Revisiting Enlightenment: *Lantugi* as Rational Discourse

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Abstract. This paper revisits the Enlightenment as conceptualized by Immanuel Kant, Michel Foucault, and key figures in the Frankfurt School. Kant construes the Enlightenment as an emergence from self-incurred immaturity, i.e., dependence on authority. Foucault reframes Kant's question as an interrogation of the present. I then trace Adorno and Horkheimer's diagnosis that the Enlightenment risks becoming an instrumentalized myth and present Habermas's corrective of communicative rationality as a procedural way to recover the emancipatory promise. Reflecting on my fieldwork with an apologetics community in Bohol, I argue that *lantugi* captures Habermas' vision for undistorted discourse and thus offers a local, practice-based, non-Eurocentric pathway for re-anchoring the public use of reason, conditional on light institutional supports (rotating moderation, archival practice, civility norms). *Lantugi* is one of the possibilities for rebuilding deliberative capacities from below.

Keywords: Kant, Foucault, Enlightenment, rational discourse, domination

Introduction

The Enlightenment, in everyday parlance or at least in how I previously uncritically used the term, refers to the 18th-century intellectual movement that urged people to rely on reason, evidence, and public debate instead of settled authority, and promised what is called public reason, i.e., arguments offered in common forums and assessed by anyone, not just by experts, priests, or rulers.[1] As formulated by Immanuel Kant, the Enlightenment is both individualist and public. McCarthy (2002) astutely juxtaposed Kant's (1784 [1991]) apparently individualist exhortation "Have courage to use your own understanding!" at the start of his essay "What is Enlightenment?" with the remainder of his essay being about the use of

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[1] Note however that Horkheimer and Adorno (2002, 2) define Enlightenment broadly as "the advance of thought," and by doing so they place the term beyond the narrow confines of eighteenth-century politics to include any intellectual movement that promotes the development of reason or thinking.

reason in public. Hence, reason, as articulated by Kant, is intrinsically dialogical.

Foucault (1984), however, locates Kant's contribution elsewhere. Instead of focusing on the content of the "Enlightenment," Foucault returns to Kant's essay to argue that the real contribution of Kant is in the essay's attempt at the problematization of the present. Here, Kant "poses a new problem" (Foucault 1984, 33), the problem of finding what philosophy's role is today. That attention to the present is therefore what brings me to a paradox identified by Horkheimer and Adorno (2002, 2) that "the wholly enlightened earth is radiant with triumphant calamity," indicating that they critique enlightenment as a form of domination and mass deception, rather than emancipation.[2]

Enlightenment seeks to free humanity from fear by replacing myth with reason, yet that same replacement produces a totalizing instrumentality, technicalization of knowledge, the world is reduced to what is calculable and useful. Demythologization returns in new, more powerful guises that reinforce domination rather than dissolve it (Horkheimer and Adorno 2002, 2–6).

Yet the perversion of reason in some cases need not be taken as the definitive downfall of the Enlightenment. Jürgen Habermas however argues that the Enlightenment is always an unfinished project. He departs from the pessimism of Adorno and Horkheimer as he is "concerned with shoring up the Enlightenment program of reason aimed at achieving human liberation and the amelioration of oppressive social conditions" (Chriss 2018, 93). He is hopeful of a possibility of a rational communicative community guided by communicative reason. There is reason to believe that in the Philippines, the Enlightenment is "still burning bright" (Zialcita 2020). I locate a potential site of rational discourse in a practice in Central Philippines called *lantugi.*

Lantugi, a recurring practice of reasoned public discourse in Central Philippines, both instantiates and transforms the core Enlightenment demand for the public use of reason.[3] Inherent to the practice is the confrontation between two communities with opposing stances. Admittedly, there are cases when *lantugi* progresses more like a vigorous debate, which still boxes it in the confines of instrumental rationality. Yet not so in all cases.

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[2] Weber similarly warns of rationalization's "iron cage," where bureaucratic calculation traps action in rule-bound procedures but articulating that further is for another paper.

[3] In this paper, I explore the Enlightenment as an alternative lens in interpreting *Lantugi.* I developed an agonist hermeneutic of *Lantugi* in my master's thesis. See Pandan, Mark Steven A. *Lantugi towards the Development of Agonist Teaching Models in Social Studies.* MA thesis, Cebu Normal University, 2025.

Experience, field observations, and interviews coalesce in the finding that *lantugi* can serve as a site for change of worldviews, a site for learning from a person with the opposite worldview. I (first author) was a former member of a *lantugi* community in Bohol, a province in Central Philippines. Interviews with members of the community show how not only did *lantugi* become an avenue where they could defend their beliefs (apologetics), but it was also a site where their opponents' ideas shattered the certainty by which they held their presuppositions. Having become a site of the overcoming of an echo chamber, I argue that it has become a site for rational discourse.[4]

Kant and the Enlightenment

Kant provides the normative point of departure.[5] Immanuel Kant's essay "An Answer to the Question: What is Enlightenment?" (1784) begins with his famous definition: "Enlightenment is man's emergence from his self-incurred immaturity. Immaturity is the inability to use one's own understanding without the guidance of another" (Kant 1784 [1991]). The key term here is "immaturity" (*Unmündigkeit*). It is not a natural deficiency but a condition maintained by habit and fear. Kant immediately clarifies that this immaturity is "self-incurred if its cause is not lack of understanding, but lack of resolution and courage to use it without the guidance of another" (Kant 1784 [1991]). The problem is not ignorance as such, but timidity: the refusal to exercise one's own reason. Hence the essay's motto: "Sapere aude! [Dare to be wise!] Have courage to use your own understanding!" (Kant 1784 [1991]). The structure is deliberate: Kant places courage (*Mut*) before knowledge, because intellectual independence requires a break from dependency. Enlightenment is an act of will, not only an accumulation of facts.

Kant then identifies why immaturity persists. It is, he says, "so convenient to be immature!" (Kant 1784 [1991, 12]). Relying on books, advisers, and experts spares one the exertion of judgment. Kant does not condemn the *use* of expertise but the *abdication* of one's own judgment. Laziness and cowardice form the psychological ground for immaturity; "guardians" e.g. priests, teachers, etc. exploit it to keep others docile. Yet

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[4] This parallels the argument by Ocon (2025, 33) that the Internet's "potential as a public sphere stems from its capacity to go beyond echo chambers."

[5] Although the Enlightenment is such a common concept to hear about, the works problematizing it has remained absent in social studies classes that I have observed. My first encounter with it being problematized was in a Coursera class under Dr. Michael S. Roth, where we were introduced to Kant's essay, "What is the Enlightenment?" It was around the same time that my seminary professor, Fr. Jose Conrado Estafia, PhD, used the same text for the History of Philosophy class at the Immaculate Heart of Mary Seminary.

Kant insists the danger of independence is exaggerated by these guardians: "they would certainly learn to walk eventually after a few falls" (Kant 1784 [1991]). He writes,

> If I have a book to have understanding in place of me, a spiritual adviser to have a conscience for me, a doctor to judge my diet for me, and so on, I need not make any efforts at all. I need not think, so long as I can pay; others will soon enough take the tiresome job over for me (Kant 1784 [1991]).

