

More than Mercy: Towards a Better Affective Compromise in the Catholic Pastoral Response to Transness

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Abstract

Pope Francis' pastoral response to trans people represents a compromise between his negative-affective political stance towards transness, and his positive-affective theology of pastoral welcome. By reducing away transness to sickness or sin, he can welcome trans people as individuals in a depoliticised personal sphere apart from the political - at the cost of a reductive 'domestication' of trans people, and the reproduction of right-wing populist politics evoked by his own negative-affective political transphobia. This paper argues for a better compromise, which enables positive-affective attitudes specifically in and amidst negative-affect, enabling trans people to be welcomed without reduction. It does this by reading Francis as championing a utopianism similar to that of José Esteban Muñoz. It argues that his recovery of a Franciscan ethic of self-subjection gestures towards an unimagined relationality in which trans people can be welcomed amidst the tensions of the present, and against theopolitical transphobia.

Keywords: Pope Francis; José Esteban Muñoz; utopia; transgender; Evangelii

Gaudium; Fratelli tutti

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The Catholic Church doesn't know how to feel about transness. This is illustrated starkly by Pope Francis' comments in an in-flight press conference after his 2016 visit to Azerbaijan. During the conference, the journalist, Joshua McElwee challenges Francis on his comments describing "gender theory" as "the great enemy, a threat to marriage". He asks Francis how he would pastorally accompany someone who "has suffered for years with his or her sexuality and truly feels that it is a biological problem, that his or her physical makeup does not correspond to what he or she considers his or her sexual identity". Francis responds by affirming his own history of accompanying queer people, as well as the importance of not rejecting them. However, he also reaffirms his condemnation of "gender theory", describing its mainstreaming in schools as "ideological colonisation". He then tells a story of a Spanish trans man whom he once received, and speaks approvingly of a priest who heard his confession. He takes this as an example of a good pastoral approach, elaborating:

Life is life, and things have to be taken as they come. Sin is sin. Tendencies or hormonal imbalances create many problems and we have to take care not to say: "It doesn't make any difference, let's live it up"... But for every case welcome it, accompany it, look into it, discern and integrate it... Please, do not say: "The Pope blesses transsexuals... I want to be clear. It is a moral problem... It is a human problem. And it must be resolved as best we can, always with the mercy of God, with the truth... but always this way, with our hearts open."¹

Here, negative-affective narratives around "gender theory" are woven together with positive-affective narratives around welcome.² Indeed, there is an implicit challenge in McElwee's question about whether Francis' negative-affective narratives are compatible with a loving pastoral approach. In this context, Francis' narrative of welcome is marked by something of a compromise with his political negative affect, not only being reconciled to it, but actually serves to justify it by showing that this compatibility exists.

This paper attempts to think through the interface between these two affective dimensions of Francis' approach to transness. I argue Francis' affective compromise leads him to a reductive pastoral approach to transness that cannot recognise its authentically challenging dimensions. The result is that his welcome to trans people is highly conditional, revolving around the negation of transness' challenging aspects. Trans people may rightly be hesitant to subject ourselves to these conditions. It also leaves uninterrogated the link between political negative-affect and the kinds of harmful policies in which it often finds expression.

In this context, I consider the possibility for an approach to transness that can both derive positive affect from it, but also avoid imposing the conditions associated with Francis' current pastoral approach. I argue that Francis' apostolic exhortation, *Evangelii Gaudium* offers a hermeneutic of alterity that parallels José Esteban Muñoz's "anti-antirelational" queer utopianism. In doing so, it suggests the possibility of finding joy even among real conflict and difference. When applied to trans people, this should allow Catholics to find joy in transness even in the face of the challenges or dangers excluded by the conditions of Francis' welcome. I then anticipate the criticism that this new approach is too idealising to break the link between negative political affect and transphobic policy, arguing that Francis' utopian desire ought to actively motivate Catholics to actively work for trans liberation – albeit perhaps in an uneasy way.

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A troublesome compromise

There are several troubling aspects to Francis' hermeneutic of transness. First, his positive-affective hermeneutic of trans people is premised on reducing away transness to sickness or sin. This discourse of disease³ is paternalistic and individualising, and its pathologizing dimensions and attendant narratives of accompaniment and healing are haunted by the spectre

of harmful conversion practices⁴ - which draw from this medical and pastoral imaginary to delegitimise transness and convey themselves as a form of compassionate medical care and spiritual salvation.⁵ But more subtly, his pastoral approach thus turns on a distinction between the (welcome) person and their (sinful, sick) transness, with the latter being excluded from the scope of his positive-affective response. Trans people can only be the object of this positive affect insofar as we can prescind from our transness. Moreover, through this reduction, he renders trans people unthreatening: we do not challenge the gender and bodily norms he champions; we are merely sick, or just another group of sinful people to be viewed with mercy. And in this regard, he closes himself off to any positive or liberative aspects to transness' more transgressive dimensions, too.⁶

In these regards, Francis displays wider problems associated with positive-affective hermeneutics: that, in the pursuit of positive affect, they can also seek to master their objects, often by conforming their objects to a status quo that dictates the conditions for positive affect.⁷ This is a problem for trans people who might otherwise want to embrace Francis' attitude of welcome. This attitude is premised on our dissociating ourselves from our transness, particularly in its more challenging dimensions.

Second, Francis' concerns about ideological colonisation are inflected with contemporary populist rhetoric around transness. This becomes particularly apparent when they are read alongside statements such as his concern in *Amoris Laetitia* about

...an ideology of gender that “denies the difference and reciprocity in nature of a man and a woman and envisages a society without sexual differences... This ideology leads to educational programmes and legislative enactments that promote a personal identity and emotional intimacy radically separated from the biological difference between male and female....” It is a source of concern that

some ideologies of this sort... manage to assert themselves as absolute and unquestionable, even dictating how children should be raised.⁸

The term, “ideology of gender” evokes a recent history of Catholic concern about feminist and later queer politics. Case traces this back to the 1980s,⁹ although Garbagnoli argues that these roots build on even earlier material.¹⁰ However, Faúndes finds its characteristic themes in a more fully realised form in conservative reactions from Francis’ native Argentina against the mainstreaming of “gender” as an analytical term, as well as various sexual and reproductive rights in the UN in the mid-1990s.¹¹ Originally framed in terms of fears around “gender feminism”, these narratives find contemporary expression in terms of “gender ideology”. The construct, “gender ideology” now functions as an “overdetermined”¹² signifier that serves as the “symbolic glue” binding together a range of otherwise disparate reactionary political movements around the world.¹³ These are associated with one another by common rhetoric including narratives around queer emancipatory politics as cultural colonisation,¹⁴ as well as moral panic around danger to children, including that of supposed indoctrination in an educational setting.¹⁵

To put it bluntly, these politics respond to negative-affective narratives around transness by pursuing policies that serve to create societies in which trans people are policed and marginalised, and trans life is what Butler might describe as “unlivable”.¹⁶ Indeed, Francis himself recognises these oppressive dynamics within them in relation to other groups: while Francis’ historic relationship to them is an ambivalent one,¹⁷ he explicitly condemns them today for their hostility to the vulnerable, especially refugees and asylum seekers.¹⁸

As illustrated by his response to McElwee’s challenge, Francis’ pastoral response to trans people serves to accommodate these politics in the face of his pastoral responsibility. The upshot is that it can be turned to justifying the policies associated with them in this context,

working to create a world that is fundamentally hostile to trans people. Indeed, insofar as unlivability is bound up in subjective unviability,¹⁹ Francis' pathologizing discursive approach directly suggests such an eliminatory project. This, too, makes the terms of his welcome troubling.

