



THE ENGLISH COMPLEMENT
Installment 4

HALAL THIS WAY

TOWARDS
A VIABLE QUEERING
IN SUNNI ISLAM

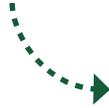
a foundational thesis by

MAHER ALHAJ

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Installment 4: Chapter 1.3

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PART 1

On Convening the Problem



CHAPTER SYNOPSIS

1.3 *On Ontogeny and Ontogenic Descriptors as Law*

THIS CHAPTER WAS DEVELOPED IN RESPONSE to the presumption that because we are one species (a developmental claim), all people and collectives of people are exactly the same and want to live the same way. This is the assumption behind why a liberal “democratic” secular narrative has been pushed and globalized (i.e., as valid to everyone everywhere), and this is the framework through which various human “rights” (including particular renditions of “gay and/or queer rights”) are being universalized and mandated.

Because I agree with the developmental claim that we are all members of one species (and as such, our struggles and concerns are intersectional, intertwined, and/or relate to one another, which speaks to the idea of the shared “physiology” and universal “tropes” I alluded to in the previous chapters), but disagree that we are all the same *kind* of human being, I must therefore provide (or at least allude to) a *developmental* framework that makes sense of my claims (which I do in this chapter). That is, I must have an answer to this: if we are all members of the same species, why and how are we able to be of, or differentiate into, different *kinds*, what does that mean, and why can’t we all agree (from a developmental perspective) on universal solutions to problems we see manifest universally?

[Manifest Problem/s] As humans, we all belong to the same species. As a species, we are defined by an “essence” (or what we refer to as “human nature”) that makes us a species (i.e., all humans have this “essence” without which they could not be classified as humans). Because as a species, our essence, or “human nature”, is universal to all of us (we all have “human nature”), it “can” be understood as “identical” among all of us. If the “nature” of being human can be understood as identical in all humans (i.e., human nature is developmentally “stable”, which could mean it is

the same in all of us and does not change), so does our perception of what it is to be human in general (i.e., we perceive all humans to be the same developmentally or of *one* kind, where the words “species” and “kind” are considered synonymous). Consequently, our problems as members of the same species or kind (such as violence being committed against Queer folks everywhere) and their solutions “can” also be understood as one and the same (so why not universalize?).

[Destabilization/s] While we are all members of the same species and share an overarching concept of what we refer to as “human nature”, not all humans (including Queer people) and collectives of humans (e.g., Queer collectives within the various human collectives) have the *exact* developmental way of being in the world (i.e., what we perceive as a shared “human nature” is not *exactly* the same in all of us). In other words, what we refer to as “human nature” (which unites us as members of the same species) is *not* as stable as we assume (i.e., stable *enough* to make us members of the same species and for us to perceive a shared connection, but *not* stable enough to make us a replica of one another), for human nature interacts *necessarily* with the environment in which it exists (i.e., the various times, places, and contexts), thereby giving rise to various developmental patterns of being human (because humans interact necessarily with *different* times, places, and contexts). When we apply this to the development of groups (i.e., the various collectives of people because humans tend to live in diverse groups or collectives) and take into consideration the varying times, places, and contexts through which the different collectives have lived, this results in the manifestations of what I have been referring to as various human *kinds*. In this view, the words “species” and “kind” are not synonymous; “species” is the *pluralism* of “kind”.

That is to say, since we have not lived in one time, place, and/or context (all of which necessarily interact with our developmental patterns), we are not all developmental replicas of one another (we vary as individuals and groups). Furthermore, this also means that people (individuals and groups) who live within the same and/or a similar time, place, and

context are more developmentally alike than others (other individuals and groups) who are not in and/or of that time, place, and/or context.

[Critical Problem/s and Consequence/s] On the one hand, to view all human kinds as developmentally the same and consider human nature as rigid and developmentally *invariable* forces us to live through the false reality of one *kind* of human being at this globalized juncture (i.e., the hegemonically “dominant” and more “powerful” kind). By choosing this as our starting point, our perceptions of and interventions in the world (which include our approaches to queerness and its various expressions) become limited to *that* particular way of being human (and its dominant narrative and/or discourse); the way of the dominant is then enforced onto all *the Others*, ignoring the various other existing ways of being in the world and/or violating them.

On the other hand, acknowledging that we are developmentally *variable* allows us to reach our full potential as a developmentally pluralistic human species; we are various human *kinds* who have various understandings of the world, its problems, and how to intervene in them. By acknowledging our developmental pluralism, we enrich humanity from different and equally critical angles. Instead of one solution for all (in relation to our various human predicaments), we end up with pluralisms of solutions that are truer to who and what we are and the nature of the problems we face as a pluralistic human species. Therefore, instead of dismissing the Other as “less” human when the Other does not conform to our way of being (which comes from the uncritical presupposition that humans are all but one kind, so they must want and live through the same reality), we must embrace our developmental truth as a pluralistic species, for we *do* vary developmentally (to an extent).

[The Message/s] To address the queer predicament responsibly, we must acknowledge and account for our developmental variations as a species and expand our notions of what it means to be human. To do just this, I start developing herein the concept of *ontogenic pluralism* (from the word

“ontogeny”, which means a pattern of development), the idea that as a species, our human development allows us to manifest into various ways of being in the world, or what I refer to as “ontogenic expressions” (i.e., we have a pluralism of ontogenic expressions).

Ontogenic expressions reference our various ways of being human in the world; they are not limited to one aspect of our existence, such as “race”, religion, language, food, etc., and are (i.e., as linguistic expressions when referencing various kinds of people) an answer to the problems and/or inadequacies we face when we superficially reference people with *one* of those aspects (as if those aspects were *the* essence which defines people’s existence and differences). For example, the main *qualifiers* in saying “White people” and “Muslim people” are “race” and “religion”, respectively, as in, saying those people are *inherently* different *because* of their skin color or religious beliefs (which, among other problems, lacks substance and is generalized and generalizing, but I will discuss this point in further detail later on in 2.1).

Rather, ontogenic expressions take into consideration the fullness of the particular time, place, and context through which human collectives develop and differentiate as individuals and groups, and the assemblages of all of which define them as various groups and cause them to manifest as various *kinds* (which could not be limited to or defined by *just* “color”, faith beliefs, and the like).

This chapter will go on to postulate that not only is it better to express our differences as various human kinds in terms of ontogenic expressions (rather than in terms of a single aspect of our existence, such as “race”, language, etc.), but that we as a species are *ontogenically pluralistic* (we have various ontogenic expressions). This is significant for the queer predicament at hand because while we have a universal phenomenon we refer to as queerness, our understandings, approaches, and solutions to injustices related to various expressions of being Queer and queerness are particular instances that depend on our various times, places, and contexts. In other words, ontogenic pluralism as a framework, gives us, among other things, the necessary language we need to express our differences *better* and allows us to make sense of how and why we are all of the same species

but of different *kinds* (and therefore how and why our solutions to the queer predicaments, too, cannot all be of the same kind).

To make sense of our developmental differentiation (that we are different human *kinds* and express ourselves through various ontogenic expressions), I expand herein on two main ideas. One has to do with our human *nature*, and the other has to do with developmental mechanisms that work through the model of human nature that I postulate (which I name “the laws of ontogeny”).

First, I argue that human nature could be viewed through a “dualism” of “core” and “periphery” or “peripheries”. The “core” is the essence by which we recognize ourselves as a single human species, and the “peripheries” are what allow us to differentiate into various human *kinds* (i.e., the peripheries are the medium through which we are connected to our core or essence as a species, as well as being able to interact with our various surroundings at a given time, place, and context). This “dualism” makes sense of the “essence” we have uniting us as a species (through what I refer to as the “core”; we all have the same human “core”) but also why we are not all the same (the “periphery” part of our human nature allows us to interact with our varying times, spaces, and contexts leading us to manifest in different ways).

Second, I postulate what I call the “laws of ontogeny” to describe the particular *mechanisms* through which we as a human species are able to differentiate into or manifest as various human kinds. These are the Law of Ontogenic *Continuity*, the Law of Ontogenic *Permeability*, the Law of Ontogenic *Plasticity*, the Law of Ontogenic *Interdependence*, and the Law of Ontogenic *Variability*.

The first law (i.e., the Law of Ontogenic Continuity) posits that all *ontogenic components* (“beings” and objects, i.e., “components” that influence our patterns of development) within a developmental space (i.e., where the process of development takes place) are *connected*. Everything in life is relational to other living and non-living things within a given context. This law helps make sense of the continuous interaction between organisms and their environments, affirming that “nature” and “nurture” *cannot* be discretely divided.

The second law (i.e., the Law of Ontogenic Permeability) posits that all ontogenic components are not only continuous but also permeable (to an extent). That is, they not only “touch” one another but also “go through” one another. For example, a human being cannot be considered as such without *breathing* air, *eating* food, *absorbing* light, and so on. These objects (non-human things) become part of the human being (e.g., through consumption and digestion), affirming that a human cannot exist without a sustained “permeability” with its environment and/or context.

The third law (i.e., the Law of Ontogenic Plasticity) posits that ontogenic components (such as a human being) are *malleable* or “plastic” (to an extent), affirming that we *can* be altered at a biological level (among other levels) by our environments and experiences. I extend this notion of plasticity to posit that time, place, and context *contribute* to the various ways through which we are able to be of different human *kinds*. In other words, our nature of being “plastic” (to an extent) allows us to develop differently based on time, place, and context (thereby giving rise to a pluralism of human kinds).

The fourth law (i.e., the Law of Ontogenic Interdependence) posits that all ontogenic components (such as a human being) are *interdependent*, affirming that beings within a developmental space are in *complicated* interdependent relationships with one another. This is the case so much so that it is almost impossible to clearly delineate what affects what and to what extent.