The deeper critique emerges when he writes that "Dogmas and formulas, those mechanical instruments for rational use (or rather misuse) of his natural endowments, are the ball and chain of his permanent immaturity" (Kant 1784 [1991]). Dogma here is not simply religious; it is any rigid scheme that replaces living judgment with rote application. The enslaving effect is intellectual paralysis. Only "a few, by cultivating their own minds, have succeeded in freeing themselves" (Kant 1784 [1991]). Kant then pivots from the individual to society. Paradoxically, he thinks it is easier for a public than for an individual to become enlightened, "There is more chance of an entire public enlightening itself. This is indeed almost inevitable, if only the public concerned is left in freedom" (Kant 1784 [1991]).

Here lies the essay's crucial distinction: freedom of discussion can generate collective progress, even if individuals remain timid. Guardians, once they free themselves, can set examples. Yet Kant warns against revolution as a substitute for enlightenment, "A revolution may well put an end to autocratic despotism and to rapacious or power-seeking oppression, but it will never produce a true reform in ways of thinking" (Kant 1784 [1991]).

Political upheaval does not guarantee intellectual maturity. New prejudices often replace the old, keeping the "great unthinking mass" under control. Thus, enlightenment must be gradual, dependent on freedom of reasoned speech, not sudden coercive change.

Kant introduces his most famous distinction between "public" and "private" uses of reason. The contrast is counterintuitive: "The public use of man's reason must always be free, and it alone can bring about enlightenment among men; the private use of reason may quite often be very narrowly restricted" (Kant 1784 [1991]). By "public use" Kant means when a scholar writes for the reading world; by "private use," he means when one fulfills an official role within an institution. Thus, a soldier must obey orders on parade, a citizen must pay taxes, and a priest must teach church doctrine,

yet in each case, the same individual retains freedom to critique these practices as a scholar (Kant 1784 [1991]). Civil order requires obedience in action, but intellectual progress requires liberty in writing and argument. Freedom of thought, when publicly exercised, can exist even under regimes of obedience, provided rulers do not fear open discussion. His examples, officers, taxpayers, and clergymen, illustrate how obedience and critical reflection can coexist without contradiction.

Kant addresses whether ecclesiastical authorities may bind themselves by oath to fixed doctrines. His answer is uncompromising: "A contract of this kind, concluded with a view to preventing all further enlightenment of mankind forever, is absolutely null and void, even if it is ratified by the supreme power" (Kant 1784 [1991]). The reason is that no generation can prevent future generations from using reason freely. To do so would be to "violate and trample underfoot the sacred rights of mankind" (Kant 1784 [1991]). Here Kant universalizes enlightenment as a human vocation. It is not merely an individual option but the destiny of the species. Any attempt to arrest intellectual progress is therefore not only impractical but illegitimate.

Kant then situates his essay in its historical context, praising Frederick the Great of Prussia, "a prince who does not regard it as beneath him to say that he considers it his duty, in religious matters, not to prescribe anything to his people, but to allow them complete freedom... is himself enlightened" (Kant 1784 [1991]). This is no mere flattery. For Kant, rulers secure enlightenment not by imposing doctrines but by removing obstacles to free discussion. His paradoxical formula crystallizes this: "Argue as much as you like and about whatever you like, but obey!" (Kant 1784 [1991]). Intellectual freedom can flourish even where civil obedience remains strict, and that this intellectual freedom eventually reshapes civil institutions. For Kant, the "age of enlightenment" is less about having arrived at maturity than about clearing the path for its gradual realization.

Kant closes by identifying religion as "the focal point of enlightenment," since religious immaturity is the most degrading (Kant 1784 [1991]). Yet he generalizes the principle: rulers should not fear criticism, for "there is no danger even to his legislation if he allows his subjects to make public use of their own reason" (Kant 1784 [1991]). Intellectual progress, once set in motion, enlarges human dignity and compels governments to treat citizens not as machines but as persons.

Thus, Kant's exposition of enlightenment is both modest and radical. Modest, because it emphasizes gradual cultural change through freedom of discussion, not violent revolution. Radical, because it insists that every

person has the duty, and not merely the right, to think for themselves. To deny this freedom is to deny humanity itself. The essay's power lies in its enduring motto: *Sapere aude!* The courage to think is the first act of liberation, and the true beginning of enlightenment.

Enlightenment as Interrogation of the Present in Foucault

Foucault shifts to Kant's conceptual innovation about the present.[6] He insists that, "in itself and within the Christian tradition," Kant's little text "poses a new problem" (Foucault 1984, 33). This is the problem of the present. In his work *Kant on Enlightenment and revolution,* Foucault (1986, 88) wrote that

> ...the question which seems to me to appear for the first time in this text by Kant is the question of the present, of the contemporary moment. What is happening today? What is happening now? And what is this 'now' which we all inhabit, and which defines the moment in which I am writing?

The essay is "certainly not the first text in the history of philosophy" to address history (Foucault 1986, 88). He says this to avoid the overclaim that Kant invented historical thinking; instead, Kant reorients the way philosophy poses historical questions (Foucault 1986, 88).[7] Kant's question is thus not teleological in the old sense; instead of asking what history will culminate in, he asks, practically and locally, "What difference does today introduce with respect to yesterday?" (Foucault 1984, 33). The philosopher's task, then, becomes one of discrimination: to single out that feature of contemporaneity that bears philosophical meaning (Foucault 1986, 89). Put plainly, Kant asks: what in our now has philosophical significance? and how should that significance be read? (Foucault 1986, 89).

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[6] The author acknowledges the feedback from Dr. Joseph Martin Jose and Dr. Joseph Paña.

[7] Philosophers had long reflected on "today," but Foucault compresses these older modes into three schematic types so that Kant's difference stands out. One older mode treats the present as a distinct historical era or as the aftermath of a dramatic event, the sort of moment Plato's *Statesman* characterizes as a revolution of the world (Foucault 1984, 33). A second reads the present as a set of heraldic signs that foretell what will come, an interpretive, almost prophetic hermeneutics exemplified by Augustine (Foucault 1984, 33). A third treats today as a threshold to a new realized condition, as in Vico's image of "a complete humanity... spread abroad through all nations," where the present is valued as the dawning of a grand accomplishment (Foucault 1984, 33). Descartes does refer to his "own personal itinerary" as a historical situation for decision-making, but he does not ask "What then is the precise character of this present to which I belong?" (Foucault 1986, 89). In other words, Descartes uses his historical situation as a motive for methodological choice, whereas Kant asks after the character of the situation itself (Foucault 1986, 89).