In the face of these issues, I would like to suggest some parameters for a better pastoral approach. This approach would

1. be capable of recognising something authentically joyous in transness, and therefore able to offer a positive-affective response to trans people *as* trans people.
2. be able to do this without negating the aspects of transness that might otherwise be challenging, unsettling or troubling. This is important not only in that it would enable trans people to accept this response without having to abandon these aspects of our transness, but also because many trans people (myself included) would want to say that part of the value of transness lies in the way that it troubles the gender ideologies ascendent in the Church. Conversely, we live in a world in which many pastors simply *do* find transness troubling, and any pastoral response which requires a pastor to sideline these impressions would likely be unrealisable for many.
3. integrate its positive- and negative- affective dimensions such that it finds positive affect *in* or *through* the negative. Francis' pastoral response is problematic because of the way in which its positive-affective dimension is enabled only through a defensive reaction against the object of his negative-affective political stance. In short, while his positive-affective pastoral response serves to validate his negative-affective politics, his pastoral response itself is premised on an opposition between positive and negative affect, and it is from this opposition that the limitations to that response arise. An integration of the two affects would overcome this opposition and thus avoid these limitations in its pursuit of joy in transness.

4. interrupt the pass from negative-affective narrative to hostile policy. Francis' political negative affect is bound up with certain narratives around transness that are associated with a politics that also encompasses policies that seek to make trans life unlivable. His pastoral response serves to validate the policies that are promoted in response to them. Because those narratives frame and may motivate his negative affect, it is questionable whether the two can be detached. To compromise with his negative affect therefore likely means leaving them intact. Equally, however, a more satisfactory pastoral response cannot serve those policies. It is also likely that, for many Catholics, the fact that these politics as a whole are so entrenched within the Catholic world makes it seem as though their associated policies are the necessary expression of the associated narratives. This means that any such interruption must involve a demonstration both that hostile policy need not follow from those narratives, and that non-transphobic policy can do so too.

This paper seeks to develop such an approach. But before I move on, two caveats:

First, I do not, however, claim that it is ideal. Francis' pastoral approach is effectively a compromise between negative-affective views of transness, and desires for trans people to be welcome within the Church. This paper simply hopes to suggest a better one.

Second, nor do I claim that my suggested approach will, in itself, be a compelling one. My argument above turns on the idea that making trans life unlivable is undesirable. Of course, this will be unconvincing to anyone who believes that trans life ought not to be accommodated within society and transition should be impossible – a group that includes some proponents of the very approach I have just criticised. Rather, I write with a particular eye to my own project as an ecclesially-engaged trans theologian. I have argued elsewhere that trans people can see themselves as playing a pastoral role in the life of the Church,

leading it beyond its present limitations in a manner suggested by Francis' own eschatological view of pastoral accompaniment.²⁰ In this vein, the purpose of this paper is simply to explore the possibility that a better compromise between the two affects defining Francis' pastoral approach to trans people is possible. On the other hand, my argument below suggests that this compromise might be truer to at least certain themes in Francis' teachings that seem to demand solidarity in the face of unlivability. Those who are compelled by my reading of these themes may therefore find my compromise persuasive on that basis alone; something which might then serve as a propaedeutic for affirming my criticism above. Either way, the question of how to make it compelling to those who do not find my critique a problem lies outside the scope of this paper.

A utopian hermeneutic

The foundation for the affective compromise I seek lies in a certain *utopian* dimension to Francis' social teaching. This parallels, and emerges when read alongside, José Esteban Muñoz's queer utopianism.

Queer utopia

Muñoz is one of many queer theorists who figure queerness in terms of temporality, problematising "seemingly commonsensical categories such as past, present, and future".²¹ He finds in queer art the capacity for a kind of "anticipatory illumination", deriving from a "surplus of both affect and meaning within the aesthetic" beyond the mere attraction of beauty. This surplus enables a work of art to envisage unrealised utopian "potentiality". These potentialities, for Muñoz, "are present", but "do not exist in present things". Rather, they have "a temporality that is not in the present, but... in the horizon, which we can understand as futurity".²² Their presence thus gestures beyond conditions of the present, including the present limitations of the subject of the art itself.²³ They are marks of an "ecstatic" futurity

that gestures beyond the totalised conditions of the present.²⁴ Seeking a utopian future in this mode thus marshals desire to seek fulfilment not within the conditions of the present, with all their attendant injustices and political impasses, but in their overcoming through the realisation of alternative, hopeful potentialities.

Crucially, this also includes potentialities for political collectivity. Muñoz finds this political potentiality embodied in the “we” invoked and addressed by statements such as the Queer Liberation Front’s slogan, “we want a new society”.²⁵ For Muñoz, this “we” is “a future collectivity, a queerness that registers as the illumination of a horizon of existence”.²⁶ Our belonging to this future collectivity is not a function of some already-grasped unity or principle, but rather an unrealised queerness glimpsed only as a utopian horizon. And in turn, this means that to be ‘queer’ in the present is not to share in some already-realised univocal identity, but instead to be a point of juncture from the present in which this utopian future may arise.

