

Counteracting Epistemic Totality and Weakening Mental Rigidities: The Antitotalitarian Nature of Wonderment

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In this essay, I attempt to address the (mis)educational problem of epistemic totality by reflecting on what I call “wonderment.” The essay is divided into two parts: the first is concerned with epistemic totality, and the second focuses on wonderment as a promising epistemologico-educational framework that can counteract epistemic totality. I base the term “epistemic totality” on Hannah Arendt’s standpoint on totalitarianism as well as Michel Foucault’s notion of *episteme*: totalitarianism being a logic that is usually mobilized by one idea and seeks to hold absolute control and authority over thinking,¹ and *episteme* here being (silent) structures of knowing.²

In the first part of the essay, I briefly address the contemporary pertinence of epistemic totality and consider a few perspectives on the problem as well as a few suggested antidotes. In this part, I do not intend to exhaust theoretical formulations of totality; rather, I aim to gather certain challenges under the term “epistemic totality” in order to draw attention to the contemporariness and practical consequences of it, as well as to leave room to reflect on the difficulty of effecting antitotalitarian epistemic ruptures. Although the first part of the essay focuses on totality, the main concern of the essay is about wonderment as a counteragent working against this totality, gaining momentum in the second half. In this latter part, through discussing what I call cases of wonderment, I argue that, because wonderment creates epistemic ruptures that are inherently antitotalitarian, it can provide a promising epistemologico-educational framework.

EPISTEMIC TOTALITARIANISM AND CONTEMPORARY TIMES

Arendt writes that totalitarianism is nourished by a grand and fixated explanation — logic — of reality. Furthermore, it is usually based on one *idea* that it considers to be the truth. She writes how totalitarianism creates a “fantastically fictitious consistency” (*OT*, 352) in explaining reality by ordering the facts into an absolute and straightforward logical procedure. Consequently, when this logic appropriates structures of knowledge, it can lead to “epistemic violence,”³ subjugation and closure against *nonknowledge*.

A germane and present-day extension of epistemic totality as discussed above is what Emmanuel Levinas simply calls “war”: when “impositions” — or “concepts”, “generalities” such as a heretic or a threat — are imposed on the other, and hence the other’s “alterity” is denied.⁴ This appropriation of alterity prevents preserving the other as other,⁵ and it is epistemically — if not physically and geographically — violent. A case in point can be the war of the Islamic State of Iraq and Syria (ISIS) in the Middle East and the violence of Sunni Muslims against Others (Kurds and Christians, or non-“*selves*,” non-Sunnis, *other* nonknowers of “my” religion) which, aside from its main cause being prolonged and problematic imperial interventions, also feeds off epistemic totality.

The violence of denying alterity and the unknown other is also a central subject of inquiry in Arendt's work even though she investigates it under different terms — mainly the totalitarian logics behind ideologies that act as exclusionary forces. For Arendt, the drive for consistent explanation within totalitarianism can lead to — and also can spring from — ideology, “a logic of an idea” (*OT*, 469). Ideology can sustain the subjugation and crowding out of inquiry and nonknowledge. Because everything is supposed to be consistent with the logic-based-on-one-idea, contingencies that are not compatible with the logical process are consequently crowded out, “so that whatever happens, happens according to the logic of one ‘idea’” (*OT*, 469).

The exclusionary self-other logic of epistemic totality is thrown into sharp focus in the postcolonial context. Joanne Sharpe corroborates how, with the help of what she calls “longtime insinuations by institutes of education,... the unquestionable privileging of western science [and] culture led to the internalization of only a few set of values and ways of knowing the world.”⁶ Frantz Fanon also explores the exclusionary practice of dichotomies in epistemic totality. He does so by reflecting on the somber geographical, racial and existential aftermaths of denying difference (alterity). He writes how, for black people, the subjugating and denying of *thinking otherwise* had led to subjugating and denying *being otherwise*. Added to this, the imposition of generalities (or, quite simplistically put, a sublime being/race is a white existence/race) has made the black man subjected to a new mode of existence: “non-being,”⁷ which in effect becomes a massive, intergenerational, psycho-existential complex, in which the subject of totality “feels a disharmony and enlarges his alienation and difference.”⁸