Kant, Foucault emphasizes, does not locate *Aufklärung* as simply an era, an augury, or an imminent fulfillment; rather, he defines it negatively as an *Ausgang*, an "exit," a "way out" (Foucault 1984, 33). Foucault teases out the key features of Kant's way out. Kant's "exit" releases human beings from a condition he calls "immaturity," where immaturity names a willful dependence, "a certain state of our will that makes us accept someone else's authority to lead us in areas where the use of reason is called for" (Foucault 1984, 34).[8] Enlightenment, for Kant, therefore alters the relation among will, authority, and the use of reason: it is a reconfiguration of who is permitted to exercise judgment (Foucault 1984, 34).

Foucault notes "antinomies," or logical tensions, that appear when Kant treats the Enlightenment as both "process" and "phenomenon" (Norris 1994, 168).[9] By "antinomies," Norris points to clashes between claims that cannot be fully reconciled within Kant's framework, especially when Kant ties critique to universal *a priori* faculties while also anchoring critique in concrete historical conditions (Norris 1994, 168). Norris contrasts this cautious reading with Foucault's earlier, more skeptical account in *The Order of Things*, where Kant's project looked merely like a transient discursive illusion slated to vanish under the pressure of changing "discourse" (Norris 1994, 168). Here, however, Foucault treats the Kant text with more respect, calling it a work "located in a sense at the crossroads of critical reflection and reflection on history" (Norris 1994, 168). Foucault now acknowledges Kant's originality in linking philosophical critique to historical self-awareness.

Foucault notes that Kant distinguishes between the private and public uses of reason. The private use occurs when one is "a cog in a machine," confined to a role where reason must serve particular institutional ends; there, the free use of reason is inappropriate. But when one speaks as a member of "reasonable humanity," reasoning must be free and public (Foucault 1984, 36–37). This inversion, a reason that is free in public yet

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[8] Kant makes this concrete with three everyday examples: when "a book takes the place of our understanding," when "a spiritual director takes the place of our conscience," when "a doctor decides for us what our diet is to be," each of which shows how authority can replace personal judgment (Foucault 1984, 34).

[9] Kant's account is ambiguous in the important sense that he treats the Enlightenment both as a collective phenomenon and as an individual duty, "a phenomenon, an ongoing process," and simultaneously "a task and an obligation," summed up in the motto *Aude sapere*, "dare to know" (Foucault 1984, 34–35). Because Kant locates responsibility for immaturity in human beings themselves, escape must be enacted by individuals; Enlightenment is both the historical process they participate in and the moral courage they must exercise personally (Foucault 1984, 35). This is why Kant's use of *Menschheit* (mankind) is vexed: it may mean the entire human race experiencing political and social transformation, or it may mean a change in what constitutes human nature itself; Kant leaves the scope somewhat ambiguous, and Foucault highlights this complexity (Foucault 1984, 35).

submissive in private, poses a political problem: how can the public use of reason be secured in a society that also depends on obedience? Kant's practical answer, offered to Frederick II, is a conditional bargain: permit the public, free exercise of autonomous reason, and that very openness will best guarantee obedience, *provided* the political principle enforced is itself aligned with universal reason, a proposal Foucault dubs a "contract of rational despotism with free reason" (Foucault 1984, 37).

By making "today" both a difference in history and the motive for a distinct philosophical task, Kant, in Foucault's reading, sketches the attitude that will define modernity: an intertwining of personal responsibility, public critique, and political arrangements that allow reason to be exercised in broad daylight (Foucault 1984, 38). Foucault then argues that "modernity" is better understood not merely as a historical period but as an *attitude*, a distinctive way of relating to the present that combines feeling, thought, and practice (Foucault 1984, 39).[10] He brings us to "envisage modernity rather as an attitude than as a period of history" (Foucault 1984, 39). By "attitude," he clarifies, he means "a mode of relating to contemporary reality; a voluntary choice made by certain people" and, finally, "a way of thinking and feeling; a way, too, of acting and behaving" that both signals belonging and presents itself as a task (Foucault 1984, 39). Modernity is not only a time we happen to live in. It is an ethical and practical stance people adopt toward the now.

Foucault links this idea of attitude to the Greek notion of *ethos*, suggesting modernity functions like a character or disposition (Foucault 1984, 39). Because it is an attitude, modernity will always meet resistance; Foucault therefore urges us to look for how "the attitude of modernity, ever since its formation, has found itself struggling with attitudes of 'countermodernity'" (Foucault 1984, 39). That contrast, modernity as a chosen posture versus countermodern reactions, shifts the historian's task as tracing recurring orientations toward the present.

Foucault chooses Baudelaire as an emblematic example, since Baudelaire's consciousness of modernity was "one of the most acute in the nineteenth century" (Foucault 1984, 39–40). Baudelaire famously defines modernity as "the ephemeral, the fleeting, the contingent," and Foucault uses that definition to show what modernity feels like: an awareness of

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[10] He notes that "modernity is often spoken of as an epoch, or at least as a set of features characteristic of an epoch" (Foucault 1984, 39). He means that people usually treat modernity as a slice on the historical calendar, something preceded by a premodern past and followed by a troubling "postmodernity" (Foucault 1984, 39). From that starting point he poses the question whether modernity should be read as the sequel to Enlightenment or as a rupture from eighteenth-century principles (Foucault 1984, 39).

time's discontinuity and a vertigo before the passing moment (Foucault 1984, 40). But Foucault emphasizes that for Baudelaire being modern is not merely recognizing transience; rather, it "lies in adopting a certain attitude with respect to this movement" (Foucault 1984, 40). That attitude aims to "recapture something eternal" that is not outside the present but "within it," meaning the modern person searches for an enduring significance *inside* the very instant that seems fleeting (Foucault 1984, 40). Thus, modernity differs from mere fashion; fashion merely follows the course of time, while modernity seeks to "heroize" the present by finding its deeper, sometimes tragic, meaning (Foucault 1984, 40).[11]

Foucault turns to painting to show how this attitude operates in art. He notes that Baudelaire mocks painters who, finding contemporary dress "excessively ugly," would paint only ancient togas, because that mistake misses modernity's task (Foucault 1984, 40). For Baudelaire, the modern painter is instead the one who can display the contemporary frock-coat as "the necessary costume of our time" and thereby reveal "the essential, permanent, obsessive relation that our age entertains with death" (Foucault 1984, 40). In other words, the modern artist does not reject current appearances; he renders them pregnant with enduring meaning, political, poetic, and social, so everyday clothing becomes a sign of deeper conditions (Foucault 1984, 40). Baudelaire even describes the public life of his era in funeral imagery, "an immense cortege of undertaker's mutes," to show how contemporary forms carry a communal significance that the modern artist must make visible (Foucault 1984, 40).

