is a re-clarification and re-assertion of meanings. It is this effect, which inspires the follower of a mitigating overlap to be watchful and invested in the manner that interfacing concepts express its re-committal to what they traditionally uphold. This re-committal makes the mitigating overlap a unique opportunity to re-assess and re-valuate claims over identity/ies. Its interest, therefore, is enwrapped in this query: Will the defense mechanism of a concept succumb to the tension, which the coupling of concepts is most capable of asserting?

An example of a mitigating overlap is in the tension-based interface between these two types of thanksgiving activities: the traditional thanksgiving ritual of the Agusanon Manobo, the *Taephag*, and the thanksgiving activity of the Agusanon Manobo as Roman Catholics, the Novena to San Isidro Labrador. Both activities find actuation during rice harvest seasons. The Agusanon Manobo, who has been traditionally oriented towards the *Taephag*, now finds it equally important to conduct the ritual to the Saint after the conversion of their families to the Catholic fold. With the presence of such activities, this question arises: Does the language of opposition permeate the relation between the ritual and the novena?⁴

After carefully treading the landscape of the Agusanon Manobo's culture and context in Barangay Mambalili, Bunawan, Agusan del Sur, I figured in my ethnographic study that the *Taephag* is an activity that necessarily locates itself in the farm lot. As a thanksgiving ritual it involves the spirit guardian of the rice fields, *Taephagan*, the owner of the lot, the priest-craft, a few witnesses, a make-shift table where various symbols that dispose human and spirit interaction are placed, and a silent/calm environment are invested in the proper conduct of the activity. This is also an activity that cuts-across the cosmology of the Agusanon Manobo and their economic needs. This is one reason why the Agusanon Manobo sees the fundamental need to perform the ritual as it functions as a meeting space for these inter-connected

realities: human beings, spirits, environment, a prospective successful rice harvest, and petitions-intentions. Done prior to the harvesting of rice, the Agusanon Manobo affirms the values and meanings that regulate his/her traditional worldview.

The novena to San Isidro Labrador is a thanksgiving activity, which the Agusanon Manobo also performs before the rice harvest. As sons and daughters of parents who were converted into the Catholic fold before World War II, this generation of the Agusanon Manobo grew-up witnessing the maintenance of the *Taephag* and the novena in their lifeworld. This somehow explains why the more senior members of the Agusanon Manobo community in Barangay Mambalili, Bunawan, Agusan del Sur appreciate and value both the ritual and the novena. In Sitio Hagnaya, the nine-day novena is participated in by the Agusanon Manobo to ask San Isidro Labrador to pray for the success of the rice harvest. Is it possible to forego the novena? Majority of the key informants maintained the necessity to ensure its conduct. Here is another question that the informants tried to address: Is it possible to conduct the novena in the farm lot? 'No' served as their common reply. Hence, in dis-locating the ritual and the novena in their 'proper respective lots', the dis-location grounds the presence of the tension, which is the point of interface between the two activities. And as long as this unique type of tension subsists, the interfacing concepts will find it necessary to assert its respective space or territory.

Another occasion where mitigating overlap is exemplified is when two paradigms exist and are conditioned as oppositional to each other's stance. Coming from two divergent starting points or assumptions, the tension arises out of the necessity for such perspectives to at least try to see the other eye to eye – an effort which causes more strain as positions go against each other's grain. In contrast to the reconstituting overlap, the interface does not lead to a birthing of a new perspective. In a mitigating overlap, the interface locates itself in the opposition that maintains or feeds life to the tension, and disposes perspectives to re-assess and put forth re-claimed sides of the table. This is the mitigating overlap's version of a productive pairing. As pair, the other stance finds it almost impossible to develop itself and its propositions if the opposition is dissolved or the effort to dilute the opposition gains a foothold. As an oppositional couple, the other functions as a point of reference in arguing made-more-precise claims and assertions.