The fifth and final law (i.e., the Law of Ontogenic Variability) follows laws one through four. That is, because beings within developmental spaces are continuous, permeable, malleable, and interdependent, and vary in relation to time, place, and context since time, place, and context change, our ontogenic expressions (how we manifest as groups) will also be expressed differently (to an extent). This affirms why we look different, speak different languages, have different ways of being in the world, and so on.

Each of these laws has a special relationship to the queer predicament at hand. I will explicate within this chapter (and the rest of my thesis) how they connect to it, what is at stake, and how these ontogenic descriptors can provide much-needed guidance in approaching the queer predicament of Sunni Arab spaces (and others) at this globalized juncture of time.

CHAPTER 1.3

On Ontogeny and Ontogenic Descriptors as Law

A BEDROCK OF MY SYSTEM OF “meaning-making” is the belief that not all people and clusters of people hold the same lens through which they see, live, know, and make sense of the world. In fact, people cannot all be the same even if they want to. That remains the case because we (as various human “kinds¹⁴⁹”) *develop*¹⁵⁰ differently in response to our varying times (e.g., particular histories), places (e.g., particular geographies), and contexts (e.g., particular situations and/or circumstances through which various particular times and spaces converge¹⁵¹).

149 *Kind* as in “a group united by common traits or interests”; see “Kind, (n.)”, in *Merriam-Webster* (Merriam-Webster, Inc.), accessed February 5, 2022, find the URL in the bibliography. However, what unites these people is a *developmental* process through which a group “evolves” (i.e., “develops” that way due to shared time, space, and context) to have such common *traits* and/or interests (I discussed an initial definition of “development” in the Introduction, footnote 40; see also the next footnote). By “trait”, I mean for now a “distinguishing quality or characteristic”; see “Trait, (n.)”, in *Lexico Dictionaries | English* (Oxford University Press), accessed February 8, 2022, find the URL in the bibliography. However, I will also discuss a technical meaning of “trait” later in this chapter under a sub-section titled “On Human Nature as Ontogeny”.

150 As in to “grow or cause to grow, to become more advanced, elaborate, or mature; to bring or come into existence”; see “Develop, (v.)”, in *OED Online* (Oxford University Press), accessed November 21, 2019, find the URL in the bibliography.

151 As a reminder, different times and places *influence* how we develop to understand and/or respond to different circumstances and/or situations (in this chapter, I will explain *why* such is

As a result, we live differently, navigate the world differently, and *progress* differently. That is, there exist *multiple* ways of being human in the world, all of which are authorized, legitimized, and animated on their own terms and within their own varying contexts in time and space. Those manifestations of the various developmental ways of being human (resulting in the various human kinds) are what I am going to refer to as the various *ontogenic expressions* (i.e., ways of being).

This will be important to understand because while I recognize that as humans, we share a universal “core” of what makes us a species (as a word, “species” is written in the plural even when referencing *one* species because a species can be understood as a *group* of organisms, i.e., living beings such as humans who share similar characteristics and/or traits), much of what we are (which allows us to be of different *kinds*) cannot be universalized¹⁵².

For example, while “Queer” and “queerness” (part of our universal essence, as in people and/or traits we see manifest in various times, places,

the case). That is, our development as a species is contextualized through time and space, which results in the manifestations of *various* human kinds. In other words, these various kinds of being human occur *because* as a species, we are developmentally *amenable* to change through time, space, and context (in this chapter, I will also explain *how*, or the mechanisms through which these changes happen), and since times, places, and contexts *change*, they influence the development of our species (resulting in the manifestation of various human kinds).

152 It is tempting to use familiar terms such as “essence”, “attribute”, and “substance” to distinguish what is universal to the human species and what is not. I am shying away from using (or limiting my use of) such terminology because they have a long history of debate and/or come packaged with certain understandings (and therefore mean different things to different people) not only within what some qualify as the “Western” philosophical tradition (e.g., a conversation undertaken by Aristotle and Descartes, among others), but also within Islamic theology (e.g., a conversation about the essence and attributes of God which marked many of the differences between the various Islamic theological traditions). I merely want to express that (as humans) there are developmentally “fundamental” things that make us *one* species, and there are other less “fundamental” things (much of which are *also* developmentally expressed *but* cannot and/or should not be universalized because their manifestations depend on their time, place, and context) that distinguish us as *different* “kinds” of the same species (this is the conversation which the remainder of this chapter will unpack).

and contexts) represent and/or reference diverse ways of being *within* a particular ontogenic expression (e.g., a way of being Queer within a Western space or an Islamic space, and so on)¹⁵³, “Queer” and “queerness” (as a reference to people and/or phenomena expressed universally) are *also* expressed differently *between* different expressions of ontogenic spaces (e.g., historically, the expression of *Western* queerness is different from *Islamic* queerness because their manifestations and how we understand them depends on their particular times, places, and contexts).

In fact, treating all queer ontogenic *expressions* (i.e., how “Queer” and “queerness” are manifest and understood within the various times, places, and contexts that characterize the various human “kinds”) as universal¹⁵⁴ (i.e., all the same) has been part of the problem in approaching the queer predicament in Sunni Arab spaces¹⁵⁵. As such, this conversation about the *critical* variations between the various ontogenic expressions in general (i.e., why we are different as various collectives and/or kinds) and what *allows* such variations or differences to happen (which includes what allows for the various manifestations of *queer expression* to happen within the various ontogenic expressions) is especially important as we navigate the solutions to the historical injustices against Queer folks and communities everywhere (i.e., if queer expressions are variable, then the solutions to the various queer predicaments may also need to be variable).

Therefore, I posit some basic frameworks here to make sense of what it means to be human in general (what is our “nature” as members

153 Which has been historically perceived in both the West and Islamic spaces as a “bad” variation from the so-called accepted norm.

154 For example, the Western model has *functionally* declared queer expressions to be the same everywhere.

155 That is to say that the framework I develop here makes plausible the *diversity* of being “Queer” in different times, places, and contexts.

of the same species). This should allow us to account for our *unity* as one species and our differences as various kinds. That is, this should help us understand why we manifest (i.e., develop) differently as various collectives of the same species (i.e., we have a pluralism of developmental “ontogenic expressions”). Furthermore, this conversation makes sense of the universality of queerness (as well as other phenomena) on a species level, as well as the reasons why it manifests *differently* in different times, spaces, and contexts.

In this chapter, I first define what I mean by *ontogeny*, which means for now (i.e., initial definition) our *patterns of development* as individuals and as a species, and articulate (what I understand as “laws”, i.e., as facts) certain *descriptors* that specify how and why *variations* in ontogenic expressions (how and why we are different groups, or how and why our pattern of development changes to result in these different groups) are *expressed* and made *possible* (i.e., able to happen). I then go through each of these laws to briefly explain their meaning and relevance to the conversation on the queer predicament in Sunni Arab spaces (but also for similar conversations beyond it). I conclude this chapter with a discussion on *ontogenic pluralism* (as a species, we manifest a pluralism of ontogenic expressions, i.e., ways of being) and allude to how *queerness* in Sunni Arab spaces is pertinent and/or could be visualized through such a conceptual framework.

On the Meaning of Ontogeny

I borrowed the word “ontogeny”¹⁵⁶ from discourses on human development. As a term, ontogeny (i.e., liminal definition) “refers to the pro-

¹⁵⁶ Etymologically, the word comes from “onto” (being) and “geny” (genesis, origin, production of); see “Ontogeny, (n.)”, in *Online Etymology Dictionary*, accessed November 21, 2019, find the URL in the bibliography.

cess of growth, development, and maturation of the individual organism [e.g., a living being such as a human] from conception to death. It is virtually axiomatic that every species [type of organism such as humans, cats, dogs, etc.] has its patterns of ontogeny...”¹⁵⁷.

However, here I want to expand the definition of ontogeny beyond the biological and social development of one *single* individual within an organism (as in a single human) to the development of *groups* of an organism or what we may refer to as *populations* where the word “population” has a technical definition that *links* human groups and other living populations to *geographic* areas (because populations have been geographically based from a historical “ecological¹⁵⁸” perspective)¹⁵⁹. That is, ontogeny (i.e., applied definition) for our human species becomes a process (or the processes) of growth, development, maturation, expression, etc., of the *individual* organism *as well as* of the various human *groups* and/or populations (because humans as social beings tend to live together in groups in various geographic areas).

I clarify the definition of ontogeny (i.e., extend its typical meaning not just to include individuals but also groups) and emphasize its definition as *patterns* of development (in the plural, not just one) because I am especially interested in how ontogeny manifests differently (i.e.,

157 See Barry Bogin, “Evolutionary Hypotheses for Human Childhood”, *American Journal of Physical Anthropology* 104, no. S25 (1997): 65, find the URL in the bibliography.

158 Ecology is the “branch of biology that deals with the relations of organisms to one another and their physical surroundings”, see “Ecology, (n.)”, in *Lexico Dictionaries | English* (Oxford University Press), accessed July 15, 2021, find the URL in the bibliography.