Since “difference from self” is not celebrated in the logic of epistemic totality, perpetrators of totality tend to disfavor thoughts or beings that are contradictory to or different from the logic of totality. Enrique Dussel provides an example of the geopolitical consequences of this prohibition of difference inherent in epistemic totality. He does so by reflecting on the case of colonization in Latin America: he writes how the colonial *knower* created questions that were violent from the very first premises. By regarding Europeans as rational animals, the knower saw the difference of indigenous people as contradictory to their sense of rationality, their self-ness. The subjugator from the center constituted the periphery (non-Europe) and asked itself, “Are the Amerindians human beings? Are they Europeans, and therefore rational animals?”⁹ Whether the answer was yes or no is of little importance, “we are still suffering from the practical responses”¹⁰ [of this totality]: “The Amerindians were suited to forced labor; if not irrational, then at least they were brutish, wild, underdeveloped, uncultured because they did not have the culture of the center.”¹¹ And even though political and economic “decolonization” from this knower might have occurred, the painful intergenerational legacy of this epistemic totality has lingered on. The struggle to break free from or decolonize the violent knowledge that questioned the humanness of *Amerindians* is “an ongoing struggle, and more difficult to overturn than political institutions.”¹²

Postcolonial educator Marie Battiste considers overturning colonial epistemic totality as one of the central tasks of anticolonial education. She calls this totality

“Cognitive Imperialism”¹³ and writes how this imperialism is itself nourished by Eurocentrism, a type of knowing in which “dominant consciousness has been marinated.”¹⁴ Aided by residential schools, colonial epistemic totality has been successful in crowding out and marginalizing indigenous knowledges. In Battiste’s view, forced English assimilative education is the applied manifestation of this epistemic totality, one that has led to inducing a “collective alienating amnesia and leading to intergenerational trauma.”¹⁵

Epistemic totality is not exclusively traceable in history and war. It is also a pertinent dilemma within a modern liberal-democratic context. David Blacker probes into the problem of epistemic totality by reflecting on fanaticism in religious schooling, where ideological indoctrination mobilizes curriculum. He identifies comprehensiveness and single-mindedness as two totalizing constituents of fanaticism and warns against their repercussions in education: when one idea, or one religion, informs or directs every sphere of activity, it “colonizes” or “metastasizes” areas of believer’s lives,¹⁶ thereby preventing the Deweyan sense of growth, legitimizing sectarian interventions in public schooling, and attempts at commandeering educational institutions.

What I want to take away from discussions of epistemic totality before moving on to its counteragents are a few central tenets that nourish its “perverse logic,”¹⁷ namely, rigid dichotomies between selves and others, linear logics and fixed conclusions, fictitious consistencies, established realities, generalizations, and the prohibition of contradicting ideas or difference.

RUPTURING EPISTEMIC TOTALITY

There have been ample reflections on antidotes to totality. For example, Arendt sees “beginnings” as counteragents for epistemic totality: “Over the beginning, no logic, no cogent deduction can have any power, because its chain presupposes, in the form of a premise, the beginning” (*OT*, 473). Following Arendt, I extrapolate that freedom is enacted with initiating a new epistemic endeavor. For as she writes, “Freedom, as an inner capacity of man, [is] identical with the capacity to begin” (*OT*, 473). Here, I am reading Arendt’s “inner capacity” as an “epistemic” actuality.”

For Emmanuel Levinas, morality is the counteragent to totality and war. To him, morality maintains exteriority and preserves the alterity of the other. Being able to enter the realm of morality is to “proceed from the experience of totality back to a situation where totality breaks up, a situation that conditions totality itself.”¹⁸ The return or breaking up of totality for him “is the gleam of exteriority or of transcendence in the face of the Other (*autrui*).”¹⁹

Furthermore, Enrique Dussel enriches Levinas’s idea of breaking up totality by imagining an epistemic rupture.²⁰ Andrew Irvine writes how Dussel imagines that “only a rupture or breach in the totalized self-enclosure of the totality, effected by the irruption of the other, can call being into question.”²¹ Fanon, on the other hand, imagines a self-combusting thought: once ruptured, epistemic totality can be countered by “a warm feeling that digs into its own flesh to find a meaning.”²² Finally, Battiste, alongside Paulo Freire, urges a critical conscientization so as to interrogate the cultural and structural issues evident in public goods like education.²³