The upshot is that Muñoz’ ecstatic futurity thus opens up a social vision characterised by a “proximity of different senses of the world”.²⁷ In this, a plurality of distinct and incommensurable senses of the world are shared among others to produce the common world, which does not reduce to any one existing sense. Muñoz describes this pluralism in terms of a radical negativity: a “negation of negation” in which we find a non-opposition between the negativity of irreducible difference and the positivity of the social, such that negation can be the source of positivity. It emerges from an “anti-antirelationality”, in which incommensurable others come together *in* their incommensurability, without the reducing away to some already-realised ‘same’ that merely perpetuates the conditions of the present. Likewise, as illustrated by the Queer Liberation Front, queer belonging to this future community is a belonging in particularity, with the potential for the collective to emerge from the surplus that arises within the double negativity that attends difference in the present.²⁸

Significantly, this difference can even be a conflictual one. Muñoz illustrates this with an example from Eileen Myles' memoir of queer awakening, *Chelsea Girls*. The book recounts Myles' work as a carer for the queer poet, James Schuyler in a way that foregrounds agonistic dimensions of class conflict, yet also testifies to a "surplus that is manifest in the complexity of their moments of contact".²⁹ Schuyler dominated those around him, conducting them as if they were an orchestra by withholding or granting this attention as it suited him. This gave rise to an affective dynamic in which Myles describes each person as becoming "like music"; something that, for all its painfulness, was nevertheless "marvellous to be around".³⁰ Here, Muñoz writes, Myles reveals this anti-antirelational dynamic, in which agonistic difference is both entirely real and acknowledged, and serves as the context for joy to emerge; a utopian "communing of incommensurable singularities" in a relationality of "being-in-common-in-difference".³¹

The result is a social vision that can admit present conflict and negativity, but look to hopeful potentialities and future reconciliation as the surplus that emerges from within the agonisms of today. In this way, Muñoz holds in tension *both* negative- *and* positive-affective impulses – but without slipping into either the self-protective refusal to allow the other to present themselves as a source of pleasure, or domestications that render them a source of positive affect by conforming them to one's desire. This, then, might be the stance we need of Francis, allowing the potentiality not only for a recognition of something authentically joyful in transness, but without denying its transgressive aspects and the challenges these may hold, and even locating the potentiality for that joy *in* the conflicts engendered by that transgression.

Francis and utopianism

Francis offers hints of a similar utopianism in his *Evangelii Gaudium*.³² The surplus that characterises anti-antirelationality emerges in the second and fourth of Francis' "four

principles related to constant tensions present in every social reality”, which he presents as able to “guide the development of life in society and the building of a people where differences are harmonized within a shared pursuit”.³³

His second principle is “*Unity prevails over conflict*”. Here, the surplus is unity itself, which does not simply prevail over conflict, but emerges from it without negating the tensions which produce it. Hence Francis begins by affirming: “Conflict cannot be ignored or concealed. It has to be faced”. However, he follows this up with a statement about not allowing oneself to become “trapped in conflict” such that we lose sight of the “profound unity of reality”.³⁴

This tension between present conflict and unity is then inscribed within a utopian temporality via reference to his first principle: *Time is greater than space*”. This enjoins us to locate ourselves in “time”, or the tension between “each individual moment and the greater, brighter horizon of the utopian future as the final cause which draws us to itself”.³⁵ Francis illustrates what this means by way of a contrast between time and space:

Giving priority to space means madly attempting to keep everything together in the present, trying to possess all the spaces of power and of self-assertion...

Giving priority to time means being concerned about initiating processes rather than possessing spaces. Time governs spaces, illumines them and makes them links in a constantly expanding chain, with no possibility of return.³⁶

Here, space represents immediacy and possession. In contrast, time is deferral and surrender of power, but also relativises space, inscribing it within a broader eschatological trajectory identified with “processes”. To prioritise time means being concerned with surrendering the desire to possess and control, approaching the world in terms of something we engage with in an eschatological context that outstrips the present. Francis views unity in these terms,

writing that the “best way” to deal with conflict is to “resolve it and to make it a link in the chain of a new process”.³⁷

Moreover, viewed in this way, unity becomes a utopian surplus to the conflicts of the present. *Prima facie* this may be surprising: such teleological language seems opposed to anti-antirelational surplus. The object of Muñoz’s utopian hope is “queerness”, or a life beyond the pain of what he calls “straight time”: the “dominant and overarching temporal and spatial organization of the world” that makes queer life impossible.³⁸ This gestures towards queerness as “the-thing-that-is-not-yet-imagined”; a futurity that has yet to be envisioned as an object to be directly grasped or desired.³⁹ In this, queer utopianism exists in an “ontologically humble state” that rejects the idea that queerness is “always already known”.⁴⁰ This ontological humility has the effect of unfixing queerness in time, in relation to both the past and future.

However, there is a deeper resemblance between Francis’ teleology and this queer temporal unfixing. Muñoz illustrates this when he quotes Heidegger to argue that queer utopianism’s transformative capacity means “[t]ime is prior to space” – in the process echoing Francis. The transformative power of queer utopianism lies in the way that the “then” of the unimagined future (as well as of the past – more on this later) “potentially has bearing on the *here* of naturalized space and time”, rendering contingent the set of elements included in the present which might otherwise be taken as necessity.⁴¹ In this regard, it also evokes Francis’ relativisation of present limitation in the face of the “bright horizon of the utopian future” and the process of its realisation.

This might be taken as another way of understanding what it means to make something a “link in the chain of a new process”, unmooring the present from necessity, and thereby inscribing it within a new temporality. To read Francis in this way would be to nuance our

understanding of how he uses teleology. For Francis, the future draws the present towards itself. However it does so in a way that is less about confirming the present in relation to the future, and more about unfixing it by juxtaposing the latter against the former as its horizon, therein affirming the inabsoluteness of the present before it.

The figure of the “process” in Francis’ first principle embodies this movement: it is something that we set in place, but which exceeds us, extending into the future. Insofar as we enter into processes, this excess is also an ecstatic one. Crucially, this self-transcendence has an interpersonal dimension: initiating processes requires us to “engage other persons and groups” who can bring them to fruition.⁴² This returns us to Francis’ second principle: such engagement can include conflict. That is, the “final cause” which draws us to itself only does so through present conflict, which otherwise “cannot be ignored”, and in doing so overturns present totalisations. Here, we have the non-opposition between (presently) irreconcilable difference and the surplus fulfilment which emerges from it. Reconciliation is not the fulfilment of a teleological movement in which the social arrangements of the present are ultimately confirmed. It does not seek a peace that reduces to mastery and the status quo. Rather, it represents a fulfilment outside of the present time and its conflicts.

This utopianism can also be glimpsed in Francis’ use of the past. Muñoz illustrates queer ontological humility by contrasting its attitude to the past with what he calls “evidencing”: the practice of understanding the present by looking to the past for the conditions that necessitate it. Evidencing renders the past a function of the present, as its guarantor, thereby serving to consolidate the present by portraying it as inevitable. In contrast, queer utopianism approaches the past as the “no longer conscious”, which, rather than necessitating the present, embodies what could have been, but has now been forgotten. Viewed in this way, the past can be recovered and brought to bear on the present in order to reveal its contingency, and the potentiality for alternative futures.⁴³ To illustrate this, he gives the examples of rapturous late

20th Century queer memoirs that draw an idealised picture of queer life without reference to the impact of AIDS. To read these and then return to life in the “straight world” is to experience a “shock” that reveals “the prison that is heteronormativity”,⁴⁴ thereby also indicating the potentiality of life beyond its walls.

