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META: Research in Hermeneutics, Phenomenology, and Practical Philosophy

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Research Articles

Referential Opacity and Hermeneutics in Plato's Dialogue Form

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Abstract

The paper argues that Plato's dialogue form creates a Quinean "opaque context" that segregates the assertions by Plato's characters in the dialogues from both Plato and the real world with the result that the dialogues require a hermeneutical interpretation. Sec. I argues that since the assertions in the dialogues are located inside an opaque context, the forms of life of the characters in the dialogues acquires primary philosophical importance for Plato. The second section argues that the thesis of Sec. I coheres with the claim in Plato's *Seventh Letter* that since philosophical truth is incommunicable by means of language it is of primary importance for philosophers to develop proper "schemes of living" (forms of life). Sec. III argues since the forms of life of the characters portrayed in the dialogues is of primary philosophical importance for Plato, and since hermeneutical methods are required to interpret emerging forms of life, Plato's dialogues are positively crafted to be read hermeneutically. Sec IV argues that Heidegger, who is famous for seeing Plato's views as antithetical to his own hermeneutical approach, is mistaken, and that Plato's real views are, in principle, more akin to Heidegger's views than he thinks.

Keywords: Plato, opaque contexts, hermeneutics, Wittgenstein, Heidegger, Dilthey, Lessing, *Seventh Letter*, life-world, limits of thought

It is impossible for what is written not to be disclosed. That is why I have never written about [my real views], and why there is not and will not be any written work of Plato's own.

Plato, *Letter II*, 314c-d

Plato... manifests the hermeneutic phenomenon in a specific way. (...) The literary form of the dialogue places language and concept back within the original movement of the conversation ... [which] protects the word from all dogmatic abuse.

Gadamer 1975, 332

There has been much debate about the significance of the fact that Plato wrote dialogues as opposed to straightforward essays (Griswold 1988). Some commentators take the significance of this to be that, like the Pythagoreans, Plato had one view for the public (his dialogues) and secret teachings reserved for his inner circle.¹ Nevertheless, some scholars have claimed to have discovered Plato's "real views" in the dialogues². But this is problematic. Not only is Plato himself not present in his dialogues, with his place, on some views, taken by his "mouthpiece", Socrates,³ but, worse, Socrates makes numerous inconsistent statements throughout the dialogues.⁴ Furthermore, many of Plato's dialogues are artistic masterpieces that employ a variety of literary techniques, irony, myth, allegory, narration of remembered events, the dramatic setting, etc., that make interpretation difficult at best (Randall 1970, xii-xiii).⁵ Some hold that these problems can be resolved by appeal to the fact that Plato's views developed over time. On this view, there may be difficulties discerning Plato's real views, but these are, in principle, no greater than those in understanding other philosophers, and they are resolved for Plato as they are for others—by discovering patterns of development in the texts. Plato's dialogue form may make matters a bit messier, but it does not fundamentally alter the situation. One may not find such patterns in the texts, but if one does, one can discern Plato's views.⁶

In opposition to this, the present paper argues that Plato's dialogue form possesses a logical feature that adds a new dimension to the debate over the significance of the fact that Plato wrote in dialogues. Specifically, every assertion made in the dialogues is presented to the reader, either explicitly or implicitly, in the form: "S says (or believes) that *p*." But such

constructions constitute an “opaque” context,” which means that it can be true that S says (or believes) that B loves C, and true that that C = D, but it is not true that S says (or believes) that B loves D.⁷ This places a specific kind of logical barrier between the views expressed in the dialogues and Plato himself, which means that the assertions made by Plato's characters offer *no logical grounds* for attributing any of his character's views to Plato himself. One may be justified in believing that the dialogues express Plato's views, perhaps because of what he expresses in his letters, remarks about Plato's views by his associates, facts about his life, etc.⁸ But the case of Plato's dialogues is qualitatively different from that of Berkeley's (1969) and Hume's (1955) dialogues because the latter also expressed their views in essays. Against this background, the paper argues that the dialogues must be read hermeneutically.

Sec. I argues that since all the views in Plato's dialogues occur inside an opaque context, the dialogues provide no *logical* basis for attributing those views to Plato. Sec. II argues that Plato's apparent view in *Letter VII* that philosophical truth is incommunicable explains why Plato chooses the opacity of the dialogue form.⁹ Sec. III argues that as the logical opacity of Plato's dialogues relegates brackets¹⁰ the real world truth or falsity of the assertions in the dialogues, it elevates the portrait of the ways of living and questioning of the characters in the dialogues to the fore—providing a fertile ground for a hermeneutical reading of the dialogues. Sec. IV argues that Heidegger's failure to appreciate the logical opacity of Plato's dialogues made him fail to show just how sympathetic Plato is to his own views.

I. The Referential Opacity of the Platonic Dialogues

Plato was following Socrates in rejecting the earlier idea of a philosopher as a wise man who hands down the truth to other mortals for their grateful acceptance. (...) It is important to realize that whatever is stated in his works is stated by one or another of his characters, not by Plato the author.

Cooper 1997, xix

Quotation is the referentially opaque context *par excellence*.

Quine 1966, 159

Plato's dialogues are based on a kind of *mimesis* (imitation) (Amis 1992, 346-359; Golden 1975, 118–131). But Plato imitates Socrates (and others) in a specific way—not by dressing up like him or by wearing disguises. Plato's form of *mimesis* is to write dialogues in which everything that is asserted is, either explicitly or implicitly, of the form "S says that p" or "S says 'p'" (where S is not himself but one of his characters). But "S says that p" has unique logical properties: it contains a referentially opaque context. Quine defines an opaque context as "one in which you cannot in general supplant a singular term by a *codesignative* term ... without disturbing the truth of the containing sentence." (Quine 1960, 151) Other examples of opaque contexts are "S believes that p", "Necessarily, a is F", etc.¹¹ Plato's sentence "Socrates says that p" constitutes an opaque context because it could be true that Socrates says that Homer is a great poet, and that Homer is the man from Smyrna, but Socrates does not say that Homer is the man from Smyrna.

Consider this point in connection with one of the perennial interpretative problems concerning Plato—whether he holds that the Forms are *separate* from perceptible particulars. On one common view, Plato's "middle dialogues" hold that Forms are separable from perceptible particulars, but that the later *Parmenides* undermines this (Prior 1985, 75-82, 89 and note 12).¹² Although many commentators take such facts about the differences between the "middle" and the "later" dialogues to show that Plato changed his views over time, there is no *logical* basis for this such an inference. If Socrates' states in the *Republic* that Forms are separate from perceptible things, while Socrates accepts Parmenides' view in the *Parmenides* (133a) that the Forms are *not* separable from perceptible particulars, Plato has *not* stated incompatible views. In the *Republic*, one gets, roughly, "Socrates says that

the Forms are separate from perceptible things.” In the *Parmenides*, one gets, roughly, “Socrates agrees with Parmenides that the Forms are not separate from perceptible particulars”. But these two sentences can be true together. There is not even an incompatibility between “Socrates says that p” and “Socrates says that not-p.”¹³ Propositions “p” and “not-p” contradict each other, but “Socrates says that p” and “Socrates says that not-p” can be true together. Politicians, among others, state inconsistent beliefs all the time. Since Socrates’ apparently inconsistent statements are made within an opaque context, the most that one can say is that Socrates (specifically, the Socrates of the dialogues, not necessarily the flesh and blood Socrates¹⁴) states different views in different contexts. One cannot even infer that Plato’s views have changed between the *Republic* and the *Parmenides*. Given that the dialogues are descriptions of conversations by others, it could be true that Plato says at t_1 that Socrates holds that the Forms are separate from perceptible particulars and that Plato says at t_2 that Socrates says that the Forms are not separable from perceptible particulars, but that Plato himself does not hold *any* of these views. What Socrates (or any of Plato’s characters) asserts in the dialogues has no *logical* bearing whatsoever (deductive or inductive) on what, if anything, Plato believes about the matter.

One might think that the case would be different if Plato had put himself in the dialogues. In fact, this makes no *logical* difference. Suppose, for example, that the legendary dialogue, *The Philosopher* (Cooper 1997, 235) were found in some Greek basement and that Plato himself is the main spokesperson. Suppose further that the character named “Plato” sums up his views in the dialogue with the speech: “It’s time to put an end to all this bickering. Some say I hold that the Forms are separable from perceptible things. Others say I hold that Forms are not separable from perceptible things. Here’s my answer. The Forms *are* separable from perceptible particulars. By the dog, I hope that settles it and we can finally move on!”

Unfortunately, even if this unlikely event were to come to pass, it would not settle the matter. All this would mean is that Plato had written a dialogue which contains or implies (something like) the sentence, “Plato says that the Forms are separate from perceptible things”. But this is altogether *logically different* from what would be the case if Plato had written a book titled, *The Theory of Forms*, in which, in *propria persona*, he *asserts* that the Forms are separable from perceptible particulars. In that latter case, Plato asserts a sentence about the Forms. In the former case, all he has done is write a sentence *which is not even about the Forms but which is only about what some character named “Plato” says about the Forms*—and that latter sentence can be true no matter what, *if anything*, the real Plato holds about the Forms. The opaque context created by the dramatic form of the dialogues (logically) changes everything. Thus, scholars who emphasize that it is crucial to take the dramatic form of Plato’s dialogues philosophically seriously are correct, but, in the present case, it is not the dramatic form *per se* that is the key. The crucial point is that Plato’s dramatic form produces an opaque context that separates the assertions in the dialogues from Plato’s own assertions in the real world by an impenetrable logical barrier. Scholars are correct to emphasize the philosophical importance of these aspects of Plato’s writing. But it is a separate *logical* point that *these myths, allegories, etc., also occur within an opaque context*. If one frames the point as one about dramatic form, the use of myth, etc., the issue may appear as a dispute over whether certain scholars take Plato’s dramatic artistry seriously, and, if challenged, they will reply that they do (Irwin 1988, 194). The key point is that Plato’s dialogical form creates an opaque context that puts a logical barrier between the views of Plato’s characters and Plato himself, irrespective of whether the characters’ views are expressed literally or mythically.