In the archaeology of human thought, for example, Plato's qualification of the real as that which is permanent and unchanging does not hold ground for Aristotle who regards the real as that which has its origins in finite space and time. While Plato privileges the world of ideas/forms as the real realm, Aristotle points his finger downwards and reckons the world of sense and sense-impressions as a fundamental entry point to knowledge. This coupling is a classic example of an opposing relation that interestingly finds strength in the presence of an antithetical other. As the relation conditions a disciple's desire to constantly improve on one's cognition of Plato's stance, this disciple admits that his rumination is constantly challenged by Aristotle's position. A similar experience regulates the follower of Aristotle. Will a reconstituting overlap eventually characterize the pairing of Plato and Aristotle? Will the mitigating overlap eventually lose steam and surrender to the reconstituting interface and experience a precarious vulnerability through the blurring of margins?

The third kind of overlap is symbolic. For this conception of the overlap, the interface happens when a context has an organic capacity to ground or support a seemingly strange or unusual image or actuation. This context can pertain to a lifeworld regulated by cultural practices and meanings that make unusual instances possible. This fitting of sorts between an act and the culture is what a follower of a symbolic overlap is interested in, since such a harmony magnifies the meaning of both the act and the life-world. This is why the term symbolic is used. Building on the familiar connotation of the term, as that which allows the overflow of meaning, symbolic stands for the fertile occasion that forces the mind to inquire on the relation between acts and life-worlds. This is its logical route, since the act, when transported into a different cultural context, is corrupted or loses its intrinsic fecundity. To borrow Collingwood's term, it can refer to a nodal point wherein life and impulse usher as it thrives on a life giving ground. In the language of the social sciences, the symbolic stance can also pertain to a case study, which is valued as a fertile occasion that functions as a microcosm of ideas, sensibilities, or meanings, which a social scientist can explore, observe, and analyze.

The term symbolic, in the foregoing sense, hence, structurally reveals an occasion of the overlap. In this specific sense, the symbol gains a certain elevation as it conjoins the invisible cultural meaning with its physical or concrete embodiment. In more philosophical

terms, the act and lifeworld forms an integrated and unified meaning and reference. It is this unique fusion and integration which conditions why the act stands out while remaining deeply intertwined to a ground.

Hence, if the question ‘Is the blurring of boundaries in a symbolic overlap comparable to the kind of precariousness of margins experienced in a reconstituting overlap?’ is raised, our reflection tells us that somehow there are similarities and dissimilarities. One common feature is the emergence of meanings. In a reconstituting overlap, the hybrid concept is characterized as having the capacity to assert its autonomy, as an independent perspective or point of view. But in a symbolic overlap, the blurring of boundaries does not give birth to a hybridized-autonomous stance. Rather, the new meaning emerges as a disclosure of unarticulated meanings. This disclosure is where the dissimilarity lies. Instead of the blurring of boundaries, the logical space opens up or broadens the relation between an act and its lifeworld. In so doing, less obvious meanings are made more accessible, and the margins expand its territory.

The example that shall function as a nodal point for the symbolic overlap is the act of a teacher breastfeeding while teaching Mathematics to her Manobo high school students. This act is a unique stance, which unleashes numerous meanings when connected to its ground – the Manobo cultural lifeworld. The act gains a hold grip of itself and broadens its boundaries when understood within the purview of the life world. If the breastfeeding act is transported in the urban milieu, its meaning loses its ground and its sense. The act may not be allowed and may be construed as a violation of school regulations.⁵

Logical Principles

The task now is to show that the three kinds of overlap can function as logical principles, which in Russell’s point of view are indicators that the mind is thinking beyond the realm of sense-impressions or empirical acquaintance of physical objects in the world.⁶ Will the reconstituting, mitigating and symbolic overlap stand or function as thinking structures that are not validated or invalidated by examples or concrete instances? Also, will these forms of overlap dispose and allow the mind to articulate presuppositions, which has always beset philosophy’s interest? To deal with these questions, a description of presuppositions that

can be identified for every type of overlap will be the specific philosophic challenge in the proceeding sections.

In a reconstituting overlap, the possible assumption is this: thoughts can gravitate to another thought to occasion a breakthrough re-invention. This is a productive pairing which carves a viable location where both thoughts can give birth to a novel concept that other forms of pairing cannot condition. In contrast to a productive pair, the coupling of thoughts does not generate the unfolding of another philosophical thought/stance. This possibly explains why breakthrough moments seldom happen. The genius of the human mind breaks free when a productive pair of thoughts initiates a reconstituting overlap.