159 “Biology can be visualized as a hierarchy of units, ordered from the smallest to the largest. The units are molecules, cells, tissues, organs, organisms, populations, communities, and the biosphere”; see William K. Purves, ed., *Life, the Science of Biology*, Seventh Edition (Sunderland, MA: Gordonsville, VA: Sinauer Associates; W.H. Freeman and Co., 2004), 6. A population is “a group of individuals that all belong to the same species. Populations are geographically based; they live in a particular area. But the size or scale of that area can be variable...”; see “Ecological Levels: From Individuals to Ecosystems”, Khan Academy, accessed November 11, 2019, find the URL in the bibliography.

all of us do not have the *exact* same ontogenic or developmental pattern) on the individual level but also on the level of the various populations of the human species (i.e., various clusters and/or collectives of humans, or what I refer to as different *kinds* of humans) in their respective ecosystems (where an ecosystem in its technical definition includes not *only* the living organisms, i.e., populations, but also the “non-living” components of the environments in which these organisms exist). These “non-living” components of an ecosystem also influence human development as much as they are influenced by it (e.g., the temperature patterns we are exposed to, the quality of the air we breathe, the type of food available, the degree of chemical poisons in the water we drink, the kind of environments we have, etc., as well as the kind of “influence” *we* exert onto them)¹⁶⁰. This is also why I use the term *ontogenic*, not *ontogenetic* (against the conventional practice in the field of human development). I do so because I want to de-emphasize “genes” (while they remain developmentally integral) to highlight that our patterns of development are *also* influenced by other things, namely, the time, place, and context through which they take place.

An ecosystem, then, includes the time, place, and context of an organism, all of which influence it and are influenced by it (which is important because I am interested in *how* different kinds of human

160 “When you are talking about ecosystems, you are not only looking at all the different populations and species in the given area, but you are also looking at the physical environment, the non-living or abiotic..., and not just what they are, but how they impact the organisms, and in some cases how the organisms impact the physical environment. For example, temperature and rainfall patterns influence where different terrestrial species of plants and animals live; some can survive dry desert conditions, others need the high rainfall found in rainforests. But the forests themselves also influence temperature and rainfall patterns...”; see “Ecological Levels”.

collectives are expressed and made possible [i.e., able to be] in *different* ecosystems with different times, places, and contexts)¹⁶¹.

However, our environments (i.e., ecosystems) affect our development in more substantial ways, which is possible due to certain intrinsic ontogenic (i.e., developmental) properties I will explain within the remainder of this chapter (e.g., our environments influence our language development, the pattern of “genes” we have, and so on). This is not to say that some of us are “better” than others, but to emphasize that our ontogenic expressions depend on and/or are influenced by the *place* in which they are contextualized in important ways.

Since every species has its own “axiomatic” pattern of ontogeny (i.e., it follows a certain trajectory of development that is universally true for it as a species), it follows that there is something that makes us human in a universal kind of sense (i.e., irrespective of which ecosystem we are a part of).

However, the question of differences in “being” within a species itself (i.e., differences *between* us as members and collectives or kinds of the same species in different ecosystems) then becomes interesting (we are not all the same *kind* of human, e.g., see Figure 7; while we, as various collectives, are all the same color, e.g., green, we are not all the same shade of green).

That is to say (i.e., an applied understanding derived from ontogeny), while we as a species have an overarching ontogenic pattern of development (which make us a species), we also develop and manifest into various ontogenic expressions (i.e., ways of beings or kinds) as various populations (i.e., our overall pattern of development at the species level allows for pluralism of patterns that mark our individual and group

¹⁶¹ See the previous footnote.

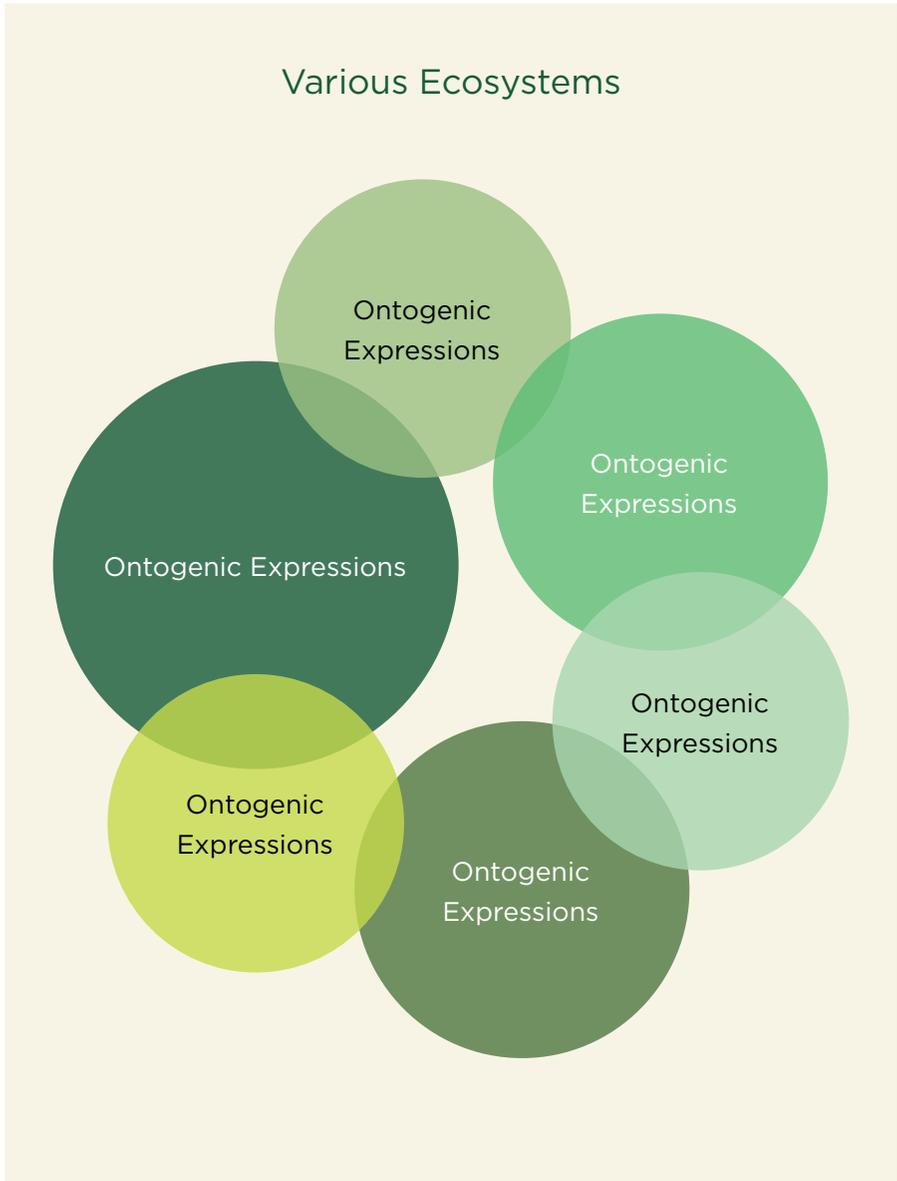


FIGURE 7: Ecosystems and Ontogenic Expressions

differences) at different times, places, and contexts (as a species, we are not all a replica of one another but have a pluralism of ontogenic expressions, i.e., “ways of being”)¹⁶².

How and *why* do individuals and groups within a species differ, and to *what* extent do such differences manifest (and matter)? That is, how are we of the same *being* but of different *kinds* on both the individual as well as population levels, and why should we care?

Ultimately, the answer to some of these questions, as in how are we the same but different, is relevant to the queer predicament, for queerness is an “event” or a “trait” that is universal to the human species but manifests differently not only within and between individuals, but also within and between their various populations and ecosystems. This matters because our political “solutions” to injustices related to queerness need to take into consideration the various manifestations of queerness and their relationship to time, place, and context. Therefore, it helps if we are “informed” by how this is at all possible (i.e., by understanding some of the “mechanisms” through which human “nature” operates).

To be “formative”, therefore, I want to first *describe* here what we refer to as “human nature” and then link it to certain ontogenic “properties” (i.e., developmental properties which allow us to be members of the same species but manifest differently). Because I believe such properties are axiomatic in shaping ontogenic expressions (i.e., the various manifestations of how clusters of people in different times, places, and contexts live), I will refer to them as the *laws of ontogeny*. That is,

¹⁶² Some may refer to this as “culture” or “cultural differences”, but the term “culture” and its derivatives are not very helpful if devoid of a developmental understanding which accounts for why such “cultural differences” and diversity are present and possible.

I formulated these laws to describe our ontogenic reality, the developmental patterns allowing us to be a *pluralistic* species (i.e., one but many).

On Human Nature as “Core” and “Periphery”

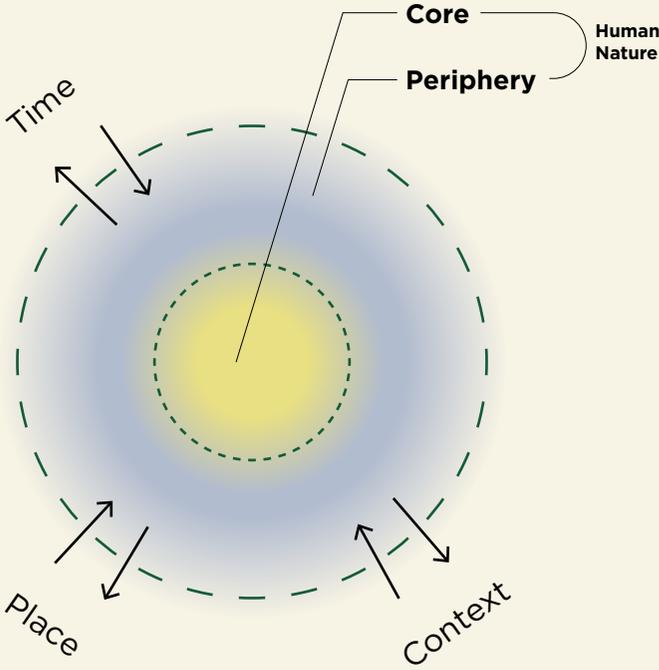
How do we understand what makes us human? I previously hinted that the human within an Abrahamic monotheistic understanding is a created assemblage of body, mind, and soul. However, humans do not look the same at the individual level (e.g., they vary in body, mind, and soul even as individuals) as well as at the group or population level (e.g., their collective manifestations as bodies, minds, and souls vary “on average¹⁶³” in terms of groups as well). Yet, we can agree there is something about a human being that makes it a human as opposed to other kinds of organisms. How do we make sense of such unity in the face of some of our fundamental differences? To answer this question, it is helpful to visualize a human (as well as other existing beings) as a being composed of a “core” and a “periphery”.