When Plato writes a dialogue, he creates an “opaque context” populated by his characters, and it is not possible logically to infer from assertions inside that opaque context to Plato’s (or to anyone else’s) real world views. Indeed, the

opaque context formed by the Platonic dialogues is analogous to the Platonic cosmos itself, i.e., it is a *limited (closed) self-sufficient whole* (Carone 2005, 55, 58-9, 155).¹⁵ The referential opacity of Plato's dialogues separates Plato's fictitious dialogic world from the real world, needing no more support from an external creator (Plato), than the Platonic cosmos itself needs support from the *Demiurge* once it is created. Since Plato separates the *fictitious* world of the dialogues from the real world by the logical barrier of an opaque context, the philosophical importance of Plato's dialogues *must lie within the dialogues themselves*, irrespective of whether Plato believed the views articulated therein.¹⁶ It is important that the present point is *not* the epistemological claim that one cannot *discover* Plato's real views by reading the dialogues. The present point is the logical point that, because the claims in the dialogues occur within an opaque context, one cannot derive Plato's views from the dialogues *by means of logical inference*.

One might object that the case is different for the "narrative" dialogues, like the *Republic*, and the "dramatic" dialogues, like the *Gorgias*. But this is incorrect. The *Gorgias* begins:

Callicles: "This is how they say you should take part in warfare and battle, Socrates".

The *Republic* begins with Socrates' remark,

Down I went to the Piraeus yesterday with Glaucon, son of Ariston...

In the former, the quotation marks create an explicit opaque context. But the quotation marks, though not explicitly present in the latter, are implicit. Although it was Plato who wrote the sentence, "Down I went..." he did not thereby assert the sentence, "Down I went..." any more than Shakespeare asserted "Men shut their doors against a setting sun" (*Timon of Athens*, Act 1, Scene 2). That sentence is asserted by Apemantus, one of Shakespeare's characters, not Shakespeare,

and though no quotation marks are present on the page, they are implicitly present. Since the sentences in the *Republic* are not asserted by Plato, the wording of the first line in narrative of the *Republic* is shorthand for, Socrates said: “Down I went...,” and that constitutes an opaque context. Thus, despite the lack of *explicit* quotation marks in the narrative dialogues, it could be true that Socrates said, “Down I went to the Piraeus yesterday...” where the Piraeus is, in fact, the place where Jimmy Hoffa is buried, but it is not true that Socrates said, “Down I went to the place where Jimmy Hoffa is buried...”

This brings one to a second objection. Is it really necessary to bring in the tedious logical device of opaque contexts to make this point? We already knew that one cannot derive “Plato believes that p” from “Socrates believes that p”. Since this point has been made by a multitude of scholars, it was already clear that one cannot derive Plato’s views from Socrates’ assertions in the dialogues. What is added by the point about opaque contexts?

Since an opaque context is one in which one may not substitute co-referential terms without possible change of truth values, this means that the *reference* of the terms in the opaque context is irrelevant to the truth of the whole proposition. Let S stand for the proposition: “Socrates believes that the Form of Beauty is separate from perceptible things” and let P stand for “The Form of Beauty is separate from perceptible things.” Note that S can be true whether there is a Form of Beauty or not and whether it is separable from perceptible things or not. That is, given the referential opacity of Plato’s dialogue form, whether the expression “the Form of Beauty” in S refers to something and whether P is true are both *irrelevant* to the truth of S. Derrida is famous for saying that “there is nothing outside the text” (Derrida 1976, 158). One need not go that far. But the effect of Plato’s putting all of his theses inside the opaque contexts of the dialogues makes reference of the key terms in the dialogues irrelevant to the truth of the (opaque) sentences Plato actually wrote. Further, as the references of these key terms drops out as irrelevant, so too the truth of those

assertions, such as P, become irrelevant to the truth of the sentences that Plato actually wrote. In plain terms, Plato's dialogues are not about other-worldly metaphysical entities referenced by Plato's characters—and this brings one to the key point of the present section: As the reference and truth of the theses in the dialogues is bracketed off by the referential opacity of the dialogues, *the life* of the characters on phenomenological display in the dialogues, becomes the primary philosophical datum of the dialogues.¹⁷

The situation would be quite different if Plato had, in *propria persona*, outside an opaque context, stated his views. The closest he comes to doing so are the thirteen alleged Platonic letters. Further, *Letter VII*, which has been *believed* by many scholars to be authentic (Cooper 1997, 1635), undermines the claim that Plato states his views in the dialogues.

II. *Letter VII* and the Incommunicability of Philosophical Truth

One statement ... I can make in regard to all who ... may write with a claim to knowledge of the subjects to which I devote myself ... Such writers can in my opinion have no knowledge of it. I certainly have composed no work in regard to it, nor shall I ever do so in future, for there is no way of putting it in words like other studies.

Plato, *Letter VII*, 341b-c

In *Letter II* (314c) where Plato states that he has not and will not put his own deepest philosophical views into words for fear they will be disclosed. This implies that it is possible to put these views into words—otherwise, why fear their disclosure? Plato there seems to resemble the Pythagoreans who reserved one doctrine for the inner circle and another doctrine for the outsiders.¹⁸ But he goes much farther in *Letter VII* where he implies that there is no reason to fear that “the subjects to which I devote myself” will be disclosed because they *cannot* be “put into words” in the way other subjects can¹⁹. Assuming that the subjects to which he “devotes” himself are his core philosophical views, it would seem to be his view that these core views *cannot* be communicated in words as other subjects can.

The view of *Letter VII* is, arguably, stronger than the analogous doctrine in the final proposition of Wittgenstein's *Tractatus*: "Whereof one cannot speak, thereof one must be silent" (Wittgenstein 1966, prop. 7). The German word for Wittgenstein's "must" is "*müssen*," which is a "modal" verb that means *permission* as opposed to logical necessity (Traupman 1981, 189). One says, "You must (*müssen*) not cheat on exams," not because it is logically impossible to do so but because it *is* possible—and wrong. When Wittgenstein says one must not speak of certain subjects, he means that though one *can* speak of them, one *should* not speak of them (McDonough 1989). By contrast, *Letter VII* states that even if Plato were to give his permission to convey his views to others, it is *not possible* to do so. Plato is certain no one can have knowledge of his views, not because he hasn't told anyone, but because it is impossible to convey such subjects by words to another human being in the way it *is* possible to communicate other subjects by means of language.

There are, however, several places in his letters where Plato endorses views akin to views in the dialogues, e.g., in *Letter VII* (326a-b), he endorses a view very similar to the view in the *Republic* (473c-d) that human beings will not be well-governed until philosophers become Kings or Kings become philosophers. So there are cases where one can take the assertions of some characters in the dialogues as representative of Plato's views—but one must be clear about the logic in such cases. One cannot derive "p" from "S says that p", and one cannot derive a proposition about Plato's views from the fact that some character in his dialogues says "p".²⁰ The fact that, in special cases, one can ascribe certain views that are internal to the opaque context of the dialogues to Plato gives no *general* license to make such ascriptions. One always requires, in such cases, some *additional statement of fact* taken from some transparent context (Plato's letters, reports by Aristotle, etc.) to do so justifiably.²¹

Second, if Plato accepts the doctrine from *Letter VII* that philosophical truth is incommunicable, then, since Plato does

communicate the doctrine concerning the philosopher King in *Letter VII*, one must conclude that this cannot be one of those subjects about which Plato “concerns” himself. One must distinguish between a primary and a secondary sense of philosophical truth, where the communicable doctrine of the philosopher King falls into the latter class. What sort of subjects fall into the former class? Although Plato does not specify those subjects in *Letter VII* one can fairly assume that these are a subset of those topics at which Plato's dialogues resort to myth and allegory (Roochnik 1990, 125-6). Perhaps the best example of these is “the greatest study” of all, the study of “the idea of the Good” (*Republic* 504e-505a). Socrates there indicates that he is unable to communicate the idea of the Good, but is “willing to tell what looks like a child [“offspring”] of the Good”, the Sun (506e-507a, 508b-c). Plato uses the physical Sun as the perceptible image of the imperceptible Form of the Good, but apart from the kind of communicability afforded by such *analogies*, Plato's “greatest study of all” is, apparently, incommunicable in the way other subjects are. If *Letter VII* is taken at its word, then the perceptible image of the Good, the image of the Sun, and the associated story about the sun's causal powers, is *not* a placeholder for a *bona fide* theory to be provided later.²² Rather, such images and metaphors are the best one can achieve in such cases.

In brief, Plato holds that there are some fairly concrete subjects, politics, education, etc., that *can* be “put into words like other subjects”, but his core philosophical subjects cannot be “put into words” in that way. It is these “greatest studies” with which Plato really “concerns” himself. Plato's fear is that there may be those who confuse the views expressed by various characters in his dialogues with his own views on these deepest subjects. How can he protect himself from such misrepresentation? How can he put some “lock” on his public writings to insure that such deluded commentators cannot claim to know his deepest views?

Wittgenstein shared Plato's fear,

If you have a room which you do not want certain people to get into, put a lock on it for which they do not have the key. But there is no point talking to them about it, unless of course you want them to admire it from the outside (Wittgenstein 1980, 7).

The fact that Plato puts his characteristic Platonic theses inside the opaque context of the dialogues constitutes just such a lock. In contrast with Plato, Socrates did speak, in *propria persona*, in the marketplace. Many who heard Socrates' public speeches thought they understood him. For this Socrates was rewarded with a death sentence. Even more troubling is that many of his disciples did *not* really understand him. This is the point of the exchange with Crito at the beginning of the *Crito* (43a-46c), the exchange with his friends at the end of the *Phaedo* (116d-117e), and many other exchanges in other dialogues. Socrates, speaking in *propria persona*, could not protect his words from misinterpretation. He could, of course, be evasive or obscure, but then he could not express his views in the way he wishes. So he spoke his mind freely and transparently. Unfortunately, once one's remarks are put out into the world, people can read the most astonishing fancies into them, and when some of Socrates' disciples, such as Alcibiades, turned bad, the blame was reflected back on Socrates (Taylor 1968, 84, 95-6, 100).

In contrast, by writing in dialogues, and never, except possibly in the thirteen letters to private individuals, in *propria persona*, Plato has placed the *logical lock* of an opaque context around his public works. Some people will not see the lock, or fail to grasp its significance, and will hastily ascribe the views in the dialogues to Plato, or misinterpret them in some other way. There is no way to prevent *that* kind of misuse of the dialogues. But the fact that he locks the views inside the opaque context of the dialogues means that whenever anyone does misinterpret or misuse them, it is always be possible to point out that Plato never said those things. Socrates²³, Meno, Phaedrus, etc., said them, and Plato is separated from their

assertions by an opaque context that, as a matter of logic, cannot be breached.

Wittgenstein's remark also suggests that one might leave a way to "unlock" his works and get inside. Is there a way to "unlock" Plato's dialogues and "get inside" them—and if so, what it would mean to understand the dialogues from the inside?