The suggested epistemic antidotes of beginnings, ruptures, and self-combusting inquiries into meanings are valuable responses to epistemic totality because they address its central concerns of, *inter alia*, logical linearity, rigid dichotomies, and prohibiting contradictions. Nonetheless, from an educational perspective, what I see as an overlooked and missing component in the suggested antidotes is the arduous creating of the *need* for epistemic ruptures and critical breaking-ups. It is arduous precisely because of the very corollary constituents of epistemic totality — linearity, consistency, flattening of difference, prohibiting contradictions, and negative coercion of logic — make it very difficult for the need for epistemic ruptures to be generated, for example, a need for a breaking away from linear thinking or a need for inviting in the prohibited meanings. That is why, beyond addressing totality, one fundamental challenge within antitotalitarian educational frameworks is in addressing the difficulty of “creating a need” for antitotalitarian epistemic beginnings. Hence, the studying of the genesis of this need for antitotalitarian thinking alongside studying epistemic ruptures becomes a significant area of inquiry.

Therefore, the main concern of this essay falls along the lines of reflection on epistemic totality, but it also takes a crucial educational turn with the question: how can antitotalitarian ruptures occur and what do they embody; how do they generate the need for liberatory ruptures and epistemic beginnings; and how can such ruptures provide the need for the Fanonian empowering of thinking and extricating knowing from totality? In the second and third sections of this essay, the main purpose is to explore how the concept of wonderment can constitute a promising epistemologico-educational framework for creating the need to challenge epistemic totality.

WONDERMENT AS AN EPISTEMICALLY ANTITOTALITARIAN EDUCATIONAL FRAMEWORK

Wonderment can potentiate ruptures and beginnings for thinking; it can thereby invigorate the need for epistemic decolonization from totality (“decolonizing” here being the undoing of enclosures of epistemic structures by epistemic totality). In order to conceptualize possible tenets of antitotalitarian thinking, I will first start the discussion by putting three cases of wonderment in conversation with each other: *Theaetetus*, a dialogue between Socrates and a young geometer, Foucault’s elaboration on Jorge Luis Borges’s Chinese encyclopedia, and an example of Ibn-Arabi’s Quranic exegesis. The reason I weave these cases together to discuss epistemic ruptures is that all three cases engage with epistemic totality through wonderment. I define wonderment as an “epistemic insurrection” that a) is produced by forms of dyadic configurations²⁴ or contradictory constructions²⁵ and b) grapples with some tenets of epistemic totality in one way or another.

CASE 1: THEAETETUS AND DIZZINESS — WONDERMENT AGAINST UNQUESTIONABLE CONCEPTUALIZATION

In *Theaetetus*, Socrates initiates a dialogue with the young Athenian mathematician to answer the question, what is knowledge? During the conversation, they develop three conceptualizations: knowledge is nothing but perception, knowledge is true belief, and knowledge is true belief with an account (*logos*). Every time they both agree on one definition of knowledge, Socrates starts challenging the very definitions that they worked hard to establish. In other words, Socrates constantly disrupts the

established reality. For the first definition, for example, Socrates employs a play of dyadic configurations with knucklebones: “Suppose we have six knuckle-bones. If we put them next to four knuckle-bones, then we say that they are *more* than four - one and a half times more, in fact. But if we put them next to twelve knuckle-bones, we say that they are *fewer* — in fact, half as many. And that is the only way the language allows us to put it, isn’t it?”²⁶ Upon thinking about the dyads of the established ideas, Theaetetus admits he feels dizzy with wonder, “Sometimes I get really dizzy from considering them”²⁷ Socrates smiles at this epistemic rupture: “It looks as though Theodorus’ sketch of your character was accurate, my friend. I mean, this feeling — a sense of wonder — is perfectly proper to a philosopher: philosophy has no other foundation, in fact.”²⁸