The *core* could be visualized as a living, amorphous, non-concrete, universal essence (i.e., a living core, which to an extent and ever so slightly, moves, responds, develops, etc., but in a *limited* way); see Figure 8. Each type of organism (e.g., humans) shares this core with all other members of its type (e.g., other humans). This “core” is universal to all of them, and it is what characterizes them as members of the same species.

It is through this “core” that various human collectives can perceive some “universal” commonalities between each other (e.g., this is why injustice anywhere, which includes our perception of injustice about

¹⁶³ I will discuss what I mean by “on average” later on in this section (in the forthcoming footnote 186).

Human Nature as Core and Periphery



The Environment

FIGURE 8: Human Nature as a “Dualism” of “Core” and “Periphery”

animals and the environment, is a threat to justice everywhere and this is how we can make sense of why the “West” should care about queer injustice, not just in its own spaces but everywhere).

The *periphery*, on the other hand, is the component of the organism (e.g., humans) or the “medium” through which the core is connected to the outside world (which includes the “surface” area connecting the organism with everything around it). This periphery is even *more* “flexible” and “fluid” in comparison to the core, for it moves more, responds more, is influenced by (and influences) the environment more, and so on; see Figure 8.

As such, this “periphery”, because of its more “flexible” fluidity, movement, and interaction with its various ecosystemic surroundings (at various times, places, and contexts) and its ability to impact and be impacted by its surroundings (i.e., context) allows an organism the ability to manifest *particularities* and differences (not shared with other human kinds who do *not* share the same time, place, and context) that are particular and reflect its own time, place, and context. To reiterate, however, the resultant particularities are as such that they do not negate the organism’s core existence as a member of its own species (i.e., these “peripheral” particularities, no matter how radically different, are still manifest in an organism that shares a universal core with all other members of its species)¹⁶⁴; see Figure 9.

That is to say, through this periphery (i.e., through its interaction with its particular surroundings that vary from one place to another and from one time to another), various beings (i.e., existing things) are

164 That is not to definitively postulate that our “core” is exactly the same across all members of our species, or that it may or may not be influenced by our varying peripheries, but simply to say that our core is more “stable” in terms of what defines us as a species, in comparison to our varying peripheries which allow us to manifest differently as a species in response to our varying times, places, and contexts.

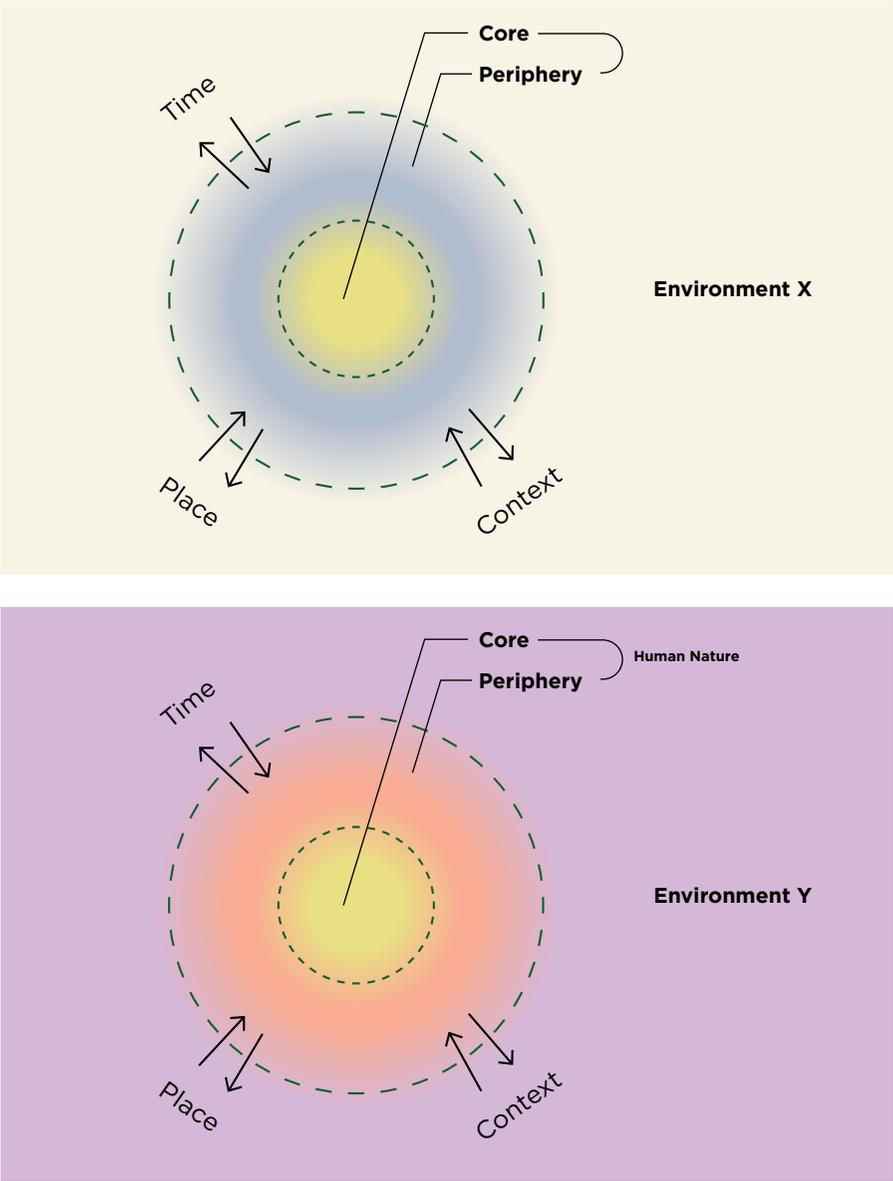


FIGURE 9: Same Organism, Same Core, Different Environments and Manifestations

able to develop as various kinds. This is possible for living (i.e., “biotic”) organisms and perhaps the non-living (i.e., “abiotic”) because of certain properties of what it is to be an existing physical entity. It has to do with the nature of being (i.e., existing) and its laws. To explain this further, next I will define what we mean by human *nature*, its *laws* (what I coin and name the “laws of ontogeny” in an attempt to explain how human nature works), and as such, some of the ways in which differences within the *same* beings are possible and able to manifest.

On Human Nature as Ontogeny

In general terms, human nature refers to what we may label as the “traits”¹⁶⁵ that set us apart from other beings¹⁶⁶. Professor Dario Maestriperi’s definition of human nature, although somewhat technical (which I will synthesize and relate to the laws of ontogeny), is as follows:

The concept of human nature refers to the notion that there are psychological and behavioral processes that are common to all (or most) members of our species. Human nature includes both broad and specific psychological and behavioral traits...The concept of human nature implies that these universal human psychological and behavioral

165 “A particular feature of mind or character; a distinguishing quality; a characteristic; *spec.* [specifically] of a culture or social group. Also *attributive*”; see “Trait, (n.)”, in *OED Online* (Oxford University Press), accessed November 21, 2019, find the URL in the bibliography.

166 Nature: as in the “inherent or essential quality or constitution of a thing; the inherent and inseparable combination of properties giving any object, event, quality, emotion, etc., its fundamental character. In later use also more generally: kind, type”; see “Nature, (n.)”, in *OED Online* (Oxford University Press), accessed November 10, 2019, find the URL in the bibliography. “*Human nature* refers to the qualities that set humankind apart from other creatures. This includes psychological and social aspects of humans, in particular actions and interactions. Among these are curiosity, emotions, reasoning, and language aptitude”; see Josephine Campbell, “Human Nature”, in *Salem Press Encyclopedia* (Salem Press, 2017), find the URL in the bibliography.

traits are at least in part genetically controlled [i.e., inherited and a characteristic of the species] and functionally meaningful [i.e., have a purpose, benefit, etc.].¹⁶⁷

However, the:

...existence of genetic predispositions for particular patterns of thinking or behavior does not necessarily imply that human thoughts or behaviors are fully genetically determined, or that they are the same in all human beings, or that they are immutable. We know that

- genes for all human traits, including psychological and behavioral ones, exist in different variants called ‘alleles’;
- all traits result from interactions between genes and environment;
- genetic influences on mind and behavior are probabilistic rather than deterministic (thus, there may be individuals who do not possess universal human traits);
- universal human traits are most likely to be expressed in species-typical human environments (and may not be expressed in highly artificial environments or individuals with unusual life experiences);
- universal human traits are, to some extent, malleable and modifiable by experience.¹⁶⁸

As such, human nature, in general, has to do with something universal to humans as in traits shared between them but also something that is not fully “biological” where contributions from the *environment* plays a *critical* role. To *some* extent, these traits are *malleable*. This

167 See Dario Maestriperi, “Human Nature”, *Evolutionary Studies in Imaginative Culture* 1, no. 1 (2017): 85, find the URL in the bibliography.

168 See Dario Maestriperi, “Human Nature”, *Evolutionary Studies in Imaginative Culture* 1, no. 1 (2017): 85–86; find the URL in the bibliography.

biology–environment interaction is descriptive of our ontogenic development and allows for *greater* variations in the manifestation of differences on individual and population levels (as opposed to being limited if the differences were purely biological and/or if the environment did not at all contribute to them; the more factors that contribute to our diversity, the more diversity we would have among us).

How is this possible? How can the environment contribute to our differences? How can our nature encapsulate and/or account for both our universal similarities as well as our particular radical differences? To answer these questions, I formulated what I have been referring to as the laws of ontogeny, which I will explain next.