III. Philosophy as a Form of Life

[A]s soon as [those who want to become philosophers] see how many subjects there are to study, how much hard work they involve, and how indispensable it is for the project to adopt a well ordered scheme of living, they decide the plan is difficult if not impossible for them, and so they really do not prove capable of practicing philosophy.

Plato, *Letter VII*, 340d-341a

[It is the task of understanding to confer] an inside [to what is initially encountered as] a complex of external sensory signs.

Dilthey 1996, 236

Although the main aim of the present paper is to outline the consequences of the fact that all of the assertions in the Platonic dialogues occur within the opaque context, the paper is *not* skeptical about assigning philosophical significance to the dialogues.²⁴ The negative part of the paper only argues that one cannot justifiably attribute philosophical views to Plato *by virtue of logical inference* from what his characters state in the dialogues. So what is the positive philosophical significance of the dialogues? To sharpen this question, suppose one only has the dialogues, none of Plato's letters, no testimony by Aristotle or other personal acquaintances, and no solid facts about Plato's life. What would be the philosophical significance of the dialogues under these austere circumstances?

One of the themes in *Letter VII* is that achieving philosophical truth requires that the philosopher pursues a

certain rigorous “scheme of living.” At *Letter VII* (344a) Plato connects this with good “morals.” Plato’s emphasizes the need for certain “schemes of living and good morals. But why should a rigorous scheme of moral living be necessary for participating in the search for philosophical truth?

Part of the answer is provided in the *Republic* 518c-d, where, describing the prisoner’s escape from the cave, Socrates remarks,

[T]he present argument indicates that this power is in the soul of each, and that the instrument with which each learns—just as the eye is not able to turn toward the light from the dark without the whole body—must be turned around from that which is coming into being together with the whole soul until it is able to endure that which is and the brightest part of that which is. [W]e claim that this is the good, don’t we?

This passage portrays the achievement of philosophical truth, not as a purely intellectual task, but as a *journey* that essentially involves the *whole person* (which, in the *Republic*, requires each of reason, spirit, and desire).²⁵ Plato’s model of the philosopher is not that of pure Reason existing in sublime detachment from existence, but that of a *healthy wholly formed human being in the world*. This may seem incongruous for the philosopher who is often portrayed as one of the chief founders of the rationalist tradition²⁶ (Markie 2008).

The argument of the present paper suggests that it is not the *propositions* asserted in the dialogues, locked as they are inside an opaque context, that are the primary import of the dialogues. If one must live *the right sort of life* in order to acquire philosophical truth (*Letter VII*), *why would Plato disseminate philosophical propositions as if they were a commodity to be bought and sold in the marketplace?* As Alcibiades, unfortunately, demonstrated, one can be given all the right theses, but still choose the wrong sort of life (Taylor 1968, 100). Is it possible that, with Wittgenstein, Plato holds that philosophical propositions and arguments *per se* are not

really the most important ingredient in the pursuit of philosophical wisdom?

Since philosophical propositions can only bear genuine fruit if they fall into the right sort of “soil”, “a well ordered scheme of living”, would not the cultivation of such schemes of living would have to be a prior concern to Plato²⁷? In fact, these schemes of life are precisely what is portrayed in the dialogues—and these “schemes of living” are *not* locked away inside the opaque context of the dialogues. An opaque context provides a *very specific* restriction on what is contained therein. If Socrates says in the *Republic* that he went down to the Piraeus yesterday, where the *Piraeus* is in fact the location of Jimmy Hoffa's body, it is not true that Socrates said he went to the place where Jimmy Hoffa is buried. That is, the impossibility of substituting co-referential expressions without possible change of truth value has *nothing* to do with what is on display within the dialogues themselves.

The Platonic dialogues are, in the first instance, not assertions of philosophical theses but, rather, are portraits of various *ways of living* (*within which* the examination of philosophical theses, the “theory” of Forms, etc., play an important role). The philosophical theses in Plato's dialogues are *presented as embedded in emerging life*.²⁸ Some of these ways of living, such as Socrates', are portrayed as conducive to the pursuit of wisdom, and others, like Alcibiades', as incompatible with it. Thus, Plato's dialogues are, in the first instance, *a portrait of various pre-reflective ways of life in their pursuit of wisdom or in their fleeing from it* (Owensby 1994, 130; Heidegger 1962, § 75 and § 81). To understand Plato's dialogues, one must, therefore, following Dilthey, confer “an inside” to the complex portraits of life portrayed in such memorable images in Plato's dialogues.

One might put it up this way: Plato presents his dialogues to the world with a curious double-aspect analogous to the double-aspect figures in perceptual psychology that can be seen in two completely different ways (Jastrow 2007, 291). Consider the “duck-rabbit” picture discussed in Part II of

Wittgenstein's *Philosophical Investigations* (Wittgenstein 1973, § 194). Looking at it one way, it looks like a duck, in a different way, like a rabbit. Similarly, looking at Plato's dialogues in one way, they appear as a structure of propositions held together by some *philosophically inessential dramatic scaffolding*. But looking at those same dialogues in another way, they appear as *representations of ways of life* (within which certain philosophical propositions play an *existential* role). Those scholars who look at Plato's dialogues in the former way admit the dramatic structure is sometimes useful in helping to *discover* the *thesis* at issue, and though they can admire the dialogues as works of dramatic art, they hold that the dramatic context, is theoretically dispensable (Kraut 1988, 177-8). The "hermeneutical" commentators, by contrast, tend to see the dramatic context as essential to the *philosophical* significance of the dialogues²⁹. Hyland emphasizes that the Platonic dialogues portray human beings in the world discussing a kind of being that is not in the world and running up against the limits of their own language in doing so.³⁰ Whereas many traditional commentators see Plato's portrayal of the ways of living of his characters as a mere literary vehicle for the expression of philosophical propositions about timeless being, the "hermeneutical" commentators tend to see Plato's portrayal of the way his characters run up against the limits of their "being-in-the-world" in attempting to discuss timeless being as the central philosophical message of the dialogues.³¹ By his choice of the dialogue form, with its double-aspect, Plato presents his readers with an initial *choice*: Is the philosophical significance of the dialogues that they are a structure of propositions held together by some philosophically inessential dramatic scaffolding, or is their philosophical significance that they are a representation of certain philosophical and/or anti-philosophical "schemes of living". Most traditional scholars believe the answer is the former. The present author inclines to the latter. None of Plato's dialogues is named "The Form of the Good", "The Essence of Beauty", "Knowledge In Itself", etc. Most are named after individual flesh and blood human beings,

such as Meno, Phaedo, and Phaedrus, or types of human beings, such as statesmen or sophists. If the *title* of a work identifies its subject matter, then the primary subject matter of the *Phaedo* is Phaedo, and the way in which he is facing or fleeing the ultimate questions concerning the meaning and value of his life. The philosophical theses raised in the *Phaedo* are important, but they are subordinate, roughly, to the concerns of the *life-world* depicted in the dialogues, and this subordination is insured by the opaque context created by the dialogues. If this is correct, then to get “inside” the dialogues, as opposed to admiring them from outside, is not, in the first instance, to extract *theses* from them. It is, rather, to enter into *the life on display in the dialogues* as Plato's inherently limited characters find or flee the truth about their being in the world. According to *Letter VII*, without the right “schemes of living,” no amount of theoretical sophistication brings one an iota closer to authentic philosophical understanding and the good life.

This choice is the same one described so memorably by Lessing (1954-8, 505ff),

If God held all Truth in his right hand, and in his left, nothing but an ever-restless striving after Truth with the condition of forever erring, and told me to choose, I would reverently choose the left hand and say: ‘Father, give me this. Pure Truth is for Thee alone’.

Whereas most traditional scholars believe Plato chose the right hand, the present paper argues that by putting all the propositions which purport to express the “Pure Truth” inside an opaque context, Plato, anticipating Lessing, chooses the left hand—*because this is the only choice that self-consciously finite limited human beings can honestly make.*

One of Plato's main themes is that those with the genuinely philosophic natures, when they develop properly, become the best of persons, but when they fail to develop properly, they may become the worst of all,

I suppose that if the nature we set down for the philosopher chances on a suitable course of learning, it will necessarily grow and come to every sort of virtue; but if it isn't sown, planted, and nourished in what's suitable, it will come to the opposite; unless one of the God's chance to assist it (*Republic* 492a).

It would, therefore, be a fundamental mistake to try to produce philosophers before one has made the candidates into virtuous human beings. For the *same* reasons, it would be a mistake to disseminate treatises of philosophical propositions to just anybody (*Letter VII* 344d-e). When Socrates describes the "occupation" of the philosopher, he does not mention theoretical cognition, but, rather, Pythagorean "purification"³² of the soul: "[T]he occupation of the philosopher consists the freeing and separation of the soul from the body" (*Phaedo* 67c-e).

Since the representation of philosophical propositions and arguments, in the wrong hands, leads to the opposite of wisdom, Plato crafts his dialogues to address the *prior* task, the cultivation of the kind of persons who have the "moral" foundation to become "true philosophers" (*Phaedo* 67d-68b). That is why Socrates says that he is concerned, not with philosophy as a body of doctrine, but as a "practice" (*Apology* 29d; *Letter VII* 340d), and such *practices*, such "schemes of living," are what is, in the first instance, portrayed in Plato's dialogues. Plato writes dialogues as opposed to theoretical treatises because he wants to portray human beings engaged in the struggle for (or against) the kind of well-ordered scheme of "moral" living that can lead to "true philosophy." Plato's "message" in the dialogues is not embodied in doctrine, but in *a portrait of more and less authentic forms of life*, and that just raises the question: What is the proper way to interpret forms of life?

IV. The Hermeneutical Significance of Plato's Dialogue Form

If [Plato's] ideas are understood as superrealities, then Plato's philosophy is diametrically opposed to Heidegger's. (...) On the

other hand, (...) if [Plato] used the [I]deas to reveal the complexity, not of the supersensory realm, but of the world in which we live, then the path to Heidegger's philosophy would (...) be left open.

Wolz 1981, 302

The aspects of things that are most important for us are hidden because of their simplicity and familiarity. (One is unable to notice something because it is always before one's eyes.)