Francis similarly uses history to gesture towards the potentiality of his utopian future:

Laudato si' critiques a present in which moral value is reduced away before an ideology of instrumentality that Francis calls the “technocratic paradigm”.⁴⁵ It does so by recovering a vision of the past that instrumental culture seems to have forgotten: that of Genesis, in which “human life is grounded in three fundamental and closely intertwined relationships: with God, with our neighbour and with the earth itself”. These, Francis claims, have been ruptured by sin. In this context, the technocratic paradigm is an expression of this disruption in the form of an overreach of human agency, or “our presuming to take the place of God and refusing to acknowledge our creaturely limitations”.⁴⁶ Read as sin, and in light of the original mode of relationality within Genesis, the paradigm is revealed to be contingent.

Laudato si' then moves from this revelation of contingency to gesture towards an alternative futurity: Francis states that viewing the world as creation in this way requires us to view it in light of a divine love that “calls us together into universal communion”.⁴⁷ He also figures this communion in terms of the Kingdom, as encountered in the present communion of the Eucharist.⁴⁸ In doing so, the Eucharist becomes a site of utopian hope within the present, gesturing towards and locating the Church in relation to this alternative future amidst the totalisation of what, to evoke Muñoz, we might describe as the dominant vision of technocratic time.

Here, perhaps, we have the basis for meeting the first three conditions described above: this hope for peaceable communion suggests a basis for a positive-affective response to trans

people as those with whom Catholics may one day be in communion (1). However, this communion is present only as potentiality, standing in irreducible tension with tensions in the present that must therefore be acknowledged (2). Yet this communion emerges from within those tensions, enabling a move from negative *to* positive-affect (3).

Trouble in paradise

Queerphobic dystopia

Laudato si's utopianism is, however, not entirely suitable here. In the encyclical, the dog-whistle identification of “valuing one’s own body in its femininity or masculinity” as a component of proper relationality locates transness within the present that Francis looks to transcend.⁴⁹ More broadly, *Laudato si*'s concerns around human nature emerge from a long history of Catholic antifeminism.⁵⁰ More broadly still, such Catholic anti-gender rhetoric represents a reaction against “the theoretical revolution produced by sexual minorities... in order to render visible and thinkable the social origins of the oppression that they bear”, constructing these groups as a unified political antagonist precisely in order to oppose them.⁵¹

In short, while *Laudato si*'s attack on transness gestures beyond the present of technocracy, it fails to make the crucial ecstatic movement beyond the present of theopolitical transphobia.

As Lemaster puts it, the utopia of *Laudato si*' is therefore ultimately “dystopic” for trans people, reproducing rather than transcending the pain of the present.⁵² This reveals an additional significance to the political dimension of Francis' response to transness, which can now be seen to play a role beyond simply motivating negative and limiting the scope for positive affect: Francis' hopeful vision itself is embedded in a politics that is fundamentally hostile to trans people. Indeed, we can see this in the unspoken dimensions to the positive-affective narratives of transness that it permits: that trans people will separate themselves out from our transness, that we will be integrated into a Church that remains unchallenged by

transness, and perhaps even that we will be healed *of* their transness. That is, his hope is for nothing less than the end of transness.

Another aspect of Muñoz's utopianism can help us here: the transformation of space to enable a new kind of globalism or universalism. For Muñoz, queer globalism stands in opposition to the "here and now" of contemporary capitalism,⁵³ evoking a "there" which lies beyond its totalised global order. To illustrate this, he offers the example of Third World Gay Revolution: a US-based gay rights movement which identified itself with global movements towards decolonisation that lay beyond the political identities and formations available in their US context.⁵⁴

This parallels Francis' fourth principle in *Evangelii Gaudium*: "*The whole is greater than the part*" (EG 234). This promotes a 'polyhedral' universalism in which the differences between locales are maintained within a whole that nevertheless also exceeds the sum of its parts. Francis contrasts this with a conformist 'spherical' universalism in which difference is obliterated. Like his second principle, this principle locates relationality in the 'beyond' of a higher dimension that transcends the elements which are incorporated within them, namely a third dimension in which the various two-dimensional faces of the polyhedron converge. Specifically, this illustrates a globalism in which various local groups and cultures can exist without being subsumed under global capitalism. In this way, Francis' polyhedral convergence in difference likewise envisions a global relationality that exists as surplus beyond the totalisations of the present global order; a mode of relation that is other to the ones available in the present. Hence even absolute and thus irreconcilable tensions in the present are no obstacle to it: "Even people who can be considered dubious on account of their errors have something to offer which must not be overlooked" (EG 236).

This suggests that hopes for the political overcoming of difference are inappropriate – even when that difference cannot be received entirely happily – which in turn seems to warn directly against the way *Laudato si'* totalises the transphobic present by drawing from it to imagine a future in which transness has been overcome. A hope more faithful to *Evangelii Gaudium's* utopian universalism would be for a relationality that is the-thing-that-is-not-yet-imagined, rejecting such totalisations. So is there some other figure of relationality in Francis' thought that could motivate this hope?

Franciscan self-subjection

Fratelli tutti can provide this figure. In the encyclical, Francis returns to the universalism of *Evangelii Gaudium*, seeking a “universal communion”⁵⁵ in a “love capable of transcending borders” which he calls “social friendship”.⁵⁶ This love unites societies, with this inwards impulse abiding in productive tension with “[u]niversal fraternity”: an outwards-looking, global orientation that prevents social friendship from turning into something insular. This tension is a utopian one that evokes *Evangelii Gaudium*: Francis describes the global, in its capacity to draw societies out of insularity, as the “‘final cause’ that draws us towards our fulfilment”, but which preserves and is enriched by the particularities of the local.⁵⁷ He also cites *Evangelii Gaudium's* model of polyhedral globalisation in illustration.⁵⁸

Fratelli tutti also offers a distinctive contribution to Francis' utopianism in its recovery of the figure of Saint Francis of Assisi: Francis describes Saint Francis as crossing political and social boundaries in his mission to the Saracens. This mission, he writes, was animated by a spirit that refused all forms of conflict in favour of “a humble and fraternal ‘subjection’” to those who did not share the faith.⁵⁹ This subjection enabled him to attain a new mode of relationality: “He understood that ‘God is love and those who abide in love abide in God’ (*Jn* 4:16). In this way, he became a father to all and inspired the vision of fraternal society”. Francis contrasts this with the “bristling... watchtowers and defensive walls” of the medieval

world, demarcating geographical boundaries that tracked deeper divisions between powerful warring families who sought to dominate one another.⁶⁰ In this context, St Francis' refusal of power enacted another form of relationality, beyond the violent relationality of his time. His kenotic self-subjection to others can be read as a utopian gesture, opening a space in which people could abide in God's love, rather than fighting for dominance.