Theaetetus is thus wonderstruck “by what must and yet can not be said in reference to the mixing-up of the opposites” (A Wonder, 252). Contradictory constructions of knowledge become agents of annoyance for Theaetetus’ knowing: “For the question that Socrates asks Theaetetus, ‘what is knowledge?’ it suffices neither merely to number the various forms, to collect them in an enumeration of types, nor to divide, as Theodorus and the agent had divided the numbers into square and oblong” (A Wonder, 251). Having experienced *thaumazein* (wonder), Theaetetus can no longer impose simplistic answers on something he does not understand. This time, understanding, stabbed by wonderment is neither resorting rapidly to defining knowledge nor putting an end to confusion: “what is called for is not simply to resolve the opposition in favor of one term, but to continue to hover between the two and yet beyond them” (A Wonder, 266). Understanding seems to be contradicting conceptualization, or the linear certainty and exceptionless appropriation²⁹ that Theaetetus’ system of knowledge imposes on him.

CASE 2: FOUCAULT’S “SHATTERING” WONDERMENT THROUGH UNUSUAL JUXTAPOSITIONS

In *The Order of Things*, Foucault writes that wonderment is a breaking-up and a “shattering” of all the ordered surfaces and all the planes in the landmarks of our thought with which we are accustomed to tame the wild profusion of existing things. In addition, wonderment, for Foucault, generates a “long-term continuance of disturbing and threatening with collapse our age old distinction between the Same and Other” (*The Order*, 16). The trigger for this wonderment, for Foucault, is a passage from Borges that, through “unusual juxtapositions” (*The Order*, 16) paradoxically recreates the logical efforts of (excessive) scientism to control the wild profusion of non-knowledge. Foucault writes how Borges quotes a Chinese encyclopedia:

In which it is written that “animals are divided into: (a) belonging to the Emperor, (b) embalmed, (c) tame, (d) suckling pigs, (e) sirens, (f) fabulous, (g) stray dogs, (h) included in the present classification, (i) frenzied, (j) innumerable, (k) drawn with a very fine camelhair brush, (l) et cetera, (m) having just broken the water pitcher, (n) that from a long way off look like flies.”³⁰

Foucault implies that, for him, this wonderment is the “apprehension of the limitations of our own system of thought, and the stark impossibility of thinking *otherwise*, through the charm of another system of thought in one great leap” (*The Order*, 17). Borges’s *Encyclopedia* addresses the attempt to control contradicting observations of beings through scientific conceptualizing. Foucault reminds us that “exorcizing the possibility of dangerous mixtures” (*The Order*, 17) led to reflecting on this

violence. He writes that Borges's genius in creating this wonderment goes beyond using odd unusual juxtapositions: "We are all familiar with the disconcerting effect of the proximity of extremes, or, quite simply, with the sudden vicinity of things that have no relation to each other" (*The Order*, 17). What makes this effort profoundly wondrous for Foucault is that such dyadic configurations are inflicted on the very *flattening method* (*The Order*, 17) of the totalizing structure of knowledge: "The mere act of enumeration that heaps them all together has a power of enchantment all its own" (*The Order*, 17). The propinquity of the things listed is not impossible and wondrous in itself, as much as building the propinquities on the "very site on which their propinquity would be possible" is (*The Order*, 17). It is as if, through heaping together the incongruent juxtapositions, "the common ground on which such meetings are possible has itself been destroyed" (*The Order*, 18). Foucault notes that Borges decolonizes thinking by simply doing away with the very site, "the mute ground upon which it is possible for entities to be juxtaposed" (*The Order*, 18); in other words, weakening the perverse logic by distorting it.