On the Laws of Ontogeny

I posit that there are at least five laws through which we could describe our ontogenic development as a human species (but not just the human species) whose “nature” could be viewed in terms of a universal “core” and pluralism of variable “peripheries”. They are the Law of Ontogenic Continuity, the Law of Ontogenic Permeability, the Law of Ontogenic Plasticity, the Law of Ontogenic Interdependence, and the Law of Ontogenic Variability.

On the Law of Ontogenic *Continuity* as a Descriptor

The first law: ontogenic¹⁶⁹ *components*, “beings” (i.e., existing things), within an ontogenic space (i.e., the ecosystem but also beyond it) are *connected*. While objects in the world appear to exist in discrete forms

169 I use the word “ontogenic” as a qualifier to refer to all that participate in the process of development. This includes things that are “alive”, such as organisms (e.g., I say “ontogenic organisms”), but also things that we do not consider alive, such as the spaces within and through which organisms interact (e.g., I say “ontogenic spaces”).

all around us (various humans, trees, cars, etc.), and to *an extent* they do (in terms of their essences which distinguish them from one another), everything within life is relational to other living and non-living things within a given context. Every “core” of an organism and/or existing thing is connected to its surroundings through its periphery¹⁷⁰. That is, we can understand that the core of what something is in its essence and the medium through which it is continuous with other essences in its context is its periphery.

As such, we as humans cannot understand a concept of “nature” without its *relationship* to the concept of “nurture”, or “the biological” without its *relationship* to “the environmental”, because there is no discrete divider between them (i.e., every “essence” or “core” that differentiates an organism is connected to its surroundings through that organism’s periphery). For this reason, the conceptualization of organisms as being made up of “cores” and “peripheries” is helpful, for it makes sense of the continuous interaction between organisms and their environments¹⁷¹.

170 For example, think about how humans interact with air, light, food, etc.

171 This reminds me of something I read in one of Professor Paur’s articles: “...As Haraway notes, the body does not end at the skin. We leave traces of our DNA everywhere we go, we live with other bodies within us, microbes and bacteria, we are enmeshed in forces, affects, energies...”, see Jasbir K. Puar, “I Would Rather Be a Cyborg Than a Goddess: Becoming Intersectional in Assemblage Theory”, *State University of New York Press 2* (2012): 57. I intuit that it is perhaps physically impossible to imagine an “empty” space or a vacuum between things in the universe. If something *is* in something, it is a part of it to an extent. In that way, we are continuous. That is to say, we cannot “isolate” the divider that would separate objects from the space in which they exist (or the objects from themselves), for everything is to an extent continuous with everything, and/or perhaps *assembled* within itself and with other things within its context (I am using the noun “assemblage” as a continuous verb here to highlight the movement, process, connectivity, and *complexity* of how we are “assembled”; I will talk more about the meaning of “assemblages” later on in this chapter and more in Part 3, but for a conversation on Assemblage Theory and its relationship to “intersectionality”, both of which are theoretical frameworks attempting to make sense of how we are “connected” and some of the relevance of that to political interventions, see Puar’s “I Would Rather Be a Cyborg Than a Goddess: Becoming Intersectional in Assemblage Theory”). This (i.e., our conversation about “continuity”) has been a primary topic of debate in the “natural sciences” such as physics. For example, “physics” is interested in finding the “smallest” building block from which all matter is composed, i.e., what we could refer to as a single “quantum” of mass (where

“quantum” is the least or the smallest amount of any physical entity, or a “minimum amount of a physical quantity which can exist, and in multiples of which it can vary”; see “Quantum, (n.) and (adj.)”, in *OED Online* (Oxford University Press), accessed November 22, 2019, find the URL in the bibliography. For instance, the “atom” was once believed to be the smallest building block, but that is no longer the case, for we now know that the atom is made up of subatomic particles (and I intuit that those are also made of smaller “particles”, and so on); for a short preview on this, see “The Standard Model: the Building Blocks of Matter”, Exploratorium: the Museum of Science, Art, and Human Perception, accessed February 15, 2022, find the URL in the bibliography. This is relevant, however, because if there is such a thing as the “smallest” building block, i.e., a matter with the smallest possible measurable mass, then we *can* deduce that there is *also* an “empty” space that is not made up of those building blocks which would “separate” or isolate collections of these building blocks that stick together to form parts of the various physical entities we perceive as bodies, and bodies from other bodies and their contexts, and so on, i.e., we could make sense of *how* things could be *discontinuous* (we would consider the space between the smallest building blocks as “empty” because *if* it is not made of the “smallest” building blocks of matter, for they *are* the smallest building blocks without which nothing could be built, *then* it would be considered what we perceive as “massless”, and therefore is made of “nothing”). That space would constitute the “medium” through which these building blocks “stick” or adhere together, and it is believed (as mentioned in the article in the previous reference) that particles “stick” together by interacting with one another in complex ways”. That is the case because they must “exert what we call forces on each other” (i.e., forces, which then would be made of smaller building blocks of their own kind that some refer to as a quantum of force which is an important topic of inquiry in the field of quantum physics/mechanics). Otherwise (i.e., if there is no space between the “smallest” building blocks”), they would be one and the same with their surroundings and not the smallest building blocks, and if there is space between them and they are not “interacting” or “sticking” together by these “forces”, then the universe (which is composed of all “matter” that is believed to be made of these “smallest” particles) would fall apart. Having said that, to consider such existing space between the hypothesized smallest building blocks as “empty” is a contradiction, because if there is “energy” and “forces” in that “empty” space, then the space is not really “empty”, and if energy and/or force *exist* in the “physical” world, how could they be of no physical “mass”, i.e., if we can’t measure their “weight” does that mean they are necessarily “weightless”, take no “space”, and/or are “nothing”? If both “matter” and “energy and/or forces” are required for the composition of all things, then we could not choose matter over energy as the “smallest” building block but *both* (so it would no longer be *one of the* “smallest” but a relation of two); if the “smallest” building blocks *require* force and energy *to build*, then how could the “smallest” building block be defined in isolation of that which is *essential* to it, i.e., without which it could not exist, and so on). With that said, I intuit that finding the “smallest” building block of matter (whether as one, by defining it in terms of only matter, or as a relation of two, if defining it as an object of both matter and energy, or other conceptualizations) is an impossible task, for the world is bigger than us (and will always be, i.e., we are not *the* world but *in* the world). That is to say, as a species, we could only know more about the things we can *possibly* know more about, but not about things which are of a radically different nature than us or our limited (which will always be limited) understandings of the world (no matter how far we go in “science”). In general, I think we can know *quantitatively* more about the *same* things (e.g., within our understanding of mathematics, we can always unravel more theories about the universe and apply them, knowing that we can never *fully* know the universe), but not *qualitatively* more about *different* things (for example, beyond the theoretical realm, we can

I say that “nature” is “nurture”, but *not* exactly (because while they are continuous with one another, for there is no “discrete” divider between them, and as such, there is ambiguity as to where one begins and the other ends, they remain two different “concepts” or phenomena). However, while nature and nurture represent two different “concepts” or phenomena, “nature” is not separate from “nurture”, and “nurture” is not separate from “nature”¹⁷².

never answer questions about why we came to be, and what the future holds for us, for that is a qualitatively different kind of knowledge that is bigger than “science” and beyond what it means to be “human”, i.e., we are parts of the world but not the “makers” of it, we are a “creation” but not the “creators”, we are a “design” but not the “designers”, and so on). This is all relevant to the conversation about queer predicaments (and beyond them), for our concerns as a pluralistic species are all connected and/or continuous at a fundamental physical level (this is why we say we have universal concerns, i.e., we can “relate” to one another on a continuous physical level) within themselves but also with each other and the contexts through which they take place. That is to say, our “macro” (from the Greek meaning “large”) questions, and/or the “metaphysical” ones (i.e., those which seem to “transcend” their physical form) as a species are necessarily related to their very basic “micro” (from the Greek meaning “small”) physical components, and how they function. While this is perhaps one of the largest footnotes in the world of publishing (but I had an urge to write it for I feel it is important), I formulated it to simply say we are *continuous* (but more than continuous, like the rest of the laws of ontogeny, will get at) with everything in us and around us (and beyond that) at a very basic physical level, for “matter” is something, “air” is something, “gravity” is something, and “nothing” (i.e., that we can perceive to separate us from ourselves, others, and environments) is *really* nothing.

172 “Interactions between genes and the environment are a critical feature of development. Insights into the dynamic interplay between these factors have come from laboratory studies exploring experience-dependent changes in gene function, which illustrate the importance of environmental factors in determining [the] activity of the genome. These studies have implications for our understanding of the origin of individual differences in behavior and may provide new ways of thinking about the transmission of traits across generations...”, as well as, “...it is becoming increasingly clear that creating a division between genes and environment limits our understanding of the complex biological processes through which individual differences are achieved. The reality that the interaction between genes and [the] environment is a critical feature of development is emerging as a central theme in laboratory studies and longitudinal analyses in human populations”, see Frances A. Champagne and Rahia Mashoodh, “Genes in Context: Gene-Environment Interplay and the Origins of Individual Differences in Behavior”, *Current Directions in Psychological Science*, 18, no. 3 (June 2009): 127, find the URL in the bibliography. That is, “any approach to the study of human sexuality that sets biology and social behavior in competition, or that stresses only one dimension to the neglect of the other is counterproductive...”; see Alice S. Rossi, “Eros and Caritas: A Biopsychosocial Approach to Human Sexuality and Reproduction”, in *Sexuality Across the Life Course* (The University of Chicago Press, 1994), 4, find the URL in the bibliography. For the implications of gene-environment interplay for psychosocial functioning in humans, see, for example, Champagne

This is relevant in the queer predicament, as we talk about the nature versus nurture debate (and its various other manifestations and labels) in terms of the roles nature and nurture play in Queer development and whether it is at all possible to conceive of one without the other. For example, when does the role of nature stop in the formulation of Queer individuals, if it contributes to it, and when does the role of nurture begin or end, if it has anything to do with it, and vice versa? However, beyond the mechanics of how human “sexuality” works, this is also relevant (as mentioned in footnote 171) to political interventions around queer predicaments and beyond them (e.g., conversations about injustice as a universal concept, “intersectionality”, and “Assemblage Theory”).