Wittgenstein 1973, § 129

It is not possible in this brief space to discuss all the different things hermeneutics have meant to different thinkers. However, several recurrent themes are that understanding texts involve *interpretation*, that interpretation involves seeing the text *as an expression of life*, and, of course, the hermeneutical circle (the idea, closely connected with the elusive nature of life, that understanding a part of a whole requires a reference to the whole, which, in turn, requires reference to the part again) (Ramberg and Gjesdal 2005). It has seemed to Heidegger that Plato's philosophy, with its hyper-rationalism and other-worldliness, is fundamentally opposed to his own hermeneutical approach. Heidegger even traces the beginnings of the "oblivion of Being" to Plato (Wolz 1981, 302). But Heidegger is hasty here.

Ironically, Heidegger, who rails against traditional readings of the great philosophers, reads Plato too traditionally (Wolz 1981, 302). Heidegger fails to see that Plato's dialogues present two very different faces, one, the face of a certain set of Platonic theoretical propositions, and the other, the face of various living beings struggling with those theoretical propositions in order to understand the limits of their own being-in-the-world. Heidegger manages somehow to look straight past what is right before his eyes, the artfully designed opaque context of the dialogues, as if it is transparent, to the theoretical propositions contained therein. He manages to do this because the significance of Plato's choice of the dialogue

form (that it creates an opaque context) is hidden by its simplicity and familiarity.³³

Since the theoretical propositions are locked inside an opaque context, the dialogues are, in the first instance, and portrait of the life of the characters in finding or fleeing their being-in-the-world. Since the proper way to understand the movement of life in its historical development is to see that movement in relation to the developing whole of which it is a part, the understanding of the life on display in Plato's dialogues requires seeing the actions, including linguistic actions, of Plato's characters in terms of the emerging dialogue as a whole (Cooper 1997, xx-xxi). But that requires returning to the contributions of the parts, and from there to the whole again, and so on³⁴ (Cooper 1997, xx-xxi), and that is the "hermeneutic circle". The present paper attempts to bring this into focus by applying the familiar notion of logical opacity to Plato's dialogues, and by so doing, show that Heidegger failed to recognize how close to Plato he really is (Wolz 1981, 301). It could be said that Plato hides his philosophical message in plain sight—in the various portraits on display in his dialogues of finite human beings struggling through their life-world to find or flee the meaning of their being. Unfortunately, as Heidegger (1962, § 5) knew well enough in other contexts, this is the best place to hide it: "*Dasein* is ontically 'closest' to itself and ontologically farthest."

NOTES

¹ Zeller (2010, 87) claims that Plato only disclosed his real views to his confidential pupils. Aristotle (*Metaphysics*, 987a30) states that Plato's secretive tendency may derive from his Pythagorean roots. Allen (1966, 7) notes that ancient sources say of the Pythagoreans that "their silence was of no ordinary kind". See also Findlay (1974) and Hyland (2008, 87). Vlastos (1981, 379-397) argues against some versions of the view that Plato had an esoteric doctrine. See also Rosemary Desjardins (1988, 113).

² Irwin (1996, 3) states that it is his aim to discover in the dialogues "views he really holds". Aristotle too refers to Plato's views, but Aristotle knew Plato personally and did not have to rely solely on the dialogues. Although Aristotle's credibility as an interpreter of Plato has often been attacked, it

cannot be denied that he was in a unique position to know Plato's views (Prior 1985, 172-3).

³Vlastos (1991, 117) holds that Plato uses Socrates as a mouthpiece to express his own views, and that if Socrates is absent, he uses someone else as mouthpiece. Luce (1992, 98) holds that the early dialogues are "thoroughly Socratic", the "Middle Dialogues" employ Socrates as a "mouthpiece" for Plato, and the later dialogues are "entirely Platonic." See also Allen (1966, 21), Brumbaugh (1981, 148), Penner (1992, 121-169), and Nails (2009, Sec. 2.2). For a critique of the "mouthpiece" view see Hyland (1995, 1ff).

⁴The apparent inconsistencies in the dialogues led Zeller to wonder whether Plato was really a philosopher (Bowen 1988, 52). See also White (1988, 255-6 and White's footnotes 13, 24, 37, 66, 68).

⁵Randall (1970, 6-7) notes that Diogenes Laertius reports that, even in antiquity, some hold that Plato's dialogues present positive doctrines and others vigorously deny it. Many contemporary scholars (Prior 1985, 9, 51, 78, etc.) refer confidently to "Plato's theory of Forms", while Hyland (1995, 170) denies that Plato "has anything like a 'theory' of Ideas". See also Roochink (1990, xii).

⁶Hyland (1995 3-4, 126, 169, 173-4, 195) points out the circularity in the view that a given view about Plato's development presupposes a view about the chronology of the dialogues—which, in turn, presupposes a view about Plato's development.

⁷Russell (1971, 225)

⁸Prior (1985, 172-8). See also Kraut 1992b, 20-4 for a balanced discussion of the utility of these sources.

⁹Although the authenticity of all of the Platonic letters has been challenged at one time or another, there are reasons for taking *Letter VII* seriously (Sayre 1988, 93-95). Cooper (1997, 1634-5) remarks that the *Letter VII* "is the least unlikely" to be inauthentic and that "if genuine", could be significant for determining his views. See also Levison, Morton, Winspear (1968, 307). Irwin (1992, 78) thinks all the letters are spurious. Although the present section begins with a quotation from *Letter II*, its authenticity is not crucial to the present argument since it merely affirms the manifest fact that Plato left no public statement of his own views.

¹⁰The allusion to Husserl's notion of bracketing is intentional. See Beyer 2013, Sec.'s 5-6.

¹¹At *Republic* (369a-b, 430c), Socrates is "looking for justice, and, in *some* usages, "S is looking for x," is an opaque construction" (Quine 1960, 154).

¹²For the record, Aristotle (*Metaphysics* 987a34-b1) claims that Plato never gave up the thesis of separation.

¹³Nor does it make any difference if one transforms Socrates' two assertions into "eternal sentences" ("Socrates says at t_1 that the Forms are," and "Socrates says at t_2 that the Forms are not...").

¹⁴It is important to be clear who the Socrates of the dialogues is. See Roochink (1988, 185) and Irwin (1988, 195 and note 51).

¹⁵ Bloom (1991, xvii-xviii) compares Plato's dialogues to a microcosm and states: "The Platonic Dialogues (...) are a cosmos in themselves".

¹⁶ See notes 15, 17, 23, 30, and 31 on the idea that the dialogues are self-sufficient.

¹⁷ Although it is doubtful that Merleau-Ponty (1964, 24) is alluding to the Quinean notion of logical opacity when he refers to language's "opaqueness, its obstinate reference to itself, its (...) folding back upon itself...", he makes a useful analogy between an opaque text and a phenomenology of textual interpretation. See Taylor (2011, 700-18)

¹⁸ See note 1 above.

¹⁹ Plato also discusses the idea that reality is incommunicable by language in the *Cratylus* (440a-d).

²⁰ One can no more do this than one can derive Shakespeare's views from Hamlet's assertions in *Hamlet*. This would still be true even if Hamlet had, in *Hamlet*, said, "My creator, Shakespeare, holds that philosophers must become Kings." One cannot *infer* from Hamlet's hypothetical remark to Shakespeare's views, but not because *Hamlet* is a work of art. There is no reason why works of art cannot state theses. It is because Hamlet's assertions are made inside an opaque context.

²¹ Some assertions by characters in the dialogues parallel Plato's remarks in his letters and as reported by Aristotle (Schleiermacher 1992, 12).

²² See note 5.

²³ By "Socrates" here is meant, not the real Socrates, but the character in Plato's dialogues. An analogous point holds for the Stranger, the anonymous Athenian in the *Laws*, etc. See note 32.

²⁴ See note 21.

²⁵ See the similar picture in the *Timaeus* (69e-72, 89e-90b) and *Laws* (863b). One can say "whole person" instead of "whole soul" because the lower parts of the soul are intimately tied to embodied life (*Timaeus* 90c).

²⁶ The opposing "mystical" tradition has also often traced its views to Plato (Hillar 2005).

²⁷ Socrates: "I really care to know which of (...) our young men here (...) are likely to distinguish themselves. That is what I am always on the lookout for..." (*Theaetetus* 143d).

²⁸ Etymologically, the "dramatic" is "full of action" and "striking display".

Online Etymological Dictionary: URL:

<http://www.etymonline.com/index.php?search=dramatic&searchmode=none>

²⁹ White (1988, 247) remarks that Gadamer holds that the dramatic form of the dialogues has an "organic connection" with their philosophical content³⁰. On this view, irony is not something that one encounters in the dialogues here and there. Plato uses the dialogue form to portray the inherent irony in finite beings in the world attempting to characterize a kind of absolute being inherently beyond their ability to know or adequately describe.

³¹ Kierkegaard (1992, 52) sees a paradox in the speculative philosophers' claim to describe the eternal truth and sees Socratic *sophrosyne* as an antidote to the paradox: "From an eternal and divine point of view, there is no

paradox here (...) But whether or not the speculator is the eternal one who sees the eternal (...) is something else again. If [the speculative philosopher presses his claims] he (...) has not even comprehended the Socratic and even less found time to comprehend from that standpoint something that goes beyond it”.

³² See note 1.

³³ Even *Das Man*, who reads, thinks, and judges, as “they” read, think, and judge (Heidegger 1962, § 27 and § 51), knows that Plato is an artist who writes in dialogues.

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“Nothingness or a God”: Nihilism, Enlightenment, and “Natural Reason” in Friedrich Heinrich Jacobi’s Works

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Abstract

Our paper analyzes one of the most important philosophical problems of the philosophies of the Enlightenment: the problem of the emergence and the justification of the autonomy of reason. Our study will reflect on the critique of the autonomous reason, a critique brought by the Enlightenment thinkers themselves. Kant is one example of criticizing, and moreover securing the status of reason in the Enlightenment. Friedrich Heinrich Jacobi, however, was not only an adversary of transcendental philosophy, but also a radical critic of the concept of ‘reason.’ In Jacobi’s works, reason faced a powerful critique of its own mechanisms of justification. Jacobi’s main thesis is that reason is threatened by the prospect of nihilism lurking from inside its main body of axioms. His critique against nihilism from the point of view of a believer is nothing new to the history of ideas, but here the direction of the critique changes against the vein of the Modern Age’s mainstream views with respect to the relation between reason and faith: reason’s own standards of truth are deemed as incapable of securing a safe place for reason against the prospect of an overwhelming nihilism. Thus, Jacobi emphasizes again and again that reason or cognition must find its standard of truth outside itself, or else it must face the scene of nothingness.

Keywords: nihilism, natural reason, God, rationalism, atheism, Enlightenment

The Enlightenment of Belief

In his article *Philosophe* from the *Encyclopédie, ou dictionnaire raisonné des sciences, des arts et des métiers*, Du Marsais stated that “reason determines the action of the philosopher” as “grace determines the action of the Christian.” (Du Marsais 2010).