CASE 3: IBN-ARABI'S CELEBRATION OF WONDERMENT OVER TOTALIZING KNOWLEDGE

Wonderment is portrayed in the interplay of dyads that Ibn-Arabi applies for interpreting Quranic verses, where he uses famous and well-known passages with epistemically violent messages to offer interpretations that seem to be completely opposite of what those passages appear to mean (*SD*). This "distorting of the imagery" (*SD*, 55) confuses — "melts together" (*SD*, 48) — the sense of self and other, which are rigidly marked as good and bad in the totalitarian monistic verses. In Ibn-Arabi's interpretations, "villains and tyrants are commended and treated sympathetically, whereas heroes are considered misguided and ignorant, condemnatory verses are reinterpreted as praise, and idolaters are shown to be enlightened" (*SD*, 55). The story of Noah and the verses where the followers were asked to join him on his ark is a case in point. The reproaching nature of the verses that blame the "sinners" who refused to believe Noah's message establishes an epistemically violent reality. Nonetheless, Ibn-Arabi exchanges the rebuking nature of the Quranic passage with a sense of homage to the refusers, calling them enlightened beings; the refusers "were more esteemed as they rejected an unenlightened clarity in favour of their own perplexing truth" (*SD*, 58). He thus distorts and puts into question the rigid dichotomies of self-other, and the prohibition of their propinquity. Distortion ruptures the rigid narrative and causes bewilderment. This is a good thing, Ian Almond writes: "When we are confused or bewildered, we are less likely to impose a single, reductive image onto the other" (*SD*, 54). Here, again, wonderment addresses totalitarianism not through the abandonment of totalitarian, established, rigidly separated images but through "the contiguity of conflicting ones" (*SD*, 42) melting them together. Rupturing dichotomies disable the primary sense of images in order to free a plethora of secondary ones, and can potentiate the "best way the believer has of escaping the metaphysical trap of his own perspectiveness" (*SD*, 42).

WONDERMENT AND ANTITOTALITARIAN EPISTEMIC RUPTURES

I will expand the discussion of wonderment in this part by arguing how the previously discussed cases of wonderment as epistemic ruptures create the space

and the need for antitotalitarian thinking through the following: deforming logicity, weakening established realities, invigorating epistemic resistance, and reintroducing principles of discontinuity and disunity to thinking.

WONDERMENT AND THE DEFORMING OF LOGICALITY: DISTORTING LINEARITY AND OBSTRUCTING CLAIMS TO TOTAL EXPLANATION

In the cases above, wonderment has dizzied the fictitious consistency of totalitarianism in two ways: engaging in constant dyadic interruptions against linear logicity and obstructing claims to pre-established totalizing explanations. First is the issue of distorting linearity: Ibn-Arabi regards those who refused to join Noah as enlightened and those who followed him as ignorant. He thus tries to obviate the inevitable conclusion that comes from a linear logic: if A leads to B, then C does not lead to B. He distorts the As and Cs to question the conclusion of B. This is not dissimilar to Foucault's idea of counterhistory and the principle of disunity: counterhistory has the potential "to destabilize a normative order by introducing a counter-perspective that resists and invalidates the normative expectations of the imposed dominant ideology. [It] breaks up the unity of the sovereign law that imposes obligations."³¹ In Ibn-Arabi's counternarrative of Noah, he broaches the unity and certainty of Noah's narrative by going against the "negative reproaching" of rebukers; he invites the refusers into the linear totalitarian logic by calling the repudiators "the enlightened." If linearity is ruptured and distorted, then totalizing claims in knowing and explaining reality become pale, and, hence, the logic can appear as deformed.

WONDERMENT AND THE WEAKENING OF ESTABLISHED RIGIDITIES

Besides deforming logicity, wonderment can weaken the linear, certain, and straitjacket of the logic of totalitarianism through another element: playing with rigid semantic policing. Epistemic totalitarianism nourishes semantic policing and the exercise of control over meanings. This policing disfavors the plurality of concepts and strives to maintain a certain ontological economy. Conversely, wonderment can crowd in subjugated meanings that totalitarianism crowds out. Crowding-in prohibits concepts, hence weakens, the plurality-impooverished terrain of epistemic totalitarianism. Foucault notes that Borges's "unusual juxtapositions" — his bringing semantically extreme concepts close to one another and creating sudden proximity between things that have no relation with each other — wondrously weakened the rigid reign of borders in his thinking. This proximity of extremes and of logically unrelated concepts brings about an ontic diversity that poses a challenge to rigid semantic borders. It can become the "static" that changes an established "hereditary message," with the message here being the logic of scientism.³² Accordingly, once wonderment exhausts semantic policing by crowding in prohibited meanings, the possibility of thinking other than the established way of knowing can take place. Through playing with semantic policing, wonderment can make the established reality and its borders look weakened, "more spacious and less definable."³³

WONDERMENT AND CREATING RESISTANCE

Wonderment can also invigorate epistemic resistances in three ways: by promoting an interrogative return to epistemic beginnings, by creating a "need" of a different epistemic beginning and by encouraging critical sustained epistemic deferrals.