Foucault then teases out what that attitude looks like in practice by contrasting the *flaneur*, the idle spectator, with the modern man who actively seeks modernity. The *flâneur* is the "spectator's posture": he strolls, observes, and accumulates impressions for his private store of memories (Foucault 1984, 41). Baudelaire's modern figure, by contrast, is described as moving "hurrying, searching," a solitary person with an "active imagination" who seeks something "loftier" than the mere transient pleasures of circumstance (Foucault 1984, 41). The modern seeker engages fashion and daily life in order to "extract" whatever kernel of poetry or significance they contain (Foucault 1984, 41). Constantin Guys is given as Baudelaire's exemplary modern artist: in appearance a collector of curiosities, Guys is really the last to linger "wherever there can be a glow of light, an echo of

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[11] This gained salience for me when I taught the general elective course "Philippine Popular Culture" last year, as I instinctively knew the course's relevance would be passing if I focused on the fashionable instead of using the fashionable as sites for cultural critique (Ogdon, 2001).

poetry" and, crucially, he transfigures the world precisely when others are sleeping (Foucault 1984, 41).[12]

That transfiguration is not an escape from reality but a strenuous interplay between truth and freedom. Foucault quotes Baudelaire's effect: "natural" things become "more than natural," "beautiful" things become "more than beautiful," and objects acquire an "impulsive life like the soul of [their] creator" (Foucault 1984, 41–42). The modern artist intensifies reality; he respects what is there but imagines it otherwise and thus enlarges its meaning. For Foucault, this means the attitude of modernity joins "extreme attention to what is real" with a practice of liberty that both honors reality and violates it in the service of transformation (Foucault 1984, 42). Modernity, then, is not passive admiration of the fleeting; it is an active, creative appropriation of the present.

Foucault adds that modernity is also a way of relating to oneself. For Baudelaire, the modern person must practice an ascetic discipline, Baudelaire's *dandysme*, by which the self becomes an object of deliberate artistic production (Foucault 1984, 42). Dandyism is not mere vanity; it is an austere program in which "the body, his behavior, his feelings and passions, his very existence" become a crafted work of art (Foucault 1984, 42). Modernity does not "liberate man in his own being"; rather, it forces a self-production: the modern subject must invent himself rather than discover an inner, preexisting essence (Foucault 1984, 42).

Foucault stresses the social limits of this program: Baudelaire does not imagine that this ironic heroization of the present or the ascetic elaboration of the self will take place in ordinary society or in the body politic; rather, these practices can be produced only in a special sphere, art (Foucault 1984, 42). Modernity as an attitude combines acute awareness of the present, a deliberate aesthetic and ethical discipline toward the self, and an artistic transformation of everyday reality that together define a modern stance.

Foucault argues that the real legacy of the Enlightenment is not a fixed doctrine but a way of living and thinking, a habit of constantly questioning our own time and ourselves. Foucault wants to show that a certain kind of philosophical questioning, one that questions how we relate to the present, how we exist in history, and how we make ourselves into independent persons, comes out of the Enlightenment (Foucault 1984, 43). Second, he says the important link we have with the Enlightenment is not loyalty to its

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[12] In this spirit, Zizek introduces Lacan through kernels in popular culture (Zizek, 1992).

doctrines but "the permanent reactivation of an attitude," that is, a steady habit of criticizing our own era. (Foucault 1984, 43).

Kant commits to a form of critique that both arises under specific historical conditions and at the same time claims to transcend those conditions by appealing to faculties "deduced a priori as a matter of timeless, self-evident truth" (Norris 1994, 168–169). Foucault's worry is that Kant's claim to timeless, subject-centered truths cannot be squared with the insight that truth-claims are historically situated; this is a residual anthropomorphism, a human-centered move that fails to accept the full force of the contingency it otherwise exposes (Norris 1994, 169). That is, Kant both historicizes and universalizes, and Foucault sees that tension as unresolved (Norris 1994, 169).

On Foucault's reading, Kant's own will to contest established power/knowledge relations is simultaneously produced by an unexamined drive to secure his own enlightened status (Norris 1994, 169). Kant challenges existing power-knowledge setups but still assumes a subject who can stand outside history to judge them. This is a move Foucault finds inconsistent (Norris 1994, 169). Norris concedes Foucault's practical point: any critique must proceed by terms shaped in part by the Enlightenment legacy itself, so Foucault urges we "proceed with the analysis of ourselves as beings who are historically determined, to a certain extent, by the Enlightenment" (Norris 1994, 169). That phrase captures Foucault's methodological modesty: we critique while recognizing that our critical categories come from the tradition we critique (Norris 1994, 169).

From that stance Foucault insists the Enlightenment is only one among several discursive paradigms, shifting orders of language and representation that form Western reason's genealogy, and therefore enquiry should not aim to recover an "essential kernel of rationality" to be preserved, but instead should ask what now counts as "necessary" for constituting us as subjects and what no longer does (Norris 1994, 169). Inquiry becomes oriented to the "contemporary limits of the necessary," namely to the historical constraints that shape present self-understanding, rather than to some timeless core of reason (Norris 1994, 169).[13]

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[13] Foucault reads Kant as still trapped in a humanism that pretends universal validity while relying on historically bound assumptions (Norris 1994, 169). Foucault warns against confusing Enlightenment with humanism. He says this confusion is common but mistaken because the two are not the same. (Foucault 1984, 44). Enlightenment is a set of historical events and changes, institutions, ways of knowing, technologies, that happened at a certain time and changed how people reflect on the present. (Foucault 1984, 44). Humanism, by contrast, is a loose theme that appears in many different forms across history. It changes meaning depending on time and politics. (Foucault 1984, 44–45). Humanism has had many faces: anti-religious versions, Christian versions, versions friendly to science, versions hostile to science, and even versions used to justify bad politics. (Foucault 1984, 45 cf. Jaszczolt, 2024).

Adorno and Horkheimer on the Enlightenment as Myth

If Kant framed Enlightenment as emancipation from immaturity, and Foucault reframed it as an interrogation of the present, Adorno and Horkheimer radicalize the inquiry by arguing that the Enlightenment is inseparable from domination. In *Dialectic of Enlightenment*, they begin with the paradoxical formulation that "myth is already enlightenment; and enlightenment reverts to mythology" (Adorno and Horkheimer 2002, xvii). This is not a paradox for its own sake but an indictment of reason's fate: the very project meant to liberate humanity from fear ends by reproducing the same structures of compulsion and myth, only in rationalized form.

For them, the logic of enlightenment is a logic of control. The Enlightenment promise of autonomy masks new modes of subjugation, both external and internal, where freedom coincides with self-discipline in the service of systemic imperatives.

Reason itself, they argue, is torn between utopia and instrumentality. On the one hand, "Reason as the transcendental, supraindividual self contains the idea of a free coexistence in which human beings organize themselves to form the universal subject and resolve the conflict between pure and empirical reason in the conscious solidarity of the whole" (Adorno and Horkheimer 2002, 65) This represents the idea of true universality: Utopia. Yet reason is also "is the organ of calculation, of planning," thus Enlightenment thus bears within itself both the promise of liberation and the tendency toward total instrumentalization (Adorno and Horkheimer 2002, 69).

In this process, myth is not eradicated but transformed. For the Enlightenment, "Thinking, where it is not merely a highly specialized piece of professional equipment in this or that branch of the division of labor, is suspect as an old-fashioned luxury: 'armchair thinking'" (Adorno and Horkheimer 2002, 167). The result is not freedom but a new mythology of numbers, calculation, and efficiency, such that "for the Enlightenment, anything which cannot be resolved into numbers, and ultimately into one, is illusion; modern positivism consigns it to poetry." Their uncompromising judgment follows: "Enlightenment is totalitarian" (Adorno and Horkheimer 2002, 3-5).