Moreover, Francis' recalling his namesake's own utopianism is itself a utopian recovery of this past as no-longer-conscious within our present context: Francis notes that the world in which we live now is characterised by "a certain regression", with the resurgence of old conflicts and the rise of "a myopic, extremist, resentful and aggressive nationalism".⁶¹ He also claims that even the supposed "[o]pening up to the world" of globalisation simply serves to reproduce this conflictual mode of relation, serving as the vehicle for new forms of colonisation and domination while weakening of social bonds in favour of consumerist individualism.⁶² Finally, he writes that even ideals that previously may have pointed beyond these modes of relation have been co-opted by these tendencies, with "certain words like democracy, freedom, justice or unity" having "been bent and shaped to serve as tools for domination, as meaningless tags that can be used to justify any action".⁶³ The result is that "we no longer have common horizons", which is to say a relationality that does not reduce to conflict, dominance, and the expression of power.⁶⁴ In this context, the same fears that built the fortified walls of the medieval era remain.⁶⁵

For Pope Francis, St. Francis' mission speaks to an alternative potentiality for relationality in the face of these developments, which he explores in greater detail in his chapter on the Good Samaritan. A major theme within this chapter is that our concern for others ought not to be bounded by various social divisions. Francis writes that "love does not care if a brother or sister in need comes from one place or another. For 'love shatters the chains that keep us isolated and separate; in their place it builds bridges...'"⁶⁶ This, Francis argues, is

exemplified in the parable of the Good Samaritan, which exemplifies how we should be “builders of a new social bond”, answering a

...summons ever new, yet... grounded in the fundamental law of our being: we are called to direct society to the pursuit of the common good and... to persevere in consolidating its political and social order, its fabric of relations, its human goals.⁶⁷

Francis distinguishes this message of this parable from “abstract moralising”, and declares that its message is not “merely social and ethical”. Instead, it “speaks to us of an essential and often forgotten aspect of our common humanity: we were created for a fulfilment that can only be found in love”.⁶⁸ In the face of this love and our vocation to it, “all our distinctions, labels and masks fall away”, leaving “only two kinds of people: those who care for someone who is hurting and those who pass by”.⁶⁹ In other words, the relationality in the parable is prior to and thus undetermined by the conditions which govern relationality in the present – whether that is the theoretical frameworks of “abstract moralising”, or the “social and ethical” divisions between various groups of people. Instead, it is rooted in our very being, and draws us beyond these boundaries to exist solely as people who respond to others’ need.⁷⁰

This might simply be read as leading back to Francis’ hermeneutic of welcome, in which trans people are to be viewed positively as individuals in need, dissociated from our transness. This reflects the way that concepts of “need” can often serve to reproduce relationalities that are framed as the fulfilment of need. Natural law reasoning grounds various social arrangements in an account of human need in this way,⁷¹ and where love is linked to the fulfilment of need, ethics of love can likewise become vehicles for this kind of reproduction. For example, Benedict XVI cites *Humanae vitae* to frame certain sexual norms

as truths intrinsic to the expression of love.⁷² Francis' concept of Franciscan "abiding" in God's love can be read as freighted with cissexism in a similar way.

However, *Fratelli tutti* continues to make a curious move. Francis later returns to this theme of crossing social boundaries when he writes that

...the Samaritan *became a neighbour* to the wounded Judean. By approaching and making himself present, he crossed all cultural and historical barriers...

[Jesus] challenges us to put aside all differences... I should no longer say that I have neighbours to help, but that I must myself be a neighbour to others.⁷³

Francis here is referring to the way that the Good Samaritan refused to allow his concern to be restricted by customary conceptions of neighbourhood, which did not cross the division between Samaritans and Jews.⁷⁴ Yet this final reversal from having neighbours to having to *be* a neighbour has a deeper significance: we are not called to passively accept the responsibilities that come with our existing circle of concern, but to actively enlarge that circle itself. This returns us to Franciscan self-subjection to the other. Francis aspires to a mode of relationality which overturns the divisions comprising the contemporary domination of the weak by the powerful. That is, the divisions that the example of the Good Samaritan calls us to break down are a matter of power and domination. To emulate the Good Samaritan therefore requires us to break down relationships of power and domination. And this is exactly what a Franciscan refusal of power does: to exist as someone who gives aid means relating to others without wielding power in such a way as to reproduce contemporary relationships of domination.

This relationality not only points beyond the conditions of present relationality, but in doing so is incompatible with the present of theopolitical transphobia and the elimination of transness that it envisions and pursues. The utopian hope of *Fratelli Tutti* thus points us beyond the

limitations of *Laudato si'*, gesturing towards a relationality other to the present *Laudato si'* hopes to reproduce.

There are of course troubling aspects to *Fratelli tutti*'s utopianism, too: Francis' framing of his utopian relationality in the language of fatherhood and fraternity has patriarchal connotations. His worries about verbal corruption also evokes populist rhetoric around verbal engineering.⁷⁵ Finally, his concerns around individualism and rights evokes populist rhetoric that "replaces individual rights with rights of the family as a basic societal unit",⁷⁶ and opposes queerness as individualism in this sense.⁷⁷

However, there is one crucial aspect to *Fratelli tutti*'s utopianism that both distinguishes it from that of *Laudato si'* and helps us to overcome these problematic elements: any transphobic (or otherwise oppressive) relationality would be structured by power relations incompatible with the kenotic self-subjection which characterises Franciscan abiding. It is therefore possible to simply see these problematic elements as Francis overstepping himself to imagine his utopia, against its nature as the-thing-that-is-not-yet-imagined. Read in this way, they are simply imperfect attempts to express Francis' utopian hope, and in this capacity ultimately gesture towards their own overcoming. That is, whereas *Laudato si'*'s utopian hope simply reacts against transness, the kyriarchal elements within *Fratelli tutti* are more a matter of Francis being inconsistent in how he envisions his utopian hope, rather than a problem with that hope itself.

In short, the encyclical offers a corrective to its own flaws, rather than foundering upon them. And in this vein, the utopianism of *Fratelli tutti* might be read as a corrective to *Laudato si'*, too. The latter also takes St. Francis as exemplary of the communion it seeks.⁷⁸ Re-read in this context, *Fratelli tutti* suggests that *Laudato si'* also aspires to a relationality of self-subjection, but merely fails to express it consistently. Indeed, for all its ambivalences, it is

significant that the cornerstone of the encyclical's argument is a critique of instrumentality, which is to say, a mode of power.⁷⁹ Reading *Laudato si'* back through Francis' more worked-out Franciscan ethic in *Fratelli tutti* suggests that the transphobic exercise of power is no more a proper condition or part of the communion in which it fixes its hope than the technocratic one it decries.