As I already alluded to, such continuity between organisms and their surroundings (and their surroundings with other surroundings), however, does not mean uniformity (i.e., two different things can be connected yet different). A human is not a cat, and a cat is not an apple, and so on. While all components of an ontogenic space are continuous with each other (e.g., humans are connected to cats in their context, cats are connected to apples in their context, and so on), they all have different “essences” which distinguish them as different “beings”, “entities”, and/or “existing things”.

and Mashoodh, “Genes in Context”: 129. See *figure 1* on page 128 of the same reference for an explanation of DNA methylation or “gene silencing” (on how “genes” can be “silenced” from being expressed). “...The environmental context of the gene...includes factors that increase gene activity... and factors that decrease gene activity...” which influence what genes are expressed; see Champagne and Mashoodh: 128. “In addition to shaping the developmental trajectories within an individual’s life span, DNA methylation may also have implications for the transmission of traits from one generation to the next. There are two distinct pathways through which this transmission can occur: (a) the behavioral transmission of traits through experience-dependent changes in the methylation of genes, and (b) environmental effects that change DNA methylation in germ cells and are thus transmitted through the germ line of subsequent generations”; see Champagne and Mashoodh: 129–130.

On the Law of Ontogenic *Permeability* as a Descriptor

The second law: ontogenic components (such as beings and objects) are not only continuous, they are also *permeable* (to an extent). That is, they do not only “touch” (“meet” at a surface level since they are continuous) but also “go through” each other to an extent (i.e., interact with each other beyond the superficial “touching” of the “boundaries” or peripheries of their bodies).

This law speaks to the *context* that weaves time and space together. That is, context as in the particularities of the space and time that “alter” how a certain “core” of a “being” manifests (e.g., while all humans share a core, our varying contexts that operate on our various peripheries allow us [i.e., our core] to manifest into different human kinds, or to have different ways of being).

A human cannot be human (i.e., what we perceive as human) without *breathing* air, *eating* food, *absorbing* light, and so on. That is, such non-human things (i.e., objects in its environment at a particular space in time) become part of the human (through interactions, such as consumption and digestion, as in the human and its environment “go through” each other) in order for the human to be what it is (i.e., a human being). In other words, a human cannot exist independent of its environment, and for its basic survival, as much as it is thriving, it requires a sustained “permeability” with the environment and/or context (which manifests differently at various times and in various spaces).

To reiterate, because non-human things “manifest” differently based on time, space, and context (different air, food, light, available resources, accessibility, geographic limitations, and environments in general but also different circumstances, situations and/or events, and so on), what it is to be human manifests differently as well (i.e., in

response to different environments and/or contexts, human life manifests in different ways).

In short, a human is permeable through its periphery to other non-human things. Those non-human things manifest differently and, as such, affect humans differently in a variety of times, places, and contexts.

In terms of the queer predicament, this becomes relevant as we talk about the universal and particular aspects of queerness. What are those queer universalities that manifest all of the time and everywhere (e.g., the existence of queerness in itself seems constant at various times in different places and contexts), and what are those queer particularities that change as time, place, and context do? For example, what it is to be Queer in a Western space is different from what it is to be Queer in an Islamic space (because our varying understanding of the phenomenon is influenced by our varying times, places, and contexts).

In addition, this “permeability” is also relevant to the debate about nature and nurture and their relationship to Queer formulation. That is, this conversation about permeability becomes relevant in the question about the extent to which the environment affects our biology in terms of the manifestation of queer phenomenon, if at all, as well as the extent to which biology is “responsible”, and if so, whether we can “separate” our biology from our environments.

On the Law of Ontogenic *Plasticity* as a Descriptor:

The third description of ontogeny, as in what allows us to develop and manifest various ways of being that I want us to consider as law, is that ontogenic components are not only continuous and permeable, but they are also *malleable* (or plastic) to an extent¹⁷³. Plasticity in terms of the

¹⁷³ I say *to an extent* because there are periods in an organism’s development called “critical

human in one definition is “...the ability to alter the neural connections of the brain as a result of an experience in the process of learning, etc.”¹⁷⁴.

However, plasticity is not limited to the human brain (our bodies, genes, behaviors, etc., are all “plastic” to an extent)¹⁷⁵, and it is not in conflict with what constitutes a human being¹⁷⁶. With that said, plasticity in itself is also a *limited* process (i.e., we are not *too* “plastic” or malleable¹⁷⁷;

periods”, in which the organism is more susceptible to this plasticity than at other times of the organism’s lifespan. However, we know that to some extent (e.g., in terms of how a human learns, among other things), this plasticity (or ongoing developmental change) is a long-term process. In addition, plasticity *cannot* always explain variations amongst us and/or within species. That is, sometimes human development is “contingent and plastic”, and at other times it is “canalized and more strictly determined by genotype [someone’s genetics]”; see Marco Del Giudice, Romina Angeleri, and Valeria Manera, “The Juvenile Transition: A Developmental Switch Point in Human Life History”, *Developmental Review* 29, no. 1 (March 2009): 6, find the URL in the bibliography. There are perhaps other developmental reasons as well as to why we develop differently. To clarify, “canalization” is a technical term in biology and human development that refers to “the tendency of developmental processes to follow particular trajectories” despite the varying circumstances and conditions the organism is exposed to. That is, the tendency for a “specific genotype to follow the same trajectory under different conditions (different environments or different genetic backgrounds)”. In other words, the environment plays less of a role in the process of development in certain circumstances, i.e., the trait is less “plastic”; see Benedikt Hallgrímsson, Katherine Willmore, and Brian K. Hall, “Canalization, Developmental Stability, and Morphological Integration in Primate Limbs”, *American Journal of Physical Anthropology*, Suppl. 35 (2002): 131–58.

174 See “Plasticity, (n.)”, in *OED Online* (Oxford University Press), accessed November 21, 2019, find the URL in the bibliography.

175 “Due to the variety of ecological niches they live in...organisms differ widely in their growth rate, size, lifespan, fertility, and number of offspring...a remarkable degree of variation is usually observed within the same species as well...Due to such environmental variability, reproductive traits and strategies tend not to be genetically fixed, but rather evolve to show adaptive developmental plasticity”; see Del Giudice, Angeleri, and Manera, “The Juvenile Transition”: 5. We could also observe plasticity on the level of what scientists call “epigenetics”, “meaning ‘in addition to genetics’”; see Champagne and Mashoodh, “Genes in Context”: 128.

176 For many, the idea that the human could be altered by its “environment” through a process like “plasticity” is absurd and defies what a human is. To many, we are “biological” beings, and the environment does not play a critical role in what makes us “human”. But plasticity, which allows for the biology–environment interaction, is “a property of the genotype [the complete set of our genetic instructions we are all endowed with as biological beings]” and as such part of what makes humans and other organisms. “One can still hear people talking about genetics versus plasticity as if plasticity were not, in fact, a property of the genotype”; see Massimo Pigliucci, “Evolution of Phenotypic Plasticity: Where Are We Going Now?” *Trends in Ecology & Evolution* 20, no. 9 (September 2005): 481.

177 “The term plasticity as used in everyday language evokes an almost infinite malleability with little underlying logic. This describes wax, not humans”; see Edward H. Hagen and Peter

our malleability takes place at different rates during our various growth periods as individuals¹⁷⁸ and does not explain every developmental variation we undergo¹⁷⁹).

However, I want to take this further and posit that times, places, and contexts *contribute* to the various ways in which plasticity affects us, namely, our manifestations as diverse groups (the times, spaces, and contexts that we are in which “interact” with our biology and allow us to manifest somewhat differently, which happens in part due to our nature of being “plastic” to an extent which then contributes to our diverse manifestations based on the particularities of our time, space, and context)¹⁸⁰.

Because *environments* (as was alluded to above and mentioned in the definition of human nature) play an important role in our *biological* manifestations (and this happens because we are developmentally “plastic” to an extent), it is absurd to imagine the living (alive organisms) without a reciprocating or relational role, not only with other living beings but also with the non-living components of their ontogenic space as well (e.g., the environments surrounding them).

That is, beings (alive and non-living) within an ontogenic space are not only touching other beings and everything else within their space (continuous with them) and going through each other through their peripheries in that space (permeable with them), they are also affecting the character and manifestation of each other *to an extent* (they are still not affecting each other to the point that they all become the same thing or “lose” their essences; i.e., our “osmosis” is limited by our varying

Hammerstein, “Evolutionary Biology and the Strategic View of Ontogeny: Genetic Strategies Provide Robustness and Flexibility in the Life Course”, *Research in Human Development* 2, no. 1–2 (March 2005): 99, find the URL in the bibliography.

178 See footnote 173.

179 See footnote 173.

180 See footnotes 151 and 164.

natures, its *particularities*, and contexts, for no two humans or members of a species are exactly the same¹⁸¹).

In short, *beings* are influencing each other because they are continuous, permeable, and “plastic”, but they are *not* influencing each other to the point that they lose what makes them the various beings that they are (i.e., they do not lose their “essences”). In other words, “beings” within an ontogenic space influence each other (through their peripheries) but do not *melt* into one another.