The ground was set for a differentiation of the status of reason from that of faith. The “philosophic spirit” is described in its turn as “a spirit of observation and of precision, which relates all things to their true principles.” However, “it is not the philosophic spirit alone which the philosopher cultivates, he carries his attention and his concerns further.” It is reason that “compels him to know, to study, and to work to acquire sociable qualities,” so the philosopher’s life is a life dedicated to a social mission: the enlightenment (moral and intellectual) of fellow human beings. The philosopher is “an honorable man who wishes to please and to make himself useful.” He is not a social hermit or a social outcast. His correct¹ and honorable use of reason illustrates a moral quality, “humanity:” “Feelings of probity enter as much into the mechanical constitution of the philosopher as the enlightenment of the mind.” In contrast to “fanatics” and “superstitious” people, the philosopher’s attitude towards reason will thoroughly influence his life and conduct, as well as the life and conduct of others:

“The more reason you find in a man, the more probity you will find in him. In contrast, where fanaticism and superstition reign, there reign the passions and anger. The temperament of the philosopher is to act according to the spirit of order or by reason; as he loves society deeply, it is more important to him than to the rest of men to make sure that all of his actions produce only effects that conform to the idea of the honorable man.” (Du Marsais 2010)

The article “Raison” from the same *Encyclopédie* has been published in 1765, the same year as the year of the publication of the “Philosophe”. Its author is unknown. The article proposes four basic meanings which can be granted to the notion of “reason:” reason as faculty, a “natural faculty with which God endowed men to know truth, whatever light it follows, and to whatever class of subjects it applies”; reason as “the same faculty considered, not absolutely, but only inasmuch as it functions in accordance with certain notions, which we bring with us at birth, and that are common to all men of the world” reason as “that very natural light by which the faculty that we refer to by this name is guided ... one ordinarily understands the term when one is speaking of a proof, or of an objection taken from reason, and which one wants to distinguish in this way from proofs and objections grounded in divine or human

authority (*qu'on veut distinguer par - là des preuves & des objections prises de l'autorité divine ou humaine*);" and, finally, reason as "the sequence of truths that the human mind can attain naturally, without being aided by the light of faith" ("Reason" 2010). There are two main types of truths: "*eternal truths (vérités éternelles)*, which are absolutely necessary, to the point that the opposite would imply contradiction ... truths of which the necessity is logical, metaphysical, or geometric ..." and "*positive truths (positives)* ... the laws that it pleased God to give to nature, or because they depend on nature." ("Reason" 2010)

The article states that the "eternal truths" cannot be contested by faith,² the "eternal" truths being "absolutely necessary," and independent of any faith, opinion or belief. These are marked as "self-evident propositions." This being the case, the author of the article is very keen in clearly distinguishing reason from faith: "it is now necessary to establish the precise boundaries that lie between faith and reason (*il faut maintenant marquer les bornes précises qui se trouvent entre la foi & la raison*)."

First, reason is impervious to "divine revelation" if "it contradicts what is known to us, either by immediate intuition, as in the case of self-evident propositions, or by obvious deductions of reason, as in demonstrations." Reason is therefore the "true competent judge in every thing of which we have a clear and distinct idea," since revelation cannot nullify the decrees of *natural reason*, although it can confirm these eternal truths, by agreeing with the "self-evident propositions." Thus, reason can always defy the absurdities of faith, i.e. when propositions of faith are in contradiction with the eternal truths of reason: "Wherever we have a clear and evident judgment of reason, we cannot be forced to renounce it to embrace the contrary opinion under the pretext that it is a matter of faith. The reason for this is that we are men before we are Christians."

Second, revelation can be of assistance in those cases where our natural reason is *beyond its jurisdiction*: "reason not being able to rise above probability, faith guides the mind where reason falls short." If reason is uncertain of a truth *when*

it is not self-evident, and the mind only speculates in probable conjectures, the mind “is forced to give its assent to an account that it knows to come from he who can neither deceive nor be deceived.” Therefore, “when the principles of reason do not make us see plainly that a proposition is true or false, manifest revelation can resolve the mind, standing as *another principle of truth* (my emphasis). In this case, a proposition supported by revelation becomes a matter of faith, and is above reason.”³ Thus, this explains the fact that *faith* may be able to guide the reason, where reason itself falls short.

The author of the article “Reason” stresses the importance of determining the exact place and jurisdiction of reason over faith. Against the alleged interest of several Enlightenment writers to limit the significance of faith to reason as such or really exclude faith from the affairs of human reason altogether, leaving reason alone – with its obvious limitations – to deal with metaphysical truths, this author, through his work of defining reason, which, supposedly, reflected the general view of the authors of the *Encyclopédie*, casts a new light on the Enlightenment’s general views on faith, and, obviously, on the limitations that reason must first set upon its own dealings with metaphysical and non-metaphysical truths. The mind is “uncertain of the truth of what is not self-evident to it;” therefore, on some occasions, on the path of its continuous and strenuous search for a certain amount of evidence, the mind seeks support from faith. The author of the article goes even further:

“This far extends the influence of faith, without doing violence to reason, which is neither harmed nor harried, but aided and perfected by new lights emanating from the eternal source of all knowledge. Everything that is based on the jurisdiction of revelation must prevail upon our opinions, on our prejudices and on our interests, and has the right to demand of the mind its perfect assent. But such submission of our reason to faith may not reverse the limits of human knowledge, and does not shake the foundations of reason. Instead it leaves us the liberty to employ our faculties for the purposes for which they were given.” (“Reason” 2010)

To take Kant, for example, he understood that determining the precise middle ground between faith and reason (generally understood) meant not only that man’s reason should be finally

freed from the absurd dictates of blind faith – a state of obscurity seen by Kant as a self-imposed state of nonage⁴ – a dogmatism spawned by religious dogmas, individual or collective superstitions etc., but also that reason should free itself from its *own* shortcomings in relation to belief (Kant 2004, 150). Therefore, through his *Criticism*⁵, Kant thought he had found a way not only out of the dogmatism of "belief" (blind, unquestioned faith), but also out of the dogmatisms that were incumbent to the realm of reason itself, such as the "dogmatism of metaphysics." This particular 'dogmatism' of 'metaphysics' is in itself a source of "unbelief," a sort of dogmatism that ultimately leads, according to Kant, to skepticism. Another dogmatism of "unbelief" was, obviously, *atheism*, alongside *materialism* or *fatalism*:

"The *Critique* ... previously instructed us about our inevitable ignorance with respect to things in themselves, and ... restricted everything that we can *cognize* theoretically to mere appearances. (...) Now only through **critique** can *materialism*, *fatalism*, *atheism*, freethinking *unbelief*, *fanaticism*, and *superstition* (which can become universally harmful), and lastly *idealism* and *skepticism* (which are more dangerous for the schools, and can scarcely pass over into the public) be cut off at the very root. (...) The *Critique* is not opposed to the *dogmatic procedure* of reason in its pure cognition, as science (for science must always be dogmatic, i.e., it must always be rigorously proven from secure principles *a priori*), but to *dogmatism*, i.e., to the pretension of making progress in pure cognition from concepts (philosophical cognition) using only principles such as reason has long made use of, without inquiring into the manner and the right by which reason has arrived at those principles. *Dogmatism* therefore is the dogmatic procedure of pure reason, *without a preceding critique of reason's own ability*. Consequently, this opposition should not, under the self-assumed name of popularity, speak in favor of babbling superficiality, nor indeed of skepticism, which makes short work of metaphysics; on the contrary, the *Critique* is the necessary preliminary preparation for the advancement of a well-founded metaphysics as science, which necessarily must be worked out dogmatically and, in accordance with the strictest requirements, systematically, and so scholastically (not popularly), for this requirement on it is irremissible, since it obligates itself to carry out its business wholly *a priori*, hence to the complete satisfaction of speculative reason (...)" (Kant 2004, 150-153)

Regarding the realm of practical reason, Kant agrees that *freedom* (a postulate of practical reason), no less than *God*,

cannot be *cognized* theoretically, but only *thought* of as *transcendent* “principles” that “profess to pass beyond” the limits of experience, as opposed to *immanent principles*, “whose application is confined entirely within the limits of possible experience” (Kant 1965, A 296/B 352).⁶ Later, in his *Critique of Judgment*, Kant will distinguish the aesthetic from the rational ideas, the latter being referred to as according to an objective principle which is “incapable of ever furnishing a cognition of the object” (cf. Caygill 1995). In the *Preface* to the Second Edition of the *Critique of Pure Reason*, Kant agrees with limiting knowledge to the objects of possible experience and with the establishing of the “ideas” as objects of (rational) faith (Pomerleau 2012). He will therefore search – this is part of the nature of his critical inquiry into metaphysics – for the transcendental conditions of our capacity to speculate metaphysically, which he will find in the *a priori* ideas of pure reason (soul, universe, God). He will contend that some ideas serve a “regulative” function, and not a “constitutive” one (Kant 1965, A 180/B 222), in the sense that they do serve “the heuristic purpose of regulating our thought and action,” although they cannot constitute knowledge. *God*, *freedom*, and *immortality* are considered regulative ideas that function as “postulates of practical reason”, since “it is reasonable for us to postulate them as matters of rational faith.” (Kant 1965, A 3/B 7) To “postulate” these ideas means to believe in them, since they are enormously significant to our values and to our commitment to these values. Although none of these ideas are objects of any knowledge, they yield to a justifiable, subjective, yet rational belief – faith in God – which appears as a middle ground between objective knowledge and purely subjective, arbitrary opinion. (Kant 1965, A 822/B 850) This is part of what has been usually known as the “moral argument” of Kant’s *Critique of Practical Reason*. The argument contends that it is morally justified, or “morally necessary,” to follow Kant’s words, to see ideas, such as *God* or *immortality*, as arguments or hypotheses for a “rational faith.” God is a “regulative idea that can be shown to be a matter of rational belief.” Thus, the famous passage from the preface to the second edition of Kant’s *Critique of Pure Reason*, where he states that he had to “make

room for belief" in his criticism of knowledge appears as a justification of the role that "rational faith" had in Kant's endeavor to ascertain a justifiable place to faith in his criticism of traditional metaphysics:

"But since, for morals, I do not need anything more than that freedom merely does not contradict itself, and hence that it indeed at least permits of being thought without there being need for further insight into it, and that it therefore does not in any way obstruct the mechanism of nature regarding the very same action (taken in another respect), then, the doctrine of morality retains its place and the doctrine of nature keeps its as well, something that would not have taken place if the *Critique* had not previously instructed us about our inevitable ignorance with respect to things in themselves, and had not restricted everything that we can *cognize* theoretically to mere appearances. This same exposition of the positive benefit of the critical principles of pure reason can be produced with respect to the concept of *God* and the *simple nature* of our *soul*, which, however, I pass over for brevity's sake. I can therefore not so much as even *assume God, freedom, and immortality* on behalf of the necessary, practical use of my reason, if I do not at the same time *deprive* speculative reason of its pretension to transcendent insights, since, in order to achieve such insights, it must make use of principles which, because they in fact extend only to objects of possible experience, always change their object into appearance if they are indeed applied to something that cannot be an object of experience, and which therefore pronounce all *practical* expansion of pure reason to be impossible. I therefore had to cast out knowledge in order to make room for belief (my emphasis); the dogmatism of metaphysics, i.e., *the preconception that it makes progress without a critique of pure reason, is the true source of all the unbelief (always extremely dogmatic) which conflicts with morality.*(my emphasis)." (Kant 2004, 150)

Kant's main attempt at securing a certain role for "faith" in his rational reconstruction of metaphysics is not an isolated move. He is really following the trend of the Enlightenment, which saw *faith* as capable of establishing a *standard of truth* in those cases that natural reason could not reach beyond its jurisdiction. Kant succeeded in keeping a balance between faith and knowledge by recognizing the role of *faith* in supporting the standards of reason or, better yet, in providing justifiable arguments of faith with respect to things which were considered uncognizable, beyond any possible experience: God, immortality, freedom, the postulates of practical reason.

Deism

The Enlightenment thinking in general succeeded in keeping a balance between faith and knowledge, by limiting the claims of reason and by transforming the character of faith – by integrating faith into a system of justifiable beliefs – of beliefs that function as standards for the advancement of knowledge, appealing to standards of truth which are beyond the limits of discursive thinking. Faith made an appeal to the source of all knowledge – which was God – without, at the same time, doing violence to reason and to the Enlightenment’s demands for a concept of “reason”.

However, the relation between faith and knowledge did not developed so harmoniously throughout the entire Age of the Enlightenment. Some of the authors of the *Encyclopédie* were facing charges of *atheism*, such as Diderot, a guest of the *salons* of the famous 18th century Baron D’Holbach. Bayle and Voltaire also had to respond to charges of atheism. However, among French intellectuals, only d’Holbach and later Naigeon practiced a militant atheism, based on a purely materialistic explanation of the world.⁷ During his visit to France, Hume had also been a guest of the atheists’ *salons*. He was actually a Deist, reluctant to Christian dogmas, influenced by Hobbes, Locke, Shaftesbury, Pope, and Bolingbroke. Atheism is considered to have appeared as a doctrine in the 18th century as an effect of the emergence of religious toleration. Nevertheless, militant atheism professed in the *salons* was still rejected by the intellectual majority.

The fate of atheism in the 18th century was complicated by the emergence of Deism among the intellectuals of the Enlightenment. The authors of the *Encyclopédie* were also Deists. Deism was a philosophical form of understanding religious truths, which supported the idea of a Deity that should be fully explainable by reason and not by revelation or dogma. However, the article “Raison” of the *Encyclopédie* spoke clearly about revelation and about revealed truth as a support for the truths of reason.

Generally, the Deists were tolerant and non-atheists. Their doctrine, though, left a deep mark upon the

Enlightenment philosophies. They emphasized the necessity of understanding faith as a sustainable argument of belief – from here emerged the idea of a “rational faith” or rational belief in a God that did not resemble much to the God of the Christian tradition, but rather to a God imagined by philosophers. In Diderot’s own words: “I believe in God, although I live very happily with atheists.” The transformation inside the concept of “faith” itself came from the Enlightenment thinkers’ original belief in the sanctity of man and the inviolability of human freedom:

Mais il faut être bien peu philosophe soi-même, pour ne pas sentir que le plus beau privilège de notre raison consiste à ne rien croire par l'impulsion d'un instinct aveugle & mécanique, & que c'est deshonorer la raison, que de la mettre dans des entraves ainsi que le faisoient les Chaldéens. L'homme est né pour penser de lui-même.⁸

The article *Athéisme* from the *Encyclopédie*, authored by Formey (Formey 2012), described atheism as “the opinion of those who deny the existence of a God in the world.” Thus, the simple ignorance of God is not really *atheism*. But “to be charged with the odious title of *atheism* one must have the notion of God and reject it:”

[*Athéisme*] c'est l'opinion de ceux qui nient l'existence d'un Dieu auteur du monde. Ainsi la simple ignorance de Dieu ne ferait pas l'*athéisme*. Pour être chargé du titre odieux d'*athéisme*, il faut avoir la notion de Dieu, & la rejeter. L'état de doute n'est pas non plus l'*athéisme* formel: mais il s'en approche ou s'en éloigne, à proportion du nombre des doutes, ou de la manière de les envisager. On n'est donc fondé à traiter d'*athées* que ceux qui déclarent ouvertement qu'ils ont pris parti sur le dogme de l'existence de Dieu, & qu'ils soutiennent la négative. Cette remarque est très importante, parce que quantité de grands hommes, tant anciens que modernes, ont fort légèrement été taxés d'*athéisme*, soit pour avoir attaqué les faux dieux, soit pour avoir rejeté certains arguments faibles, qui ne concluent point pour l'existence du vrai Dieu. (...) L'*athéisme* ne se borne pas à défigurer l'idée de Dieu, mais il la détruit entièrement. (Formey 2012)

*Aut Deus, aut nihil*⁹

Facing the dire consequences of dealing with a religious faith that was strongly directed towards the imperatives of reason, some Enlightenment thinkers began to have second thoughts about reason's *ability* to master the issues which itself was trying to address: for example, the issues of *God, immortality of the soul, human freedom, etc.* Their concerns materialized into expressing doubts about the real capacity of reason to ascertain not only the truths of religion, but also its own (immutable) truths. Soon, these doubts cohered into a full-blown critique of human reason, yet not in a Kantian manner. These critiques appeared on the occasion of the "pantheism controversy" in Germany, sparked by a dialogue between the philosopher Friedrich Heinrich Jacobi and the dramatist Gotthold Ephraim Lessing. Lessing, an upholder of Spinozism, was criticized by Jacobi as supporter of a dogmatic *atheist* philosophy – the philosophy of Spinoza. The controversy emerged roughly around 1785, on the occasion of the publication of Jacobi's *Letters on the Teachings of Spinoza*.¹⁰ The second edition appeared in 1789, and readdressed Jacobi's critique on Spinoza's substance, which was deemed as *materialistic* substance. Jacobi also saw Spinoza's materialism as a consequence of Enlightenment's treatment of reason; therefore, pantheism was strictly equated with materialism and, finally, as a form of *atheism*. Actually, Jacobi's critique went even further. He complained about reason's inability to master its own powers and about the rationalistic project altogether: reason is not only incapable of mastering its own powers, but everything touched by it turns into *atheism* and, consequently, *nihilism*. A treatment of reason as 'dogmatic' as the Enlightenment's reason was bound to fail, precisely because *this* reason rejected faith altogether. Moses Mendelssohn was Jacobi's most important critic: he ridiculed him for confusing Spinozism with atheism and for lack of philosophical *savoir-faire*.¹¹ The first (1785) edition summed up Jacobi's critique quite clearly, in a few theses:

"Spinozism is atheism. (...) The Leibnizian-Wolffian philosophy is no less fatalistic than the Spinozist philosophy and leads the persistent

researcher back to the principles of the latter. (...) Every avenue of demonstration ends up in fatalism. We can only demonstrate similarities. Every proof presupposes something already proven, the principle of which is Revelation. Faith is the element of all human cognition and activity." (Jacobi 1994, 233-234)

This is, roughly, the sum of Jacobi's entire work in a few sentences. A later work, entitled *David Hume Über den Glauben, oder Idealismus und Realismus* (Jacobi 1994, 252-339) was another reply of Jacobi to Mendelssohn's critique of the Jacobian *Glaube* (belief). In the 1815 edition of *David Hume on Faith or Idealism and Realism. A Dialogue. Preface and also Introduction to the Author's Collected Philosophical Works*, Jacobi will state the same thing: "all human cognition derives from revelation and faith (my emphasis)." (Jacobi 1994, 538)

Basically, Jacobi's argument against rationalistic philosophy in general consisted on four main accusations against rationalism: any consistent version of the rationalist view of reason as a ground for explanation will lead to a dogmatic system, which can be characterized as: 1) monistic, 2) atheistic, 3) fatalistic, and 4) nihilistic.¹² I will refer here mainly to nihilism.

Jacobi will criticize the main argument of rationalistic philosophy with reference to a First Cause, the knowledge of which is based on the Principle of Sufficient Reason, guided by the idea of "infinite intelligibility" of a finite series ending in a *causa sui* (Franks 2000, 97). The First Cause, Jacobi states, cannot be proven of as transcending the "totality of series of conditions,"¹³ since reason itself is only a formula of *conditioned conditioning*, working within a series of conditioned conditions: "to want to discover the conditions of the unconditional; to want to *invent* a possibility for what is absolutely necessary, and to construct it in order to comprehend it, seems on the face of it an absurd undertaking." (Jacobi 1994, 376)

If rationalism tries to prove its hypothesis, the Principle of Sufficient Reason will require that finite realities should be part of an infinite substance (a monistic worldview). On the other hand, rationalism is atheistic, because reason in itself is atheistic: only belief in a transcendent reality is genuinely theistic (Franks 2000, 98). If finite conditions are dependent of an infinite monistic reality, then there really is no freedom for

human beings: freedom is seen here as a capacity to *generate*, to initiate finite series of conditions, which, according to rationalism itself, seems impossible. The infinite substance hypothesized by rationalism denies the existence of finite entities: furthermore, it denies its own existence as an entity. The clear consequence of this is that rationalism asserts that All is Nothing. The result is absurd (Franks 2000, 98).