This then requires us to revisit the place of transness in *Laudato si'*. However, doing so is no simple task. Francis views transness as part of the technocratic present the encyclical seeks to transcend. This narrative is arguably one of those in which his negative affect is so bound up as to be inextricable. As such, as outlined in (4), it cannot simply be dispensed with.

Preserved in this way, it cannot help but stake out a condition of his utopianism, defining the present which is to be transcended. The result is a tension in Francis' utopianism, which emerges from his rejection of power on this point - and to simply choose the non-domination of trans people over the non-domination of nature (as he understands it) is simply to assert one pole within it over the other.

This means that we cannot take *Fratelli tutti*'s corrective as being a matter of directly ruling out a future in which transness is not present. Rather, what *Fratelli tutti* does is highlight this tension *as* a tension - which in turn suggests that we might submit it to a utopian hermeneutic itself, as one of the tensions that characterise the present that utopianism seeks to transcend.

Under this hermeneutic, Francis might conclude that his hope ought to also be for its resolution – which in the mean-time is not-yet-imagined. The challenge then becomes one of how to live faithfully to this hope in the absence of this resolution. And this means not attempting to force a resolution by opting for either pole over the other. *A fortiori*, Francis can therefore hope for a world in which nature is no longer dominated – including in the mode of transness as he understands it. But he cannot do so by hoping for a relationality in which transness is unlivable. What exactly does this mean in a more substantive sense? Perhaps all

Francis could say is that, whatever it involves, it does not involve the domination of trans people or the elimination of transness.⁸⁰ If this seems inconsistent or frustratingly vague, these difficulties are exactly the point: they are the hallmark of a utopian hope that rigorously refuses to envisage its fulfilment. But in this difficult refusal, what we do find is the fulfilment of (4).

Conclusion: from the pastoral to the political

A welcome premised on this hope may be one that trans people can more easily embrace. This hope can look for its own realisation in transness even amidst its notionally troubling aspects, recognising joyful possibilities in transness (1) and affirming even its negative aspects as a site of potentiality for its fulfilment (2); an integration that overcomes the split between positive and negative affect that produces many of the problems with Francis' welcome (3). Finally, it inclines Catholics away from political policies that would eliminate transness, as a betrayal of this hope. This interrupts what otherwise may seem like an unproblematic pass from political negative affect to harmful policy. Any policy decisions must instead be weighed up first against this commitment, which must be sustained even in tension with others (4).

Yekani et al. worry that theorists such as Muñoz, in adopting a stance of radical refusal, alienate their theorising from the “day-today” realities of queer life, embedded as they are in more immediate desires and projects;⁸¹ a criticism Moore et al. echo in relation to his locating queerness in a future radically other to the present in which those realities are lived out.⁸² This critique raises a corresponding worry about (4), namely that the utopian hope for a Franciscan self-subjection risks consigning this relationality to an ideal sphere that has no effective claim on the present. The risk here would be that the Catholic commitment to Franciscan relationality becomes a form of lip service, with the ideal being cited in theory but

conceded in practice; something for which political negative affect, which is sustained in (2), provides a clear motivation. If so, the argument could be made that Francis' utopianism does not fulfil (4), at least in any sense that is meaningful within the context of day-to-day ecclesial life.

I would like to conclude by reflecting briefly upon this point. In short, I do not believe that the above criticism is fair to Muñoz – and in a similar vein, Francis utopianism, when properly understood, precludes such complacency.

For Muñoz, the affective dimension of queer utopianism is a matter of a desire that seeks not-yet-imagined “semiabstractions such as a better world or freedom” not simply as abstractions, but as the more concrete object of “better relations within the social”.⁸³ Correspondingly, Francis' utopianism also returns us to more concrete concerns. His third principle in *Evangelii Gaudium*, “*Realities are more important than ideas*”, enjoins us not to disconnect “ideas” from the “realities” which bring us “to put the word into practice, to perform works of justice and charity which make that word fruitful”.⁸⁴ In this context, a utopian desire for trans people as the other by the roadside cannot simply be a desire for this relation in the abstract. Rather, it must seek the concrete expression of that relation in the social – even alongside (and perhaps in tension with) similar commitments to, for example, the sanctity of nature. That is, desire must enact a society in which trans people are liberated from the relationships power and domination to which we are subject today.⁸⁵

I use the term “enact” here in conscious distinction to “pursue”. Daniels reads Muñoz' utopianism as disrupting the “prescriptive linear telos of success”.⁸⁶ Logics of “success” in this sense establish an object of hope as a norm to be pursued. The process of this pursuit is thereby rendered a normalising one, and thus an expression of mastery. In contrast, Muñoz' utopianism refuses to imagine its object, and therein does not “pursue” a norm so much as

inhabits or enact the moments of potentiality in which the future makes itself present. As I have read him, for Francis, this relationality might well be called both telos and success: it is, ultimately, the goal of a process. But this must be qualified in relation to the utopian nature of the hope that it fulfils. The distinction in Francis' first principle between space as power and time as surrender encapsulate this: to initiate a process is to surrender mastery, including that of normalisation.⁸⁷

This refusal of logics of "pursuit" is also significant in another way. Daniels argues that the very presence of the future in moments of utopian potentiality "subverts and upends clear binaries between past-present and present-future"⁸⁸ and therein linear processes of pursuit, "gesturing instead toward muddled and circular accounts of formation and method".⁸⁹ That is, for Muñoz, striving for the future is as much a case of seizing, insisting upon, inhabiting, or enacting moments of potentiality as they arise as it is pressing onwards towards a horizon that lies just out of reach. Likewise, the refusal of "pursuit" in Francis case orients us towards grasping moments in which the potentiality of Franciscan relation appears; of inhabiting or enacting relationships of non-domination as the opportunities present themselves. Here, Catholics might return to *Fratelli tutti* as an attempt to recall this potentiality amidst the walls and watchtowers of our time. In this way, the imperative of Francis' utopian desire leads to immediate and concrete ethical and political practice.

Of course, this does not entirely remove the problem. To desire this relation to trans people as not-yet-imagined is to desire it in the absence of a determinate idea of what it would involve. This, then, means pursuing this relationality without a determinate conception of how to reconcile commitments to trans liberation with others staked out in contrasting terms, such that to creation (as Francis figures it). It is important to remember here that such tensions and inconsistencies themselves need not be a problem on principle: they are simply the effects of a hope in something that transcends the present. But they nevertheless pose a practical

question: how can Catholics decide which policies to support in the moment? Should they, for example, support gender mainstreaming in schools on the basis that it enables subjective viability for trans people, even if it supposedly speaks out of the technocratic paradigm?