NOURISHING AN INTERROGATIVE RETURN TO BEGINNINGS. An upshot of a weakened totalitarian logic can be a reflexive doubtful questioning of the justified premises that constituted totalitarianism. An interrogative return to beginnings is what John Sallis considers one of the notabilities of wonder (*Thaumazein*): Wonderment created by dyadic configurations made *Theaetetus* initiate an inquiry into the basic meanings of knowledge, or, in other words, a “peculiar return” (A Wonder, 244) to the fundamental formations of his knowledge. In addition, being capable of disrupting the logic of totalitarianism enables one to cast doubt on the premise-based, deductive, and “idea-1” origins of totalitarianism. Foucault corroborates this idea, recalling that wonderment led to an uneasy reflection on his system of knowing; it carried “a certain uneasiness” that was difficult to shake off, “perhaps because there arose in its wake the suspicion that there is a worse kind of disorder than that of the incongruous, the linking together of things that are inappropriate” (*The Order*, 19). The uneasy resistance that the “throe of wonder”³⁴ engenders helps “reopen past epistemic battles and open established frameworks to contestation.”³⁵ Through questionings of and returns to beginnings, the idea that was turned into a single unquestionable starting point can reappear as an idea again: to be investigated, evaluated or resisted.

CREATING THE “NEED” FOR A DIFFERENT BEGINNING FOR THINKING. Socratic wonder created the need for a different beginning that Martin Heidegger calls for.³⁶ *Theaetetus* is encouraged to work on giving birth to a new definition by “interrogating the logos that is established in his mind” (A Wonder, 252). For the question of what knowledge is, dividing, enumeration, collecting definitions, and numbering various forms are no longer enough: wonderment necessitates a need for a new and uncommon beginning for his thinking, “a new uncommon discourse” (*BQ*, 250). A consequence of this turn to beginnings promotes what Heidegger ingeniously calls a need: *Thaumazein* necessitates a need of a different beginning for thinking (*BQ*).

NOURISHING CRITICAL SUSTAINED DEFERRALS. Wonderment ruptures the unquestionable logic of epistemic totalitarianism: Borges’s example of taxonomy as a form of knowledge or Socrates’ constant interrogations about the familiar word “knowledge” are cases in point. This rupture relieves the Heideggerian “eruption of the usualness of the most usual” (*BQ*, 143). Wonderment stabs the dispositions that carry us; with *Thaumazein*, “what is most usual of all and in all, in whatever manner this might be, becomes the most unusual” (*BQ*, 145). Knowledge, which was the most usual concept, resists being the most usual. The “distress” (*BQ*, 131) of *Thaumazein* helped prevent the given beginnings and established conclusions to perform unhindered. Instead of fixing logic and putting an end to confusion, wonderment lets beings “emerge in the decisiveness of their being and to let them stand out before oneself, to perceive them as such and thereby to name them for their being in the first time” (*BQ*, 133). Foucault writes that after reading Borges’s taxonomy, he begins to apprehend the geographical and temporal limitations of his thought: wonderment “characterizes a stepping back in the face of beings, a stepping back that becomes attentive to beings, that they are and that they are so and not otherwise” (A Wonder, 252). Sallis elaborates on how, with the rupture of wonderment, “things remain other, an other in which one strives to find oneself again, one is conscious of them as external, natural

things, and yet one has a certain awareness of something higher” (A Wonder, 252). Wonderment thus creates resistance as it places thinking and beings in a mode of sustained unconcealedness (*BQ*, 156), which is inherently against totalitarianism’s rapid resorts to epistemic closures.

Particularly, this resistance does not lack rigor. Heidegger considers criticality to be internally affiliated with sustained deferrals generated by wonderment: “the sustaining of the basic disposition of wonderment is not a melting into or a vague and empty wallowing in ‘feelings.’ On the contrary, it is the carrying out of the necessity of the question of being as such in their region, [a] tolerating and sustaining of the inexplicable as such, despite being overwhelmed by the pressure of what reveals itself” (*BQ*, 149). The sustaining of the inexplicable in wonderment is unique in that it “seeks to perceive only that which is the unconcealed reveals in its unconcealedness, namely: presence, constancy, self-installation in a form, self-limitation in a look” (*BQ*, 149).