This is relevant to the queer predicament, as we start thinking about ideas such as sex and gender, and their “claimed” “fluidity” (as in something that “flows freely”¹⁸² and does not hold a particular shape, such as water, and as such, we can easily “alter” or change) and “performativity” (as in something we “perform” or act out as opposed to something descriptive of who and/or what we are). The assumptions in some liberal secular and academic spaces have been that the binaries of sex and gender (which have historically marginalized “women” and “Queer” folks) are entirely “socially constructed”. However, because sex and gender are believed (by many in those spaces) to be “malleable” (i.e., fluid and performative), then we can “fix” the problem by dismantling all the historically held heteronormative assumptions and categories to create more equitable ones (or none at all). The question for them becomes, why not deconstruct these historically marginalizing social constructs just as we created or “constructed” them? This is also the conversation about what it is to be “Queer” in general and whether it

181 This is also true in the example of “identical twins”, for while they may share the exact genetic endowment, they cannot possibly share the same exact contexts.

182 See “Liquid, (n.)”, in *Lexico Dictionaries | English* (Oxford University Press), accessed August 28, 2021, find the URL in the bibliography.

is an inborn or acquired (i.e., socially constructed) phenomenon. I will come back to this conversation in Part 3.

On the Law of Ontogenic *Interdependence* as a Descriptor:

The fourth description of ontogeny is that ontogenic components are not only continuous, permeable, and plastic but are also *interdependent*. That is, beings (alive and non-living) within an ontogenic space are not only touching other beings within that space (continuous with them) and going through each other through their peripheries in that space (permeable with them) and affecting their manifestations (plastic because of them), but they are also in a complicated *interdependent* relationship with them so much so that it is almost impossible to say for certain what affects what, and to what extent (i.e., there are many variables that affect why something is the way it is).

Instead, we may say beings are interdependent of each other (they each depend on one other) and, as such, they are correlated (i.e., have a mutual relationship with each other). They are interdependent and correlated because they are mutually continuous, permeable, and affect one another.

This is relevant to the queer predicament when we start thinking about “causation” and “morality”, as in what causes the queer phenomenon and whether it is considered “good” or “bad”. Because things are continuous, permeable, plastic, and interdependent on everything around them (i.e., they become temporally and spatially contextual), attributing causations to various phenomena becomes difficult to almost impossible. Here, concepts such as *assemblages*¹⁸³ become relevant, where

183 “Assemblage’ is actually an awkward translation of the French term *agencement*. The original term in Deleuze and Guattari’s work is not the French word *assemblage*, but *agencement*, a term that means design, layout, organization, arrangement, and relations—the focus being not on content but

humans (who are often being taken for granted and viewed as “discrete”, fully independent entities) are deprivileged, and some agency¹⁸⁴ is taken away from them (because there are many variables contributing to what something is, so the human cannot be in full control).

In short, many factors contribute to the manifestation of one being or thing (as it contributes to other beings and things in return) to the point that it is not possible to view any being, phenomenon, or thing in isolation or draw out unambiguous absolute *cause and effect* relationships.

To go back to Professor Maestriepieri’s definition of human nature, we think within a paradigm of “probabilistic¹⁸⁵ correlations” as opposed to “cause and effect”. As such, all ontogenic components within ontogenic

on relations, relations of patterns... In *agencement*, as John Phillips explains, specific *connections with* other concepts is precisely what gives them their meaning. Concepts do not prescribe relations, nor do they exist prior to them; rather, relations of force, connection, resonance, and patterning give rise to concepts... The French and English definitions of assemblage, however, both refer to a collection of things, a combination of items and the fact of assembling... What does assemblage as a conceptual frame do, and what does their theoretical deployment as such do? For current purposes, assemblages are interesting because they deprivilege the human body as a discrete organic thing... Assemblages do not contain privileged bodies as human, nor as residing within a human animal/nonhuman animal binary. Along with a de-exceptionalizing of human bodies, multiple forms of matter can be bodies—bodies of water, cities, institutions, and so on. Matter is an actor...”; see Puar, “‘I Would Rather Be a Cyborg Than a Goddess’: Becoming Intersectional in Assemblage Theory”, 57.

184 “Whenever entities enter into causal relationships, they can be said to act on each other and interact with each other, bringing about changes in each other. In this very broad sense, it is possible to identify agents and agencies... Usually, though, the term ‘agency’ is used in a much narrower sense to denote the performance of intentional actions”; see Markus Schlosser, “Agency”, in *The Stanford Encyclopedia of Philosophy*, ed. Edward N. Zalta (Metaphysics Research Lab, Stanford University, 2019), find the URL in the bibliography. I am mainly interested in “agency” as in the capacity for individuals to think and act autonomously, and to what extent they can do so without outside influences or “structures” (as they are labeled in sociology), which include religion, sex, economic, and political institutions as structures; see Beverly J. Gibbs, “Structuration Theory”, in *Encyclopedia Britannica* (Encyclopaedia Britannica, Inc., August 21, 2017), find the URL in the bibliography.

185 “Probability is a subject that deals with uncertainty. In everyday terminology, probability can be thought of as a numerical measure of the likelihood that a particular event will occur”; see “Statistics”, in *Britannica Academic* (Encyclopaedia Britannica, Inc.), accessed November 12, 2019, find the URL in the bibliography. Of course, within a monotheistic framework like Sunni Islam, if that is understood as leaving things to *chance* without God’s Will, it is not an option. It becomes, or is, therefore, “probabilistic” because we simply do not understand it.

spaces are *correlated* to and/or with one another (to various degrees)¹⁸⁶. That is, we can think of it this way: they share a “core”¹⁸⁷ (broadly, the essence of their ontogenic space, the characteristics of the space and time which define them) and are “related” (i.e., they are all members of the ontogenic space or developmental habitat they are a part of at a certain point in time). In other words, all components of an ontogenic space are interdependent on one another and, as such, are *core-related*.

In terms of the queer predicament, this law of ontogenic interdependence becomes relevant when we speak about “essentialism” and “constructionism” among a few other conversations. Is it at all possible to isolate the complicated biological (thought of as essential) or social (thought of as constructed and unessential) components and relationships that contribute to the makings and manifestations of the queer phenomenon? I will come back to this in Part 3.

On the Law of Ontogenic *Variability* as a Descriptor

This leads me to the fifth and final law. Because our ontogenic components are continuous, permeable, malleable, and interdependent in

186 This also translates into phenomena being expressed in terms of “averages”, as opposed to involving by necessity everyone within a population (we say that individuals are not susceptible to plasticity the same way, for example). While, on average, a population may manifest a certain trait, not everyone in that population manifests that trait, and so on.

187 This is a different kind of “core” relationship, which I discussed earlier, that links each member to all other members of its own species regardless of which ontogenic space they happen to be in. To put this in perspective, this is the kind of relationship that could make it possible to understand why “Arab Americans” would be considered more “Americans” than “Arabs” in many ways, for example, or “Westerners” have a different way of being in comparison to non-“Westerners”, and so on (because of the core or “essence” they share as a group within their shared ontogenic space, which differs from other ontogenic spaces). This is almost a proportional relationship; the more the ontogenic space of “the Other” is different from one’s own, the more the variation manifests in comparison to the Other’s ontogenic “way of being”. For example, an American “way of being” is different from a European “way of being”, but an American way of being is more similar to a European way of being when compared to the ontogenic space or the developmental way of being Middle Eastern, Muslim, and/or Arab.

terms of time, space, and context, and because as various groups of people we have existed in various times, places, and contexts, then by necessity, our ontogenic expressions as groups (which are linked to our various times, places, and contexts) will show up differently (to an extent) in various times, places, and contexts.

For example, we may look different, speak different languages, manifest as belonging to various cultures, develop different cuisines, think and behave differently, and so on. I am especially interested in how this translates as law (i.e., “fact”) on both the level of what I refer to as the *intra*-ontogenic (the various ontogenic expressions within an *ecosystem* at a moment of time¹⁸⁸), as well as on the *inter*-ontogenic at the layer of the biosphere¹⁸⁹ at large at the moment in time.

That is, within an *ecosystem* (e.g., an American ecosystem, a “Western” ecosystem¹⁹⁰, a Sunni ecosystem, etc.), there are multiplicities of

188 For example, if we think of America as an ecosystem, we would be thinking about the various ways of being within this ecosystem. The negotiation between these various ways of being within this American ecosystem would be referred to as *intra*-ontogenic (e.g., the Democrats and the Republicans are examples of *intra*-ontogenic expressions of being American). However, this is also arbitrary. We could also think of the “West” as being an ecosystem, when compared to non-“Westerners”, in which the negotiation of the various ways of being “Western” (in America, Europe, etc.) are then viewed in the realm of “*intra*” as well (we could possibly get away with that “to an extent” because there is a shared “claimed” history in regards to the way of being “Western”, such as the development of their socioeconomic, political systems, understanding of “race”, understandings of the “orient”, claimed heritage to Greek philosophy, and so on). This would all depend on the context of our conversations, our definitions, and starting points.

189 The biosphere is “...a way of explaining the entire intertwined network of life on Earth...We can think of the biosphere as the habitat, or home, for all life on our planet, in all its forms, and with all its intricate biological and geological relationships”; see “What Is the Biosphere?”, Khan Academy, accessed November 22, 2019, find the URL in the bibliography. However, I intuit that the label “biosphere” is not reflective of reality (it limits our perceptions of what should be included within our habitats to only the living things, or the “bio” components (if that is what we mean by “bio” and “life”). Such is the case because “the sphere” is not just made up of the “bio” components, and because the bio is dependent on the non-bio and vice versa, a better label must also include the “non-bio” or the “non-living” as essential to it as well (for the living cannot be understood without the non-living).