In a mitigating overlap, the possible presupposition is this: thoughts when coupled can affirm the logical structure of re-establishing its conceptual and territorial hold. The presence of another thought signals the challenge/invitation to re-claim its position. While this is the source of tension motivated by the presence of another thought, thought for this kind of overlap also reckons the location as an opportunity to clarify to itself its meaning or what it hopes to mean. This self-directed re-interpretation of thought is an assumption that makes a mitigating overlap possible. Otherwise, no tension will take place and the mind will not recognize the necessity of re-assessing the extent of its perceived and cognized boundaries.

In a symbolic overlap, the possible assumption is this: thought assumes an overflowing set of meanings when it recognizes its corresponding ground/cultural context. This further means that the ground/cultural context also recognizes the thought as its own. This conceptual and concrete embrace is that which conditions the symbolic character of the third kind of overlap. Such image of the embrace is the reason why the symbolic overlap becomes a household of nodal points, where the enmeshing of conceptual images and the intricacies of the ground abound.

Conclusion

An epistemology of the overlap ascertains the presupposition that thinking is re-thinking. This means that re-thinking can be a logical ground upon which an epistemological investigation of the overlap can proceed.

Collingwood's notion of the overlap intimates the blurring of boundaries. In our discussion, however, we have figured that an

overlap need not only move towards the precariousness of margins. Re-thinking, as an assumption, has also allowed us to discover the other logical implications when an overlap is epistemologically construed.

In the case of a reconstituting overlap, the blurring of boundaries is re-categorized through the concept of productive pairs. This means that the coupling of thoughts will lead to a moving beyond or a break through thinking experience. By stressing the notion of a productive pair, the precariousness of margins is acknowledged but substantially changed.

In relation to a mitigating overlap, the blurring of boundaries is acknowledged but is logically reckoned as an occasion to fasten or tighten the grip of conceptual territories. The mitigating overlap recognizes its immediate responsibility to re-assess its position and to even advance in its conception of itself. This advancement in the presence of the other is the epistemological counterpart of the blurring of boundaries in a mitigating overlap.

For a symbolic overlap, the blurring of boundaries is an indicator of the disjunction between the act and the lifeworld. Instead of magnifying the oppositional gap, the act and the lifeworld logically carve a space where they are gravitated to fill-in each other's lack. This is the reason why the term symbolic is used, since the meeting of the act and the lifeworld conditions the overflow of meaning from the constitutive interface between the act and the lifeworld. This conjunctive giving or generosity marks the redefinition of the precariousness of margins in a symbolic overlap.

With the foregoing reconceptualization of the overlap, this article has accomplished the following: (1) an epistemological discussion on the overlap can be logically supported by re-thinking as its presupposition; (2) an overlap admits the precariousness of margins; (3) a blurring of boundaries can be repackaged in three epistemological directions, namely, productive pairing or coupling (reconstituting), tightening or assertion of conceptual territories (mitigating), and conjunctive giving or generosity between an act and a life world (symbolic); and (4) re-thinking things through is also logical assumption that allows these reflections on the meanings of the overlap can be re-thought of.

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ENDNOTES

¹The article, "An Epistemology of the Overlap: A Possible Conceptual Frame for a Filipino Philosophy," was first published in *PHAVISMINDA Journal* 11 (May 2012), 1-18. In this article, the three notions of the overlap as reconstituting, mitigating, and symbolic were first introduced and where explored alongside the three categories of thinking as regressive, progressive and digressive.

²Robin George Collingwood, *An Essay on Philosophical Method*, (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1933).

³The influence of Anthropology is shown in the examples presented in this article which were gathered after the conduct of various ethnographic studies in a field work/field school in some locations in Mindanao.

⁴This ethnographic study on the relation between the *Taephag* and the Novena to San Isidro Labrador is systematically presented in our unpublished study on the Folk Catholicism of the Agusanon Manobo in Agusan del Sur and the possible position of Vatican II towards their Folk Catholic practice.

⁵The image of the breastfeeding Manobo teacher while teaching Mathematics to her students in a classroom is explored in 'Manobo Pedagogy: Learning from an Indigenous Instructor,' a paper that I presented in a conference on Mindanao and Development Issues, 2012.

⁶Bertrand Russell, *The Problems of Philosophy*, (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1997), 47.