Through critical sustained deferrals, wonderment can be emancipatory, as it helps resist examine the speedy, linear certainty of totalitarian reasoning. Instead, wonderment “overturns” the dominant structure of knowledge in order to “twist free” of it.³⁷

WONDERMENT AND REINTRODUCING DISUNITY TO THE EXPERIENCE OF THINKING

Finally, wonderment invigorates the need for quasi-chaotic epistemic experiences that are discontinuous from totalizing logicity. An understanding that is nourished by epistemic totality is generated by logic more so than it is by experience.³⁸ In other words, understanding is a *prescribed* epistemological framework as opposed to an *experienced* one. This means thinking “becomes independent of all experience from which it cannot learn anything new even if it is a question of something that has just come to pass” (*OT*, 470). Therefore, the experience of comprehension through epistemic totalitarianism stands in contrast with William James’s notion of (emancipatory) experience.³⁹ He sees incongruity and discontinuity as necessary constituents within it: unlike epistemic totality and its rapid, linear resorts to pre-established conclusions, the Jamesian idea of experience has variations in rate and direction. This is where the antitotalitarian nature of wonderment is apparent, as it transforms the deductive nature of comprehension by means of enervating the logic, and hence creates a *need* for epistemic beginnings that are different from a logical beginning. Thus, comprehension stabbed by wonderment will no longer be inclined to entail a razor-like, colonial, and flattening continuity “that denies the outrageous, deduces the unprecedented from precedents, or explains phenomena by such analogies and generalities that the impact of reality and the shock of experience are no longer felt.”⁴⁰ It is not coincidental when James writes that a thinking that entails wonderment “appeals unutterably to experience alone.”⁴¹

CONCLUSION

That wonderment generates critical ruptures in epistemic totalitarianism can make it a promising epistemologico-educational framework. Similar to the epistemic ruptures that Dussel seeks, and, through the opening of closed epistemic spaces, wonderment can potentiate the reintroduction of the quasi-chaotic nature of expe-

rience to those whose experiences of observations and meaning-making have been bridled by rigid totalitarianism. The deforming of colonizing logicity can result in Levinas's much hoped-for "gleam of exteriority," where the condition of totality can break up. The interrogative return to and hovering over "beginnings" encourages gazing at a situation that conditioned totalitarianism itself. Furthermore, the generation of interrogative returns to beginnings responds to a Fanonian call for a self-combusting thought that digs into its own flesh for meaning. Most importantly, through generating the Heideggerian *need* for epistemic beginnings, wonderment can pave the way for Battiste/Freire's epistemologically and educationally decolonial, antitotalitarian framework of critical-conscientization: a framework that deforms totalizing logicity, weakens established realities and creates resistance to understandings generated by violent totality.

1. Hannah Arendt, *The Origins of Totalitarianism* (San Diego: Harcourt Brace, 1979), 460–479. This work will be cited as *OT* in the text for all subsequent references.

2. Michel Foucault, *The Order of Things: An Archaeology of the Human Sciences* (New York: Vintage Books, 2011), 183. This work will be cited as *The Order* in the Text for all subsequent references.

3. Gayatri Chakravorty Spivak, "Can the Subaltern Speak?" in *Colonial Discourse and Post-colonial Theory*, eds. Patrick Williams and Laura Chrisman (New York: Columbia, 1994), 76.

4. Emmanuel Levinas, *Totality and Infinity*, trans. Alphonso Lingis (Pittsburgh: Duquesne University Press, 1996), 24.

5. James R. Mensch, "Lectures on Levinas' Totalitarianism and Infinity Paper, 2013," www.academia.edu (lecture series on academia.edu), 3.

6. Joanne P. Sharpe, *Geographies of PostColonialism* (London: Sage, 2009), 5.

7. Frantz Fanon, *Black Skin, White Masks*, ed. Ziauddin Sardar, trans. Charles Lam Markmann (London: Pluto Press 2008), 2.

8. *Ibid.*

9. Enrique D. Dussel, *Philosophy of Liberation*, trans. Aquilina Martinez and Christine Morkovsky (New York: Orbis Books, 1985), 15.