In contrast to Kant's optimism about the Enlightenment, Horkheimer and Adorno (2002, 7) argue that the "Enlightenment stands in the same

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For this reason, Foucault says humanism is too changeable to be the main lens for study, and it should not be treated as the same thing as the Enlightenment (Foucault 1984, 45). Foucault's claim is that Kant's philosophy is pervaded by the error of mistaking culture-specific claims for a priori truths (Norris 1994, 169).

relationship to things as the dictator to human beings." The Enlightenment thus does not stand outside domination but exemplifies it. Knowledge, on this model, legitimates manipulation; one "knows" what one can manipulate (Horkheimer and Adorno 2002, 7). Hence, the scientist is said to know things "to the extent that he can make them," and the object's "in-itself" is transformed into a "for him," that is, into what it means as an instrument for the subject (Horkheimer and Adorno 2002, 7). The authors call this process a reduction of things to a single "substrate of domination," meaning that the variety of things is abstracted into raw material whose primary significance is usefulness in domination (Horkheimer and Adorno 2002, 7). Rationality, stripped of reflection on its own limits, becomes indistinguishable from the compulsion it sought to overcome. What Kant hoped would be emancipation, Adorno and Horkheimer diagnose as a new myth: a rationalized world that enslaves in the very act of promising freedom.

Rescuing Enlightenment with Rational Discourse in Habermas

Habermas (1982, 13) locates Horkheimer and Adorno's debt to a set of "dark writers of the bourgeoisie." Machiavelli, Hobbes, and Mandeville, and notes that Horkheimer himself was influenced by Schopenhauer, which shows a line of affinity reaching back into pessimistic and realist strands of modern political thought. He then stresses that these earlier ties to Marx's social theory are ruptured when the authors turn to what he calls the "really nihilistic dark writers," above all the Marquis de Sade and Nietzsche, and that it is to these figures that Horkheimer and Adorno turn in *Dialectic of Enlightenment* in order "to conceptualize the self-destructive process of Enlightenment" (Habermas 1982, 13). Habermas explains that, because Horkheimer and Adorno had lost hope in the Enlightenment as emancipatory, they nevertheless continued the "paradoxical labor of analysis," a stance Habermas no longer shares and which he warns may be conflated with certain post-structural appropriations of Nietzsche (for example, Derrida and Foucault) unless the two attitudes are carefully distinguished (Habermas 1982, 13).

Turning to the book's formation and reception, Habermas calls *Dialectic of Enlightenment* "a strange book" because much of it derives from notes taken by Gretel Adorno of discussions between Horkheimer and Adorno in Santa Monica and because its unusual composition, a fifty-page essay plus extensive excursuses and appendices, obscures its internal structure (Habermas 1982, 14). He therefore proposes to explicate two central theses and then to address a contemporary problem: the subtle strategies for "radically enlightening the Enlightenment about itself," a

project that will require comparing Horkheimer and Adorno to Nietzsche and will, in Habermas's view, call into question the repeated reflexivity of the Enlightenment (Habermas 1982, 14).

In his first thesis, Habermas states that enlightened thinking was classically conceived as both antithetical to myth and as a force dismantling it; the Enlightenment opposes tradition by substituting "the non-coercive coercion of the better argument," and it opposes mythical powers by turning collective spells into individually acquired insight (Habermas 1982, 14). Challenging this clear opposition, Horkheimer and Adorno advance a thesis of "secret complicity": "Myth is already enlightenment; and enlightenment reverts to mythology," a claim Habermas reports as the guiding paradox announced in the work's introduction (Habermas 1982, 14). He says that the authors develop this paradox through an extended reading of the *Odyssey*, where Odysseus's adventures mirror a "primal history of a subjectivity" that must wrench itself free from myth in order to gain identity (Habermas 1982, 14).

Habermas explains the logic of the *Odyssey* reading: the mythical world is not a homeland but "the labyrinth" one must escape from to become a subject (Habermas 1982, 15). Mythic narratives "call the individual back to his/her origins" by way of genealogical mediation, and rituals that promise reconciliation with origins also enlarge the distance they are meant to heal; rituals both bridge guilt and widen the gap from origin (Habermas 1982, 15). Thus, the primal myth, as Habermas reads Horkheimer and Adorno, contains a double motion, the dread of being uprooted and the relief of getting away, and for that reason, the powers sanctified and outwitted in ritual already instantiate an early form of Enlightenment (Habermas 1982, 15).[14]

But Habermas then follows Horkheimer and Adorno into the price exacted by that escape: even as the ego gains identity through mastery over danger, it does so by renouncing and repressing its inner nature, a dynamic they read through episodes such as the Sirens' song, which recall a former "fluctuating relationship with nature" that the subject must suppress (Habermas 1982, 16). Habermas quotes Horkheimer and Adorno's striking formulation, that "Man's domination over himself, which grounds his selfhood, is almost always the destruction of the subject in whose service it is undertaken," to show how the cultivated selfhood presupposes the suppression of the "substance" that is life itself (Habermas 1982, 16). The point is that the process of identity formation via control of external nature simultaneously entails an internalization of sacrifice: the ego originally

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[14] Durkheim, the sociologist of religion, is invoked here to indicate why ritual returns sustain collective consciousness; Habermas mentions Durkheim succinctly to register this sociological point.

outwits myth by offering a substitute, but when the ego internalizes that sacrificial posture it becomes again subject to the mythical fate it had eluded (Habermas 1982, 16).

Summarizing the historical consequence, Habermas explains Horkheimer and Adorno's diagnosis: humanity, by the Enlightenment, has distanced itself ever farther from origins while failing to free itself from them (Habermas 1982, 16). A thoroughly rationalized modernity only appears demystified; beneath that surface "rests in fact the curse of demonic objectification and fatal isolation," symptoms of emancipation gone awry, where the compulsion to "rationally subjugate the natural forces" fuels productivity ad infinitum for self-preservation while the powers of reconciliation wither (Habermas 1982, 16). The hallmark, in their account, is the double domination of an objectified external nature and a repressed inner nature, what Habermas summarizes as the Janus-face of Enlightenment (Habermas 1982, 16).

Habermas notes that this thesis reworks Max Weber's well-known image of demystified gods returning as impersonal powers, a metaphor for modern impersonality and bureaucratic domination, and that Horkheimer and Adorno thus vary Weber's diagnosis to explain the renewal of archaic conflict in modern form (Habermas 1982, 16).