190 As alluded to in footnote 187, e.g., we can think about how the “West”, as an ecosystem composed of more than one continent (such as Europe and America), is said to loosely have an

ontogenic expressions, i.e., ways of being (that have some commonalities with each other, some differences, but manage to *share* an overarching temporality, spatial location, and context)¹⁹¹.

On the biosphere level, just as there is a pluralism of ontogenic expressions within the various existing ecosystems, there is also a pluralism of ecosystems within the biosphere. Each of these ecosystems at the biosphere level will have various ontogenic expressions that are either similar or different in comparison to other ontogenic expressions and/or ecosystems of the biosphere (depending on their proximity to one another in terms of time, space, and context).

That is, at the biosphere level, there will be human ontogenic expressions within these ecosystems that are very (radically) different from each other (e.g., a way of being secularly “Western” and a way of being theocentrically Sunni Arab). That is the case because, while they have some commonalities with each other because of their shared human “core”, they do *not* claim a shared historical temporality, spatial location, and context (beyond perhaps the fact that they are members of the same species, living on Earth since the beginning of their time, etc.)¹⁹².

This is relevant to the queer predicament as we navigate what it means to be Queer as a politically charged topic between our variable ontogenic “kinds” at this *globalized* juncture. The question becomes

overarching history that influences its overall approach to life and living. But the “West” also has a variety of ontogenic expressions within it, for ways of being “American” is different from the ways of being “European”, and so on.

191 For example, there are multiple ways of being American within an American ecosystem, multiple ways of being “Western” within a “Western” ecosystem, and multiple ways of being Sunni within a Sunni ecosystem. What allows them to fall under one category is that they share an overall historical legacy, or more generally, they share an overarching time, space, and context.

192 At the level of “biosphere”, which includes all “ecosystems”, we discuss “ontogenic expressions” that could be radically different from each other because they do not have an overarching historical perspective—for example, a Western ontogenic expression, an Islamic Arab ontogenic expression, and so on.

how do we navigate queerness both *intra*-ontogenically (e.g., within an American space, as in how could American Queer folks achieve full equality within their own society, and within the various Islamic spaces, such as what it is to be Queer in Sunni Arab spaces and how it could be accommodated and celebrated within Sunni Arab spaces) and *inter*-ontogenically (e.g., on a global level, how do we navigate and negotiate Queer “rights” in spaces that are radically different and/or did not historically share time, place, and context, such as in the negotiation between a “Western” understanding of queerness and its counterpart in Sunni Arab spaces)?

On the Expression of Humans as Ontogenically Variable (i.e., Ontogenic Pluralism)

On the one hand, there is a real danger in saying that we are not the same *kind* of being. Historically, this has translated into all kinds of violence and dehumanization. On the other hand, to say that we are exactly the same (e.g., we all want to have the same way of being, conform to the same power structures, live the same way, etc.) is an equally misinformed notion. Such is the case (i.e., insisting on uniformity constitutes a misinformed notion), I insist, because the consequences of emphasizing universal uniformity have been violent and untrue to what it is to be human. Instead, we are a species of many kinds (i.e., we manifest a pluralism of ontogenic expressions; we are *ontogenically-pluralistic*).

Because ontogenic expressions are developmental (become or are ingrained as a part of us) and because that development takes into consideration the various times, spaces, and contexts, an ontogenic expression then expresses a way of being or existing in the world, one that is manifested differently in its particularities in response to varying and specific temporal, spatial, and contextual stimuli. That is,

ontogenic expressions are warranted by certain particular histories, habitats, and contexts (authorities, claims, beliefs, and understandings, among other things). An ontogenic environment, through which the various ontogenic expressions manifest, operates on body, mind, and soul and includes what warrants, what legitimatizes, as well as what animates. In other words, these various ontogenic expressions are the holders for what I have been referring to as the various systems of “meaning-making”.

An ontogenic expression is not just a way of having been (claims or associations over and with certain genealogies, habitats, and traditions) and a way of being (in the present, with all that is required for people and collectives to navigate themselves in relationship to others and the world) but also a way of becoming, transforming, and/or ending, if at all (paves the way forward for them). More importantly, the various ontogenic expressions have various priorities, ways of meaning-making, truth-seeking, relating to the world and each other, and so on.

To simplify, an ontogenic expression is a system of being and of perceiving the world that has claims over the past, present, and future, over times and spaces, and over the entirety of our contextual physical and nonphysical existences as we have come to understand them (in which the assemblage of body, mind, and soul is just one conceptualization).

I think it would be helpful to use a concept from statistics¹⁹³ known as the central tendency theorem to visualize various ontogenic expressions in various habitats in terms of a “normal”¹⁹⁴ distribution. That is,

193 “Statistics, the science of collecting, analyzing, presenting, and interpreting data”; see “Statistics”.

194 Normal in terms of quantity, as in the norm for *most* people, and not in terms of quality or moral judgment.

most people (their central tendency, where they tend to stand, as in whether they agree or disagree on things, as a reflection of their system of “meaning-making”, for example) within an ontogenic space would tend to be similar in terms of their shared history, space, and the way they develop contextually in the world; see Figure 10.

I invoke the central tendency theorem *not* to be used as a measure or measurement (especially not as a qualitative moralistic one), for it can be easily abused as humans have done so on countless occasions in the past within their various quests to legitimize their dominations over others (i.e., various human collectives have historically judged “the Others” who are different from them as less “human”). Rather, it may be used as a conceptual tool to allude to our legitimate, collective, and equally qualitative differences as an ontogenically-pluralistic species.

In terms of the queer predicament of Sunni Arab spaces, there exist two main ontogenic expressions (which can be viewed as two main “normal distributions” in terms of how they manifest in the lives of people, as in, there is a “normal” curve that reflects the way of being, or how most people are, and/or their system of “meaning-making” within these ontogenic expressions) that come into play at the onset of the twenty-first century (which is the topic of my next discussion). These two ways of being (i.e., ontogenic expressions) understand the world differently in their own contextual “normative” ways and, as such, approach it differently.

This is important because, at this age of unprecedented globalization (coupled with an inequitable distribution of power, which is the topic of my discussion in Part 2), such differences between our various ontogenic *kinds* (e.g., between the *more* dominant “secular” way of being “Western” and the *less* dominant “theocentric” way of being Sunni Arab) figure themselves into the “globalized” queer predicament of Sunni Arab

An Example of a “Normal” Distribution of an Ontogenic Expression

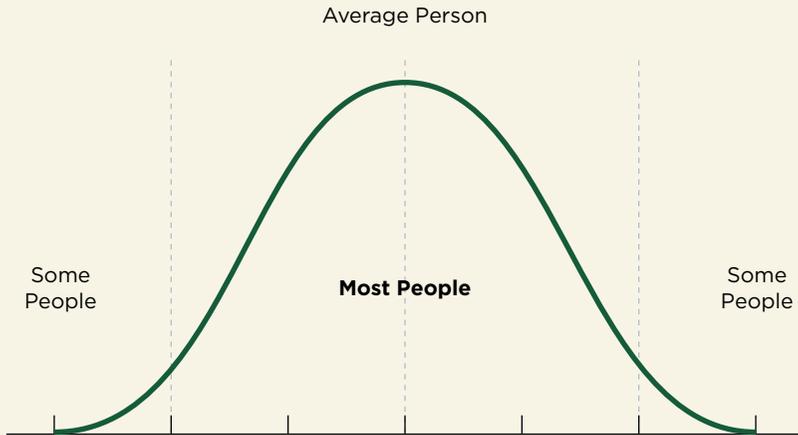


FIGURE 10: a “Normal” Distribution

spaces (as well as over various other topics) at this moment in time. In other words, these two ways of being currently find themselves in a vehement “polemical” disagreement over their conflicting perceptions of queerness, what it is to be Queer, and how to best approach and/or “deal” with the topic.

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A MESSAGE FROM THE AUTHOR

DEAR READER,

It is with great privilege that I can share this online publication with you. This installment is a part of my book, *Halal This Way: Towards a Viable Queering in Sunni Islam*.

My quest into this topic has been a lifelong journey, and being gay in a Palestinian, Arab, and Muslim context has defined my existence. I felt lost ever since I became cognizant of my queer-predicament. There was no clarity on what I was going through. The research to get the answers was not easy, and getting there was tremendously costly (both on personal and financial levels). What you read here is a product of that onerous journey.

To be truly honest with you, I needed to do this work on my terms and with my principles intact. I realized early on that the only way for me to do so is to start my own platform. This is why Halal This Way, LLC (the official publisher of this work) was conceived.

I am both humbled and proud of the work I have done on this topic so far. To be able to construct a viable path towards the theological and legal acceptance of queer matters in Sunni Islam at this moment in time is not an easy task. This work is especially complicated given the global political and socioeconomic context in which it operates. However, I am convinced that there is a viable way to do so, which I highlight in this publication (as a whole). As such, it is only a matter of time within Sunni Islam before many categories of Queer Muslims are accepted, accommodated, even celebrated.

With that said, it is very difficult for my work to continue, and for Halal This Way, LLC to succeed, without consistent funding. For me to continue this work full time (which I have been doing for the most part without financial support), and to take my organization off the ground, I need to raise funds. Among other things, this funding will help me continue the editing process, the typesetting of the book, cover the printing costs, and some living expenses. Most importantly, however, your generous contribution will help me build this platform and ensure its continuity.

I cannot thank you enough for your support and whatever one-time or monthly contribution you choose to make as an investment in me and in Halal This Way, LLC. It has been an honor to undertake this project and to share it with you. Please consider contributing to it if you are in a position to do so.

To contribute, please go to **www.halalthisway.org**. To connect with me personally, please email: **maher@halalthisway.org**.

Salam, thank you, and best regards!

Maher Alhaj