Thus, atheism, along with its nihilism, is, according to Jacobi, “the indirect consequence of man’s attempt to understand nature for theoretical and practical purposes.” (Jacobi 1994, 361) This is a full-scale critique of the philosophical notion of reason seen both as theoretical-instrumental, and as practical-instrumental.¹⁴

Jacobi starts to develop another perspective with respect to cognition: “the principle of cognition is living being,” because cognition understood through and as “the faculty of abstraction and language,” really suggests the fact that “our philosophical understanding does not reach *beyond* its own creation,” so that “we understand perfectly what we thus create, to the extent that it *is* our creation. And whatever does not allow being created in this way, we do not understand.” (Jacobi 1994, 370) Ironically, the only thing which does not fall under the laws of the all-encompassing reason is the real world itself, that is, “the actual existence of a temporal world made up of individual finite things producing and destroying one another in succession,” that “can in *no way* be conceptualized, which is to say, it is not *naturally* explicable.” (Jacobi 1994, 373) However, the fate of reason is not utterly doomed. Jacobi suggests that there could be a way of redressing the role of reason, by returning to what he names as a “natural reason.” “Natural reason,” in Jacobi’s view, is reason’s capacity of seeing the world *as it is*, as a temporal world, beyond abstraction, without transforming “the natural into something supernatural.”

“But reason need not despair because of this incomprehensibility, for knowledge forces itself upon it, so to speak; namely, the knowledge that the condition of the possibility of the existence of a temporal world lies outside the region of its concepts, that is to say, outside that complex of conditioned beings which is nature. So when reason searches for that condition, it is searching for something extra-natural or supernatural within what is natural; or again, it is trying

to transform the natural into something supernatural." (Jacobi 1994, 373)

The basic argument against rationalism as nihilism – actually it was the first text where Jacobi used the exact term "nihilism" – appears in Jacobi's famous open letter to Fichte (*Jacobi an Fichte*, 1799)¹⁵ where Jacobi criticizes Fichte's rationalism and explicitly accuses him of "nihilism." Jacobi's reply attacked the essence of Fichte's philosophical thinking, his rationalism, precisely at a time when Fichte was under intense criticism from the part of the religious circles in Germany. Jacobi's accusation of atheism couldn't have come at a worse time for Fichte. He was in the middle of the so-called "Atheist dispute," which was generated by Fichte's 1798 essay *Über den Grund unsers Glaubens an eine göttliche Weltregierung*. Because of these accusations, Fichte was forced to resign from his academic position in Jena and to leave for Berlin.

Jacobi's main points of accusation relied on his earlier critique against Leibnizian rationalism and transcendental philosophy. He criticized especially the philosophical tendency to theorize upon the notion of God in the most rigorous manner:

"It would not be any reproach to Transcendental Philosophy that it does not know anything about God, for it is universally acknowledged that God cannot be known, but only believed in. A God who could be known would not be a God at all. But a merely artificial faith in Him is also impossible as faith; for in so far as it only wants to be artificial – i.e. simply scientific or purely rational – it abolishes natural faith and, with that, itself as faith as well: hence theism is abolished as a whole." (Jacobi 1994, 500)

Here, Jacobi clearly recognizes that faith is incompatible with reason and that between these two there cannot be any sort of compromise. Either reason abolished faith, or vice versa. Actually, here Jacobi is confronting us with a dilemma that has been troubling philosophical thinking for centuries. Is faith really incompatible with reason? Is there just one way of acknowledging God?

Jacobi defined his philosophy as a "non-philosophy," that had its essence in "non-knowledge." (Jacobi 1994, 500) He accused both materialism and idealism of supporting the same method of "attempting to explain everything from a self-determining matter alone or from a self-determining

intelligence ... their opposing courses do not take them apart at all, but rather bring them gradually nearer to each other until they finally touch.” (Jacobi 1994, 502) He accused both materialism, and idealism of philosophical monism which would eventually lead to fatalism. Against Fichte, he issues a warning: a philosophy understood only as a construct of pure reason is only an illusion, since “pure reason only takes hold of itself,” without saying anything about the external world. Moreover, a philosophy of pure reason would only turn real things into empty abstractions and futile illusions. A rationalistic philosophy would only transform the thing into pure *nothingness*: “For man knows only in that he comprehends, and he comprehends only in that, by changing the real thing into mere shape, he turns the shape into the thing and the thing into nothing.” At the core of rationalism lies a very treacherous and concealed *nihilism*. The reference to Fichte’s “I” is unmistakable:

“Since outside the mechanism of nature I encounter nothing but wonders, mysteries and signs; and I feel a terrible horror before the nothing, the absolutely indeterminate, the utterly void (these three are one: the Platonic infinite!), especially as the object of philosophy or aim of wisdom; yet, as I explore the mechanism of nature of the I as well as if the not-I, I attain only to the *nothing-in-itself*; and I am so assailed, so seized and carried away by it in my transcendental being (personally, so to speak), that, just in order to empty out the infinite, I cannot help wanting to fill it, as an infinite nothing, a pure-and-total-in-and-for-itself (were it not simply impossible!): since, I say, this is the way it is with me and the science of the true, or more precisely, the true science, I therefore do not see why I, as a matter of taste, should not be allowed to prefer my philosophy of non-knowledge to the philosophical knowledge of the nothing, at least in *fugam vacui*. I have nothing confronting me, after all, except nothingness; and even chimeras are a good match for that.” (Jacobi 1994, 519)

Only a “natural reason,” which man already possesses, Jacobi argues, would accept “to call a God who is *non-personal* a God *who is not*, a non-entity.” (Jacobi 1994, 520) Is God a figment of my imagination, then? Yes, but only to the non-believer of rationalistic philosophy:

“Hence do I claim: Man finds God because he can find himself only in God; and he is to himself unfathomable to him. ‘Necessarily,’ for

otherwise there would reside in man a supra-divine power, and God would have to be capable of being invented by man. God would then only be the thought of someone finite, something imaginary, and by no means the Highest Being who subsists in Himself alone, the free creator of all the other beings, the beginning and the end. This is not how it is, and for this reason man loses himself as soon as he resists finding himself in God as his creator, in a way inconceivable to his reason; as soon as he wants to ground himself in himself alone. Then everything gradually dissolves for him into his own nothingness. Man has this choice, however, and this alone: *Nothingness or a God* (emphasis mine). If he chooses nothingness, he makes himself unto a God, that is, he makes a phantom into God, for it is impossible, if there is no God, that man and all that surrounds him should be anything but a phantom. I repeat: God is, and is outside me, a living, self-subsisting being, or I am God. There is no third." (Jacobi 1994, 524)

Conclusion

Thus, Jacobi reiterates the dilemma: either God or nothingness. Facing a powerful critique of its own mechanisms of justification, Enlightenment's reason, at least with respect to the rationalistic worldview, is threatened by the prospect of nihilism lurking from inside its main body of axioms. Jacobi's critique against nihilism from the point of view of a believer is not something entirely new to philosophical thinking. However, the relentless criticism against *reason's* own standards of truth leaves no choice in front of the alleged overwhelming nihilism: reason or cognition must find its standard of truth outside itself, or else it must face the prospect of nothingness.¹⁶ Reason cannot be autonomous without being itself condemned to its own illusion of power. The Enlightenment's vision of an all-powerful, autonomous reason is thus shattered. If there is not a human cognition in the shape of a "non-philosophy" that could find its roots in revelation of faith or in "non-knowledge," then philosophical reason is doomed to dream its own dream of godlessness and self-deception.

NOTES

¹ “The world is full of intelligent people and very intelligent people, who always judge; they always guess, because to judge without a sense of when one has a proper reason to judge is to guess. They do not know the extent of the human mind; they believe that everything can be known: thus they are ashamed not to be able to pronounce judgement and imagine that intelligence consists in judging. The philosopher believes that it consists in judging well: he is more satisfied with himself when he has suspended the faculty of making a decision than he would be to have come to a decision before having a sense of the proper reason for a decision.” (Du Marsais 2010)

² “Now it is those last truths that faith would never oppose.” („Reason” 2010)

³ All of the above quotes appear in „Reason” 2010.

⁴ Cf. (Kant 2012): “Enlightenment is man’s emergence from his self-imposed nonage. Nonage is the inability to use one’s own understanding without another’s guidance. This nonage is self-imposed if its cause lies not in lack of understanding but in indecision and lack of courage to use one’s own mind without another’s guidance. *Dare to know!* (*Sapere aude.*) ‘Have the courage to use your own understanding,’ is therefore the motto of the enlightenment.”

⁵ The newest Romanian analysis of Kant’s critique of metaphysics can be found in (Bondor 2013, 119 ff.)

⁶ See article “Transcendent” in Caygill (1995).

⁷ Materialism was a constant preoccupation for many of the 18th and 19th century French intellectuals: Helvetius, La Mettrie, Condorcet, Cabanis, de Sade, Volney, Laplace, De Tracy, Benjamin Constant, Lamarck, Saint-Simon, Thurot, Stendhal, etc.

⁸ Diderot. 1976. “Chaldeans”. In *L’Encyclopédie II (Lettres B-C), Oeuvres complètes*, edités par John Lough et Jacques Proust. Volume 6: 331. Paris: Hermann.

⁹ The expression is a title of an English book against atheism published in 1659 by Vincent Hattecliffe: *Aut Deus aut nihil. God or nothing, or, a logical method comprised in twelve propositions, deducing from the actual being of what we evidently experience, the unavoidable necessity of a God, against the atheists of our age and nation*. It suggest the dilemma faced by the honest defender of religion against atheism who, confronted with atheist theses, is forced to reject atheism altogether, due to the common opinion that atheism draws attention to the perspective of nihilism concerning reality as such.

¹⁰ For references to this work and other major works of Jacobi, see (Jacobi 1994).

¹¹ See Mendelssohn's reply in Jacobi (1994, 350-358).

¹² See the sketching of Jacobi's critique in (Franks 2000).

¹³ (Franks 2000, 98): "(...) if the First Cause transcended the totality of series of conditions, temporally (by existing prior to creation) or modally (by being capable of existing without creation), either there would be some *prior* reason for creation (whether regarded as a temporal act or as an eternal actuality) and the First Cause would not be first, or the First Cause would be conditioned by nothingness, contravening the Principle. (...) First Cause can (therefore must) be the totality of the series of conditions, regarded as an infinite whole prior to its finite parts, or the *ens realissimum* of which all realities are limitations. Therefore, infinite intelligibility requires all finite realities to be modifications of one infinite substance: in short, the Principle of Sufficient Reason entails that reality be a monistic system, which philosophy should mirror."

¹⁴ See, for comparison, Heidegger's own critique of nihilistic reason in (Heidegger 1982).

¹⁵ The text appears as *Jacobi to Fichte* in (Jacobi 1994, 497-536).