In the second section, Habermas steps back to characterize impressions the careful reader may have: the book's thesis is as risky as Nietzsche's diagnosis of nihilism; the authors try seriously to substantiate their cultural critique; yet they rely on generalizations that threaten plausibility (Habermas 1982, 17). He extracts the core thesis of the first excursus: "Reason itself destroys the humanity which it had made possible in the first place," a claim Horkheimer and Adorno sustain by arguing that Enlightenment from the start depends on a self-preserving impulse that mutilates reason into instrumental purposiveness (Habermas 1982, 17). Habermas is careful to say that this still does not automatically prove that reason remains instrumental even in the higher reaches of modern culture — in science, universalistic morality, or autonomous art — and he points to the title essay, the excursus on morality, and the appendix on the culture industry as the evidence Horkheimer and Adorno marshal to support their sweeping claim (Habermas 1982, 17).

First, Habermas reports, Adorno and Horkheimer hold that logical positivism ushered modern science into a phase in which theoretical knowledge yielded to technological exploitability, so that the sciences themselves were absorbed by instrumental reason (Habermas 1982, 17). Second, they argue, by reading *Histoire de Juliette* and Nietzsche's *Genealogy*

of Morals, that reason has been exorcised from morality and justice, so that with the decline of metaphysical certainties, normative moral standards lose credibility before the authority of science (Habermas 1982, 18). Third, in their analysis of the culture industry they claim that art fused with entertainment loses its critical and utopian content and becomes ideological drivel (Habermas 1982, p. 18). In all three domains, Habermas summarizes, separation of cultural spheres and the decay of substantive reasons produce a regression into purposive rationality devoted to self-preservation (Habermas 1982, 18).

Habermas resists this flattening. He insists the Dialectic of Enlightenment neglects important elements of cultural modernity: the self-propelling theoretical dynamism of the sciences, the universalist foundations of law and morality instantiated (if imperfectly) in constitutional institutions and democratic procedures, and the emancipatory force of aesthetic experience liberated from instrumental utility (Habermas 1982, 18). These items, Habermas argues, would, if elaborated, show the book's presentation to be incomplete and one-sided, and would explain why the reader justifiably senses the work's global pessimism, neglecting the dignity of cultural modernity (Habermas 1982, 19).

Seeking reasons for Horkheimer and Adorno's sweeping critique, Habermas proposes two moves: first, he will locate the classical Marxian critique of ideology within the Enlightenment process; second, he will offer reasons why Horkheimer and Adorno abandoned that immanent critique in favor of a totalizing denunciation (Habermas 1982, 19).

In section III Habermas reframes the earlier discussion by emphasizing that myth and enlightened thinking are also bound up in the status of fundamental concepts: myth's totalizing force suspends differences by weaving correspondences between phenomena; language in myth remains close to its referent, so that speech and world view remain interwoven and mythical categories of truth, good, and evil link to empirical concepts like exchange or causality (Habermas 1982, 19). Hence, demythologization, the modern critical move, severs that weave and allows for a decentered world in which objective entities, the social world of norms, and the inner world of subjective experiences are distinguished (Habermas 1982, 20).

From this decentering, Habermas explains, the classical critique of ideology can properly emerge: only when semantic and empirical relations, internal and external relations, have been segregated can one suspect that a theory's claimed autonomy masks hidden interests; the critique of ideology thus seeks to show that theories' validity claims cloak an a-tergo fusion of

power and validity (Habermas 1982, p. 20). Properly understood, the critique of ideology is not an alternative competing theory but a reflexive move of Enlightenment upon its own products: it unearths category mistakes produced by fusing validity and power (Habermas 1982, 20).

Yet, and this is crucial for Habermas, the drama intensifies when the critique of ideology itself becomes suspect, only then does Enlightenment become reflexive a second time (Habermas 1982, 21). Habermas locates a passage in *Dialectic of Enlightenment* that reads like an echo of earlier critical theory: philosophy's immunity to the status quo derives from its uncritical acceptance of bourgeois ideals, which contained both deceptive appearances and the seed of an immanent critique (Habermas 1982, 21). In the 1930s, critical theorists retained some trust that bourgeois ideals harbored emancipatory potentials that social analysis could release; but by the early 1940s, Horkheimer and Adorno judged that the Marxian critique of ideology had exhausted itself and so radicalized their critique into a totalizing attack that turned critique against reason itself (Habermas 1982, 21). The preface to *Dialectic of Enlightenment* confesses that the authors abandoned confidence that critique could be confined to disciplinary specialties and instead were forced to a more comprehensive radicalization (Habermas 1982, 21).

Habermas explains the logical payoff: if the suspicion of ideology becomes total, it no longer only questions bourgeois ideology but extends suspicion to rationality itself, hence the concept of "instrumental reason," which names not merely *Verstand* usurping *Vernunft* but the totalizing purposive rationality that collapses the distinction between claims of validity and the interests of self-preservation (Habermas 1982, 22). Once reason is instrumentalized and assimilated to power, Habermas reports, it loses its critical force, the critique of ideology turned upon itself becomes a performative contradiction because it must use the very categories it has declared contaminated (Habermas 1982, 22). Adorno, aware of this paradox, responds with a sustained negative dialectical strategy that refuses to resolve the contradiction but persistently develops it (Habermas 1982, 22).

Section IV turns to Nietzsche, whom Habermas treats as both model and counterexample. Horkheimer and Adorno acknowledge Nietzsche as one of the few after Hegel who "recognized the dialectic of enlightenment," that is, the identity of domination and reason, yet they also see Nietzsche as Hegel's antipode because Nietzsche's affirmation consumes the critical impulse and leaves negation without its bite (Habermas 1982, 23; (Hohendahl 1985, 15–16). Habermas summarizes Nietzsche's genealogical story: when instincts are robbed of direct discharge, subjects are reduced to

thinking and to objectifying nature, and the unspent instincts are internalized as a "bad conscience," a development Nietzsche describes as the internalization that produces the 'soul' (Habermas 1982, 24). Nietzsche thus provides a model in which domination of external and internal nature congeal into social domination, "the curse of society and of peace," because institutions enforce renunciation (Habermas 1982, 24).

Habermas stresses that Nietzsche's critique of knowledge and morality anticipates Horkheimer and Adorno's critique of instrumental reason: behind objectivity, positivism, ascetic ideals and universalist moral claims there may hide imperatives of self-preservation and domination (Habermas 1982, 24). Nietzsche supplements this with an aesthetic-genetic account: interpretation is valorization, and the "drive to metaphorize" makes texts the sum of their possible readings; the judgment of taste becomes the site where value-orders are posited and where "the beautiful" stimulates a "will to power" that replaces claims of truth with aesthetic valuation (Habermas 1982, 25). Habermas briefly identifies Nietzsche's aesthetic horizon (he is, Habermas notes, an intellectual contemporary of Mallarmé and heir to Wagnerian late-romanticism) to show why Nietzsche privileges taste and valuation over truth claims (Habermas 1982, 25).

But Habermas also points out Nietzsche's final *aporia*: if all validity claims are reduced to value preferences, critique loses its normative purchase, the "Yes/No" of value becomes merely expression of will, and so Nietzsche resorts to genealogy to re-inscribe rank by origin, thereby replacing rational standards with criteria of ancestry and precedence (Habermas 1982, 26). Nietzsche's genealogy thus relativizes truth and justice by tracing evaluative practices back to power relations and *ressentiment*, but in doing so it leaves the critic without a shared standard to adjudicate among rival powers (Habermas 1982, 26).