The Catholic moral tradition already has rich resources for discerning right action amidst seemingly incompatible commitments, so this issue does not seem fatal. It should also be noted that the pass from negative political affect to hostile policy is not absolutely interrupted by the need to weigh up a commitment to trans liberation. It may be that, in certain cases, the most faithful expression of Francis' hope will be to deprioritise our liberation for the sake of some other good - and this is not intrinsically problematic: after all, trans liberation has no necessary precedence over other equivalent causes. Nevertheless, this question might still serve as an occasion for the kind of complacent dismissal of trans liberation mentioned above: in the face of political negative affect, it is not hard to imagine how trans liberation might end up always coming second.

However, Francis' hope also speaks against this complacency. Its utopian nature prompts Catholics to pursue trans liberation without a determinate conception of how trans people will provide the joy that comes with that relationality – which is to say, how Catholics might ultimately come to view us positively in light of any political negative affect they may experience. In short, it commits the Catholics to the project of trans liberation even before they can conceive how we as trans people might be worthy of welcome.

This is as challenging as it is potentially counterintuitive. It requires Catholics to think rigorously about the effects their political negative affect may have on their decision-making: it may be that the correct policy choice is the one that goes against those to which their affect more readily inclines them. But most importantly, it suggests that Catholics ought to be unsatisfied with political negative affect. It suggests that, ultimately, Catholics must hope for

positive affect. This hope, in seeking fulfilment, presupposes an orthopathy: that Catholics ultimately *ought* to find this positive affect; that not only their personal fulfilment but that of society lies in securing its conditions. Hostility, therefore, can never be enough. Indeed, in the face of this hope, anything less than Saint Francis' own utopian love necessarily falls short. And finally, this must lead to a rigorous and constant pursuit of true justice - because for this love, nothing less than utopia itself will suffice.

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¹ Pope Francis. “In-Flight Press Conference.”

² The word “affect” originates in psychology as a term for the third-personal component of emotion, but has entered the common lexicon of a range of disciplines and now “cuts across a range of theories” (Anderson, *Encountering Affect*, 6). For the purposes of this essay, however, the above definition will suffice.

Sedgwick writes that affects are characterised by “freedom,” being on different occasions both ephemeral and longlasting (Sedgwick, *Touching Feeling*, 19), and able to attach to any object at any scale, including themselves (Sedgwick, *Touching Feeling*, 21). In this regard, she argues that they are a ubiquitous

feature of the phenomenon of “texture” (Sedgwick, *Touching Feeling*, 15): a matter of “feeling” in multiple senses (Sedgwick, *Touching Feeling*, 17) that fuses visual and haptic perception in a way that presupposes engagement with the world, and is sufficiently phenomenologically thick to express this engagement in relation to not only simply physical objects but abstract phenomena like meaning. Texture, for Sedgwick, offers a focus of attention that reconnects theorists with the phenomenological and affective, raising questions of motives and the mobilization of effort (Sedgwick, *Touching Feeling*, 17). Correspondingly, affect theory provides a frame of reference that foregrounds the texture of human life. Sedgwick herself famously uses affect theory to engage with epistemic issues in queer critical practice (Sedgwick, *Touching Feeling*, 123-151). This paper similarly attends to the affective dimensions of Francis’ pastoral approach to trans people in order to approach it as a pastoral problem in and of itself, emerging from a particular mode of involvement with a world that includes transness.

Affect can also represent emotional investment, and is thus performative. This paper focuses particularly on hope, which serves as a way of insisting on a particular kind of future, and thereby “giving meaning to future-oriented practice” (Ooman, Hoffman and Hajer, “Techniques of Futuring”, 255). More specifically, I will argue that certain aspects of Francis’ teachings suggest an insistence on a future in which negative political affect need not be responded to by repressive transphobia.

³ Case. “Trans Formations,” 651.

⁴ For an overview of these harms, see Jones et al., “Religious Trauma and Moral Injury.”

⁵ Robinson and Spivey, “Ungodly Genders,” 5-9. This is also illustrated in two recent (2024) documents on the pastoral care for trans people: the Catholic Bishops’ Conference of England and Wales’ *Intricately Woven by the Lord*, and the Diocese of Nottingham’s *Precious in My Sight*. CBCEW calls for trans people to be pastorally accompanied to accept their assigned gender (*Intricately Woven*, 9-10). The latter echoes this (*Precious in My Sight*, 23-25), and offering recommendations to schools that emphasise the possibility of desistance (*Precious in My Sight*, 17), and focus on preventing obstacles to transition (*Precious in My Sight*, 78-87).

⁶ Dorlin’s description of Catholic anti-gender politics as deploying an “agnotology” that erases queer knowledges might also be apt here (“Unreal,” 264). This erasure is partly bound up in the negative-affective dynamics mentioned above, revolving around the portrayal of transness as threat, which this positive-affective strategy serves to preserve. In this regard, my argument here is not far from Sedgwick’s critique of the strong-theoretical aspects of paranoid hermeneutics (*Touching Feeling*, 133-136), as well as critiques of reparative reading along similar lines (for example, see Tonstad, “Ambivalent Loves,” 482). The fact that both positive and

negative-affective dynamics contribute to this agnotology also suggests a broader and more complex affective profile in Catholic agnotological approaches to gender than Dorlin's examples do.

⁷ Tonstad, "Ambivalent Loves," 482.

⁸ Francis, *Amoris Laetitia*, 56.

⁹ Case, "Trans Formations," 645-648.

¹⁰ Garbagnoli, "Against the Heresy of Immanence," 190.

¹¹ Faúndes, "The Geopolitics of Moral Panic."

¹² Butler, *Who's Afraid of Gender*, 8.

¹³ Paternotte and Kuhar, "The Anti-Gender Movement in Comparative Perspective," 259.

¹⁴ In the process disqualifying "postcolonial queer-feminist perspectives" (Dhawan, "The Empire Prays Back," 195).

¹⁵ Hodžić and Štulhofer, "Embryo, Teddy Bear-Centaur and the Constitution," 63.

¹⁶ Butler and Worms, *The Livable and the Unlivable*, 13-14. Contemporary anti-gender movements mobilise within a range of contexts and around a variety of particular causes, although "politics of reproduction, kinship and hierarchy of power between genders are always at the center of anti-gender campaigns" (Graff and Korolczuk, *Anti-Gender Politics in the Populist Moment*, 6). These include "large scale campaigns against women's and transgender rights" (Graff and Korolczuk, *Anti-Gender Politics in the Populist Moment*, 3).

¹⁷ Borghesi, *The Mind of Pope Francis*, 27-28.

¹⁸ Francis, *Fratelli tutti*, 159-60.

¹⁹ Bulter illustrates this with pertinent examples of state transphobia and the negation of self-narrative by medicalised regimes of normalisation (*Undoing Gender*, 30; 57-74).

²⁰ Burbach, "Where Do Trans People Fit in to Pope Francis' Church?"