10. *Ibid.*

11. *Ibid.*

12. Sharpe, *Geographies of PostColonialism*, 5.

13. Marie Battiste, "Cognitive Imperialism and Decolonizing Research," in *Surveying Borders, Boundaries, and Contested Spaces in Curriculum and Pedagogy*, eds. Cole Reilly, Victoria Russell, Laurel K. Chehayl and Morna M. McDermott (Charlotte, NC: Information Age Publishing, 2011), 18.

14. *Ibid.*, 25.

15. *Ibid.*

16. David Blacker, "Fanaticism and Schooling in the Democratic State," *American Journal of Education* (1998): 245.

17. Frantz Fanon, "On National Culture," in *African Intellectual Heritage: A Book of Sources*, eds. Molefi Kete Asante and Abu S. Abarry (Philadelphia: Temple University Press, 1996), 238.

18. Emmanuel Levinas, *Totality and Infinity*, trans. Alphonso Lingis (Pittsburgh: Duquesne University Press, 1996), 24.

19. *Ibid.*

20. Dussel, *Philosophy of Liberation*.

21. Andrew B. Irvine, "An Ontological Critique of the Trans-Ontology of Enrique Dussel," *Sophia* 50, no. 4 (2011): 603–624.
22. Fanon, *Black Skin*, 2.
23. Battiste, "Cognitive Imperialism," 24.
24. John Sallis, "A Wonder That One May Never Aspire to Surpass," in *The Path of Archaic Thinking*, ed. Kenneth Maly (Albany: State University of New York Press, 1995), 256. This work will be cited as "A Wonder" in the text for all subsequent references.
25. Ian Almond, *Sufism and Deconstruction: A Comparative Study of Derrida and Ibn 'Arabi* (London: Routledge, 2004), 43. This work will be cited as *SD* in the text for all subsequent references.
26. Plato, *Theaetetus*, trans. Robin Waterfield (London: Penguin Classics, 2004), 35c2–7.
27. *Ibid.*, 37c9–10.
28. *Ibid.*, 37d1–4.
29. Mary-Jane Rubenstein, *Strange Wonder: The Closure of Metaphysics and the Opening of Awe* (New York: Columbia University Press, 2010), 8.
30. Jorge Luis Borges, *Other Inquisitions 1937–1952*, trans. Ruth L. Simms (Austin: University of Texas Press, 1993), 231, quoted in Foucault, *The Order of Things*, 16.
31. Michel Foucault, "Society Must Be Defended": *Lectures at the Collège de France, 1975–1976*, trans. David Macey (New York: Picador, 2003), 70, quoted in José Medina, "Toward a Foucaultian Epistemology of Resistance: Counter-memory, Epistemic Friction, and Guerrilla Pluralism," *Foucault Studies* 12 (2011): 15.
32. Cornelis Verhoeven, *The Philosophy of Wonder: An Introduction and Incitement to Philosophy*, trans. Mary Foran (New York: Macmillan, 1972), 81.
33. Santiago Zabala, *Weakening Philosophy, Essays in Honour of Gianni Vattimo* (Montreal: McGill-Queen's University Press, 2007), 29.
34. See Jerome A. Miller, *In the Throe of Wonder: Intimations of the Sacred in a Post-Modern World* (New York, Albany: SUNY, 1992).
35. Medina, "Toward a Foucaultian Epistemology of Resistance," 11.
36. See Martin Heidegger, *Basic Questions of Philosophy: Selected Problems of Logic*, trans. By Richard Rojcewicz and André Schuwer (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1994), chapter 5, "The Need and the Necessity of the First Beginning and the Need and the Necessity of an Other Way to Question and to Begin." This work will be cited as *BQ* in the text for all subsequent references.
37. For a discussion on the overturning of metaphysics see Sallis, "A Wonder," 260: "The time when overturning Platonism for Nietzsche became a twisting free of it."
38. See Arendt's discussion on ideology and terror in *The Origins of Totalitarianism*, 460–479.
39. William James, *William James: Writings, 1902–1910*, (New York: Literary Classics, 1987).
40. *Ibid.*, 8.
41. *Ibid.*, 1312–1313.