Habermas concludes by drawing the two variants together and diagnoses their shared predicament: both the Nietzschean and the Horkheimer–Adorno totalizing critiques risk losing direction because, when every claim to validity is suspect, the critic must nonetheless retain some standard by which to judge corruption (Habermas 1982, 28). Nietzsche opts to ground critique in a theory of power, a move that makes power the final horizon but which, Habermas warns, cannot serve where the categorical distinction between validity and power is presupposed (Habermas 1982, 29). Horkheimer and Adorno take the opposite road: they intensify and preserve the performative contradiction rather than resolve it, practicing a determinate negation that refuses theoretical closure and keeps the paradox alive as a critical vow (Habermas 1982, 29).

Habermas suggests that the purist ambition of a single decisive unmasking betrays the pragmatic interweaving of critique and justification; instead, only a form of rational discourse that admits its "everlasting impurity" and relies on the "non-coercive coercion of the better argument" offers a chance to disentangle myth and Enlightenment (Habermas 1982, 30). Habermas argues for a communicative rationality that recognizes and works within the unavoidable mixtures of power and validity rather than for a totalized unmasking that collapses critique into nihilism (Habermas 1982, 30).

Habermas reads *Dialectic of Enlightenment* as a set of bold and perilous moves: Horkheimer and Adorno radicalize the critique of ideology into a general indictment of reason by tracing a myth-Enlightenment entwinement, and Nietzsche offers a genealogical and aesthetic variant of the same totalizing insight. Habermas's own corrective is modest but decisive: preserve the reflexivity of the Enlightenment while refusing the totalizing gesture; cultivate a communicative rationality that can separate, procedurally and dialogically, claims of validity from claims of power (Habermas 1982, 30).

Lantugi as Rational Discourse

I argue that *lantugi*, the ritualized, vernacular practice of public apologetics, functions as a form of communicative rationality that can help repair the deficits of modern Enlightenment reason. I show how its procedural rhythms (*tigbakay, tema, paglatag, paggisa, panapos*),[15] embodied apprenticeship, and communal accountability instantiate the "the peculiarly constraint-free force of the better argument' (Habermas 1984, 28), while resisting the instrumentalization of reason that Horkheimer and Adorno diagnosed. I also note limits and propose modest institutional supports so *lantugi* can more reliably contribute to democratic and epistemic goods.

Lantugi's first moral and epistemic strength is ritualization. The practice is a sequenced enactment, an informal *tigbakay* prelude, a *tema* that functions as a boundary object, front-stage *debatedors*, regulated temporal-spatial setting (*adlaw* ug *lugar*), and closure rituals (*paglamano*, open forum, *paghinuklog*). That sequence does what rituals do in the sociological literature: it sacralizes a shared time and space for argument, makes commitments visible (the *pirmahay*), and aligns affective bonds with propositional contestation. Far from reducing argument to mere spectacle, the ritual frame suspends purely instrumental aims (winning at all costs) and

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[15] More granular description of these steps is in the full thesis (Pandan, 2025).

foregrounds mutual recognition; the handshake and a public notebook where the *debatedors* sign adherence to agreed rules, are communicative technologies that make participants accountable to a communal standard, not solely to private advantage.

Because ritual secures the lifeworld context from which topics emerge, *lantugi* avoids two classical failures of Enlightenment critique. On the one hand, it refuses the purely formal, disembodied syllogism that easily collapses into instrumentality; on the other, it resists raw particularism by supplying shared interpretive resources, canonical texts, community norms, and agreed-upon evidentiary repertoires that stabilize intersubjective testing. Ritual makes the conditions of argument visible and contestable, restoring the social infrastructure that enables reasons to count as reasons.

Tigbakay (the unscripted back-and-forth) and *tema* (topic selection as boundary-object formation) are crucial because they institutionalize interpretive humility and epistemic pluralism. *Tigbakay* is a communal hermeneutic prelude where meanings are floated and interpreted in low-stakes interaction. By permitting ideas to remain fluid at the *tigbakay* stage, the practice mirrors *interpretive work*: participants test intelligibility before fixing positions. The *tema* phase then crystallizes a contested claim but does so only after communal filters of relevance, conviction, and resonance have been applied. That two-stage structure, exploratory, then formalized, is a small but powerful safeguard against both premature closure and indefinite relativism.

From a Habermasian standpoint, this sequence helps instantiate the ideal conditions for undistorted communication: discussants enter an exchange with a shared background (the lifeworld), explicit propositions are rendered public and contestable, and the debate's scope is constrained so that validity claims are examinable. As a practice in the province where the longest revolt happened in the Philippines, *lantugi* definitely is does not pretend as though disagreements do not exist (Aparece, 2013). Yet whereas instrumentally organized discourse reduces reason to technical means, *tigbakay→tema* preserves a dialogical ecology in which reasons can win by force of their normative or empirical pull, not by rhetorical manipulation alone (Habermas 1984).

Habermas (1999, 14-15) notes that postmetaphysical thinking asks that religious "essential contents from religious tradition" be "transformed 'into justifiable knowledge.'" That transformation of religion from a matter of the private sphere into something within the realm of knowledge is inherent to *lantugi*. Field observations evidence the pressure among the communicators not to rely on arguments from authority when the authority

is not within the propositions publicly (that is, mutually agreed upon by both sides) accepted as justified knowledge.

My (first author) interviews, which were part of my thesis at Cebu Normal University, where the second author is adviser, illuminate a pedagogy in which argument is learned in embodied, affective cycles: wonder → ritual inclusion → crisis → methodical preparation → spontaneous responsiveness → reflective integration. This apprenticeship is philosophically significant. It shows how rationality is not merely propositional competence but a dispositional achievement: the practiced ability to marshal reasons under stress, to modulate affect, and to attend to audience cues. Mirror practice, rehearsal, and communal mentoring produce a skill set that is cognitive, somatic, and social. Furthermore, subsequent reflective reformulation of arguments and ideas after iterations of debates where one's worldviews are contested, sharpened, and even revised, exemplify what Habermas (2017, 94) calls "fallibilistic self-interpretation" and inclination to "decentre" background assumptions.

Two consequences follow. First, by cultivating emotional resilience and rapid, evidence-based rejoinder, *lantugi* repairs a deficit often ignored in Enlightenment rhetoric: the need for citizens who can use reason in lived, pressured encounters. Second, because novices must pass through vulnerability (being cornered) and subsequent reflective reformulation, the practice encourages epistemic humility; mastery emerges not from ideological closure but from recursive correction. In other words, the pedagogy of *lantugi* produces arguers whose rationality is reflexive and fallibilist rather than absolutist.