²¹ Moore et al., "Sexual Disorientations," 2.

²² Muñoz, *Cruising Utopia*, 99.

²³ Muñoz, *Cruising Utopia*, 3.

²⁴ Muñoz, *Cruising Utopia*, 25.

²⁵ Muñoz, *Cruising Utopia*, 19.

²⁶ Muñoz, *Cruising Utopia*, 25.

²⁷ Muñoz, *Cruising Utopia*, 198.

²⁸ Muñoz, *Cruising Utopia*, 28.

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- ²⁹ Muñoz, *Cruising Utopia*, 14.
- ³⁰ Eileen Myles, in Muñoz, *Cruising Utopia*, 13.
- ³¹ Muñoz, *Cruising Utopia*, 203.
- ³² Francis, *Evangelii Gaudium*.
- ³³ Francis, *Evangelii Gaudium*, 221.
- ³⁴ Francis, *Evangelii Gaudium*, 226.
- ³⁵ Francis, *Evangelii Gaudium*, 222.
- ³⁶ Francis, *Evangelii Gaudium*, 223.
- ³⁷ Francis, *Evangelii Gaudium*, 227.
- ³⁸ Muñoz, *Cruising Utopia*, 154.
- ³⁹ Muñoz, *Cruising Utopia*, 21.
- ⁴⁰ Muñoz, *Cruising Utopia*, 22.
- ⁴¹ Muñoz, *Cruising Utopia*, 29.
- ⁴² Francis, *Evangelii Gaudium*, 223.
- ⁴³ Muñoz, *Cruising Utopia*, 27.
- ⁴⁴ Muñoz, *Cruising Utopia*, 39.
- ⁴⁵ Francis, *Laudato si'*, 101.
- ⁴⁶ Francis, *Laudato si'*, 66.
- ⁴⁷ Francis, *Laudato si'*, 76.
- ⁴⁸ Francis, *Laudato si'*, 236.
- ⁴⁹ Francis, *Laudato si'*, 155.
- ⁵⁰ See Case, "Trans Formations"; "The Role of the Popes."
- ⁵¹ Garbagnoli, "Against the Heresy of Immanence," 193.
- ⁵² Lemaster, "Transing Dystopia," 97.
- ⁵³ Muñoz, *Cruising Utopia*, 29.
- ⁵⁴ Muñoz, *Cruising Utopia*, 19-20.
- ⁵⁵ Francis, *Fratelli tutti*, 95.
- ⁵⁶ Francis, *Fratelli tutti*, 99.
- ⁵⁷ Francis, *Fratelli tutti*, 142.
- ⁵⁸ Francis, *Fratelli tutti*, 145.

⁵⁹ Francis, *Fratelli tutti*, 3.

⁶⁰ Francis, *Fratelli tutti*, 4.

⁶¹ Francis, *Fratelli tutti*, 11.

⁶² Francis, *Fratelli tutti*, 12.

⁶³ Francis, *Fratelli tutti*, 14.

⁶⁴ Francis, *Fratelli tutti*, 26.

⁶⁵ Francis, *Fratelli tutti*, 27.

⁶⁶ Francis, *Fratelli tutti*, 34.

⁶⁷ Francis, *Fratelli tutti*, 66.

⁶⁸ Francis, *Fratelli tutti*, 68.

⁶⁹ Francis, *Fratelli tutti*, 69.

⁷⁰ Oltvai suggests a reading of Francis' moral theology that evokes this reading of *Fratelli tutti* ("Bergoglio Among the Phenomenologists").

⁷¹ Thompson identifies natural law reasoning as integral to *Laudato si'* ("*Laudato si'* and the Rise of Green Thomism").

⁷² Benedict XVI, *Caritas in Veritate*, 15, 44, 51.

⁷³ Francis, *Fratelli tutti*, 81.

⁷⁴ Francis, *Fratelli tutti*, 82.

⁷⁵ Francis, *Fratelli tutti*, 14. Compare, for example, Barreiro's complaints about "[t]he Rights Industry, which constantly mints new rights that are nonrights" ("Verbal Engineering," 934).

⁷⁶ Francis, *Fratelli tutti*, 11. See Korolczuk and Gruff, "'Ebola from Brussels'," 798.

⁷⁷ Agnieszka Graff and Elżbieta Korolczuk, *Anti-Gender Politics in the Populist Moment*, 60.

⁷⁸ Francis, *Laudato si'*, 66.

⁷⁹ Gruber reads *Laudato si'* through ecological imagery present in the text itself suggests a contextualised understanding of the tradition that enables a shift to a "power-critical" perspective ("Ec(o)clesiology," 815). Gruber similarly finds this embodied in his critique of the technocratic paradigm, but its transphobic dimensions suggest limitations to this without further correction. Similarly, the encyclical operates with a vision of nature that colours these ecological metaphors such that they point towards the transphobic anthropology which Francis quotes Benedict XVI to describe as an "ecology of man" indispensable to integral ecology (*Laudato si'*, 155; see Benedict XVI, *Address*)) that underpins this critique. This also illustrates a wider point that, as long

identified by commentators such as Stryker (“My Words to Victor Frankenstein”), images of the Natural frequently serve to police trans embodiment.

Gruber offers her ec(o)clesiology in contrast to foundationalism-inflected metaphors of “growth” (Gruber, “Ec(o)clesiology,” 811 fn. 14). Perhaps it might be applied reflexively to interrogate its own foundation in ecological imagery, mirroring my own strategy with *Fratelli tutti*.

⁸⁰ In a more practical register, we might say that the discussions and conflicts by which this tension may be mediated likewise belong to the unimagined future.

⁸¹ Yekani et al., “Introducing Queer Futures,” 12.

⁸² Moore et al., “Queer Disorientations,” 12.

⁸³ Muñoz, *Cruising Utopia*, 30.

⁸⁴ Francis, *Evangelii Gaudium*, 233.

⁸⁵ What this means more concretely likewise belongs to the future. For the beginnings of an account, see Shon Faye, *The Transgender Issue*. A commitment to trans liberation would also suggest that the transphobic politics from which Francis’ political negative affect emerges ought to be rejected.

⁸⁶ Daniels, “Excess and the Enactment of Queer Time,” 186.

⁸⁷ Nor, as Daniels might worry, does this constitute a simple displacement of mastery onto the God who brings that process to fulfilment (“Excess and the Enactment of Queer Time,” 182-183). Because this not-yet-imagined fulfilment lies beyond the normativity of the present, there is no existing norm to which the processes by which we are lead to fulfilment in reconciliation can conform. Correspondingly, the conditions according to which reconciliation represents a success are not available to us.

⁸⁸ In the sense that the future can disrupt the present *now*, or that it has *already* done so in the past.

⁸⁹ Daniels, “Excess and the Enactment of Queer Time”, 187.