Horkheimer and Adorno worry that Enlightenment, once instrumentalized, collapses claims of truth into power. *Lantugi* can function as a practical counterweight because many of its norms are procedural rather than metaphysical: protected presentation time, cross-examination, open forum, and public record (the notebook). These are weak institutional constraints, but they matter: they create predictable opportunities for counter-speech, create shared expectations about evidence (Bible + references, encyclopedias), and make rhetorical performance subject to communal memory (audience recall, later *paghinuklog*). Where institutional public reason has been hollowed by bureaucratic or market pressures, ritualized deliberation of this kind keeps validity claims tethered to community testing rather than to the calculus of power alone.

That said, *lantugi* is not automatically immune to coercion. The *hakot* (mobilizing support), the charisma dynamics, and the political permeation of topics show that ritual can be captured. The critical insight is

conditional: ritual stabilizes communicative norms only insofar as the community resists instrumental capture and preserves the preconditions for challenge. Thus, the rescue is pragmatic. It is possible when ritual practices are protected and reflexively cultivated.

My interviews show that *lantugi* already opens multi-class and cross-confessional spaces; participants include laborers, students, merchants, and clergy. This demographic breadth gives the practice democratic potential. If *lantugi* is intentionally expanded to include civic and moral-political themes, without abandoning its evidentiary rigor, it can function as a local modality of deliberative democracy: a space where citizens practice giving and testing reasons in public. The longer arc of rescue I propose is modest: not that *lantugi* will replace formal institutions, but that it can seed a culture of robust, embodied deliberation that stabilizes the public use of reason at the grassroots.

To do this responsibly requires two programmatic shifts. First, broaden accepted topic-domains (it has already begun: atheism, human rights; and I have developed a teaching model out of it, and my students have even studied the student experience of *lantugi*) while keeping the ritual filters that privilege conviction and evidence. Second, introduce light procedural supports, archival recording, minimal timekeeping conventions, and transparent rules for acceptable conduct, so that *lantugi*'s virtues (flexibility, spontaneity, apprenticeship) are not lost to performative spectacle or misinformation.

Any proposal that treats a vernacular ritual as philosophically redemptive must concede limits. *Lantugi* can ossify into xenophobic echo chambers if the *tema* selection process systematically excludes dissenting social positions; it can be gamed by mobilized audiences (*hakot*) or by charismatic elites who monopolize stage space; and digital media can distort deliberative pacing into bite-sized fragments that favor virality over sustained reasoning. These perils mirror the failures of Enlightenment reason, but they also suggest corrective measures that are practice-anchored rather than abstract: rotating moderation, explicit audience norms, recorded transcripts for institutional memory, and periodic reflective workshops to cultivate critical media literacy among participants.

The rescue I propose does not rest on discovering a pure reason beyond contingency. By cultivating ritual discipline, expanding topic horizons toward civic concerns, and adopting modest procedural safeguards, *lantugi* can function as a vernacular school of reasoning that repairs the link between the lifeworld and the public use of reason. In that limited but consequential sense, *lantugi* helps re-orient the Enlightenment away from the pitfalls of

instrumentalization and toward a practice of shared, embodied argument, the very corrective Habermas sought when he urged communicative repair of modernity's deficits (Habermas 1984).

Conclusions

I began this paper with a simple claim: Enlightenment need not end in the self-consuming regress Adorno and Horkheimer diagnose; neither must it be confined to the particular history of European institutions. *Lantugi* shows that practices of public reason can be reworked in plural, vernacular, and decidedly non-Eurocentric forms. This is not a claim that ritual alone saves reason, but that certain ritualized communicative practices, when reflexively cultivated, supply the institutional and pedagogical conditions under which the "public use of reason" can thrive again (Kant 1784 [1991]).

Lantugi answers Kant's injunction to dare to think by doing the hard labor of communal thinking in public spaces: it stages the conditions in which ordinary persons practice judgment, test claims, and learn to bear intellectual risk within a shared lifeworld (Kant 1784 [1991]). It enacts what Foucault called an attitude toward the present: participants do not wait for an abstract, universal moment of reason; they interrogate here and now, converting the plaza and the livestream into laboratories of the contemporary (Foucault 1984). In that sense *lantugi* is fidelity to Kant and Foucault at once; it cultivates courage to think and the habit of questioning the present.

At the same time *lantugi* resists the pathologies that Horkheimer and Adorno diagnose: ritualized formats, public records, cross-examination, and open forums attenuate the easy slide from reason to mere instrumental control (Horkheimer and Adorno 2002). These are weak institutions, to be sure, but they matter: they create routinized opportunities for counter-speech and communal memory that tether validity claims to ongoing public testing rather than to private power (Habermas 1984). Where Enlightenment had become a technique of domination, *lantugi* reintroduces practice, embodied, noisy, fallible practice, as the ground of critique.

This rescue, however, is conditional and modest. *Lantugi* can be captured: *hakot* politics, charismatic monopolies of attention, and digital fragmentarization can turn ritual into spectacle or tribal performance. My fieldwork repeatedly showed these dangers. Therefore, the task is not to romanticize *lantugi* but to strengthen it prudently: rotate moderators, institute light archival practices, agree on minimal timekeeping and civility norms, and organize periodic media-literacy and reflective workshops for participants. These are not heavy institutional prescriptions; they are

practice-anchored safeguards meant to preserve spontaneity while increasing reliability.

Pedagogically, *lantugi*'s greatest gift is its apprenticeship model. Novices move from wonder through being-cornered to disciplined preparation and reflective reintegration. That cycle produces arguers who are resilient, fallibilist, and attentive to audiences, capacities too often absent in contemporary public culture. In essence, it provides an opportunity, if done well, to learn emancipatory postmetaphysical thinking (Estafia, 2020). If civic education aims to rehabilitate the public use of reason, we should take seriously forms of learning that are somatic, communal, and iterative rather than merely curricular.

Finally, a methodological remark. This paper has read philosophical problems through ethnographic particulars and, in the process, returned those particulars to philosophy. That movement is deliberate: theoretical categories (immaturity, attitude, instrumentality, communicative rationality) gain traction only when grounded in lived practices. *Lantugi* does not resolve the contested legacies of Kant, Foucault, Adorno, or Habermas. It does, however, show that their debates matter in ordinary places, in plazas, in notebooks, in the embodied discipline of rehearsing a rejoinder late at night.

If Kant taught us that courage is the first act of enlightenment (Kant 1784 [1991]), and if Foucault taught us to interrogate the present (Foucault 1984), then *lantugi* teaches us how courage and interrogation are practiced together in community. If Habermas' corrective is right, that communicative repair can salvage the emancipatory core of the Enlightenment (Habermas 1984), *lantugi* offers one, locally rooted way to begin that repair. It is a modest, plural, practice-based hope: not a metaphysical rescue of reason, but a civic pedagogy that keeps the Enlightenment project alive in a world that desperately needs modes of shared, accountable thinking. And even if Central Philippines is often left out of nationalist accounts of how Enlightenment ideas entered the country (Arcilla 1991), and while we are still working to build the Habermasian precondition for democratic discourse (Ocay, 2023, 6) which is a "firmly established democracy" *lantugi* perhaps quietly testifies that those ideas were, in practice, already part of local life.

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