¹⁶ "If this is not to happen – if the divine in man is not to be delusion, if truth and purified reason are to be godlessness instead, then the non-knowledge of an entirely different kind. It must be that place of truth which is inaccessible to science." (Jacobi 1994, 533)

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The critique of the constitution model of “apprehension - content of apprehension” in Husserl’s *On the Phenomenology of the Consciousness of Internal Time*

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Abstract

The aim of this article is to analyze the problems found by Husserl regarding the application of the constitution scheme of “apprehension-content of apprehension” as a model of understanding the deepest levels (tiefsten Stufe) of time constitution. Such analysis will deal with the first period, in which Husserl investigates in a systematic way time constitution, i.e. in texts from *Husserliana X* (1893-1917). Firstly, in texts from *Husserliana X*, Husserl applies the scheme of constitution apprehension-content of apprehension as a way to describe all temporal constitution. Secondly (from 1909 on) Husserl observes that the application of this interpretative scheme to describe the lowest levels (untersten Stufen) of temporal constitution leads to serious problems, such as an inevitable infinite regression and a fall into an understanding founded on “prejudices of the now”. To overcome such obstacles, Husserl tried to deepen his analysis of the lowest level of temporal constitution and found out that the absolute flow (and its own modes of consciousness, viz., primal impression, retention, protention) is the last level of all constitution of temporality.

Keywords: Husserl, apprehension, content, intentionality, constitution, retention, time, absolute flow.

Introduction

Husserl formulated the model of constitution apprehension-content of apprehension for the first time in the

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Logical Investigations (1900-1901). This model was primarily used to describe perceptive constitution, and then generalized as a model to all objective constitution. In every constitution of objects there is an intentional act, which directs itself to the data of sensations and apprehends such sensible contents through synthesis and interpretation, as the unit of multiple modes of profiles (its multiple sensible determinations, for instance, its color, its spatial shape, its smell, etc.)

This interpretative model, when applied to the act of perception, works very well, but a difficulty arises when one tries to apply this model to the categorical constitution, for in such cases the contents that serve as a basis to the act of apprehension are not actual sensible contents. The case of the categorical intentions shows the necessity of enlarging the model of constitution apprehension-content of apprehension. Dieter Lohmar characterizes this enlargement as “the conception of non-sensible representatives.” (Lohmar 2009, 4)

As a matter of fact, in the *Logical Investigations* (Sixth Investigation), categorical intuition also follows the general model of apprehension-content of apprehension, but in this case the apprehended content, i.e., interpreted, is not sensible, but the presentation (*Darstellung*) of a state of affairs (*Sachverhalten*). Such contents consist of representative contents (*Repräsentanten*) of a categorical object that is constituted through syntheses of coincidence (*Deckungssynthesen*) realized between categorical intentional acts and acts of perception.

Nevertheless, Husserl observes that the utilization of the scheme of apprehension-content of apprehension to describe the lowest levels of time constitution and of temporal objects leads one to admit serious problems. They are: 1) the understanding that the apprehended contents are bound to the “now moment”, which implies admitting that we don’t have an access to the past and to the future; 2) the inevitable infinite regress which one needs to accept when one understands that the deepest level of temporal constitution is characterized by acts of apprehension. Thus, to realize a phenomenological description of the deepest level of temporal constitution it is necessary not only to enlarge the scheme of apprehension-content of

apprehension, but also to completely abandon it¹. It is precisely in *On the Phenomenology of the Consciousness of Internal Time* (1893-1917)² that Husserl for the first time deals with the problems related to the constitution of temporality.

In this paper, I will firstly analyze what the model consists of constitution “apprehension-content of apprehension”. In a first period of his investigations concerning temporal constitution (up to 1909), Husserl uses this model to describe the constitutional operations of time. Secondly, I will analyze the necessity, diagnosed by Husserl, of overcoming this scheme to understand the deepest level of the constitution of all temporality. Then, I will discuss the solution presented by Husserl to overcome the problems arisen from his yet immature analysis of the constitution of time. This solution consists of the discovery of a new sphere of the temporal constitution, viz., the sphere of absolute flow (*absoluter Fluss*), understood as the deepest level of the constitution of time and of temporal objects.

1. The model of intentional constitution “apprehension-content apprehension” in the *Logical Investigations*.

In the *Logical Investigations* (1900-1901), Husserl formulates his own concept of intentionality, recovered from the concept formulated by Brentano. According to Brentano, intentionality consists “of the reference to a content”: “every mental phenomenon is characterized by what the mediaeval schoolmen called the intentional (or mental) inexistence of an object, and by what we, not without ambiguity, call the relation to a content, the direction to an object (by which a reality is not to be understood) or an immanent objectivity” (Brentano 1874, 115; Husserl 2001 b, 212).

Husserl does not use the concept of “psychic phenomena” to designate intentional acts (given that Husserl considers such concept to be contaminated by certain psychological assumptions), and also disagrees with Brentano who considers that the object towards which intentionality is directed to is an immanent object, that is, it is an object which pertains to consciousness. However, Husserl agrees with Brentano when considering that every intentional experience is built as a

reference to a content, as direction towards an object, be this object existent or not. Husserl thus understands *apprehension* within this context as a “character of intentional act”, it consists of a “character of act” which constitutes the object. Once consciousness directs itself in an *apprehensive mode* towards an object, in this process of directing, the consciousness does not only aim at the object, but also constitutes the aimed at object, which thus is an apprehended object.

In *Logical Investigations*, the description of the essential structure of the intentional apprehension (of the objective constitution) is introduced through the example of perceptive apprehension. Perception is here a good example to be explored, given that it is an act that originary constitutes its objects. It is an act in which the object “in person” is originary constitutes as something that is actually present in consciousness. Thus, the model of constitution of perception is seen initially as a fundamental model of the constitution of objects, that is, represents the proper mode of constituting which characterizes intentionality of act (*Aktintentionalität*).

Perceptual apprehension constitutes the object from the apprehension of sensory matter – in itself presenting no meaning as it is a pre-given material (*vorgegeben*), pre-constituted – through the conversion of these presenting contents (*darstellend*) (called by Husserl also as representatives) of the object. These contents are the multiple profiles (*Abschattungen*) apprehended. As examples of the multiple profiles of the presentation of the object, there are the red that is felt (*empfunden*) and the spatial shape of the *sphere*, which serves as a basis to the constitution of the object “red ball”. The object is thus constituted as a unit of these multiple modes of manifestation (*Erscheinungen*). The perceptual apprehension works actively in this process of constitution through interpretation and synthesis, giving meaning to sensory matter. The “objectifying apprehension” “inspirit” sensory data in such a way that the *felt contents* appear in a unity, namely the unity of the object.

Unlike Brentano, to whom the sensory contents were transcendent and only the object was really present in consciousness – Husserl thinks that sensory data is really

(*reell*) present in consciousness, that is, both the acts of apprehension and the apprehended contents are *experienced* (*erlebten*), are immanent³. However, the perceived object is not *experienced*: “this object, though perceived, is not itself experienced nor conscious (...)” (Husserl 2001 b, 203). The object is not experienced because it is the very thing that is intentionally present in the *manifestation* (in the experience). The appearing of the thing (the experience) is not the thing which appears (that seems to stand before us *in propria persona*). As belonging in a conscious connection, the appearing of things is experienced by us, as belonging in the phenomenal world, things appear before us.” (Husserl 2001 b, 203)

2. The constitution of time and temporal objects (*Zeitobjekt*) according to the model “apprehension-content of apprehension”

The difficulties that are presented to the reader in *On the Phenomenology of the Consciousness of Internal Time*, mainly related to the long period (1893-1917) encompassed by the investigations exposed in this work, do not make this work less important to the understanding of time constitution in Husserlian phenomenology. Even when one considers that the analyses in the *Bernau Manuscripts* (1917-1918) (Husserliana XXXIII) and in the *C-Manuscripts* (1929-1934) (Husserliana - Materialien VIII) show considerable advancements regarding the investigations of time constitution, *On the Phenomenology of the Consciousness of Internal Time* is a work that must be analyzed in depth, given that it contains a general and structural presentation of the concepts, and also of the questions regarding the constitution of temporality, concepts and questions that will be once more analyzed and deepened in the *Bernau Manuscripts* and in the *C-Manuscripts*.

When one analyses *On the Phenomenology of the Consciousness of Internal Time*, one sees that, in the texts up to 1908, the constitution of time and of temporal objects is understood based on the scheme “apprehension-content of apprehension”. *Time apprehension* and the *contents of temporal apprehension* are presented as phenomenological data that

constitutes time through the previous realization of suspension (*Ausschaltung*) of objective time. This suspension is the first step in the analysis carried out by Husserl in *On the Phenomenology of the Consciousness of Internal Time* and consists of suspending – putting between parenthesis – all objective validity of time, real (*real*) and mundane, that is, what must be reduced is real time (*real*) operated by the sciences, time which is measurable with a chronometer.

After the reduction of objective time, what remains as phenomenological residue is the *apprehension of time* (*Zeitauffassungen*) and the specific contents of this apprehension. Hence, Husserl initially characterized the temporal constitution of object (*Zeitobjekt*), i.e., temporal “objectification”, in the same way he characterized “objectivation” in the *Logical Investigations*: “the experienced content is ‘objectified’, and at that point the object is constituted in the mode of apprehension from the material of the experienced contents.” (Husserl 1991, 8)

In the case of temporal constitution, one can also say that, at least in the first part (of the work) (up to 1908), the sensory contents are ‘nothing’ considered in themselves regarding being and meaning (once they are pre-constituted), they serve only as a basis to objectification, thus being indispensable to the constitution of the object. As John Brough states, “the immanent sensory contents are taken to be neutral with respect to temporal determinations. A tone-content, considered in itself, is neither now, nor past, nor future. It becomes the bearer of temporal characteristics only through special time-constituting apprehensions.” (Brough 1991, XLIV)

During this period Husserl, in his analyses of temporality, understands temporal constitutions as happening through “apprehensions of the now”, “apprehensions of the past” and “apprehensions of the future”. These apprehensions animate the immanent content according to a proper temporal mode. However, these apprehensions are developments of a continuous act (*Aktkontinuum*) (Husserl 1991, 25) which is characterized as being the perception, i.e., an act that constantly permeates in three directions: present, past and future. In 1905 Husserl understood the question regarding the

“origin of time”, which was a *leit motiv* for the investigations in *On the Phenomenology of the Consciousness of Internal Time*, as a question regarding “the perception of a temporal object”. As Luis Niel suggests, one can rephrase it as a question: “how can one perceive a temporal object through acts?” (Niel 2011, 11)⁴ Perception is a privileged locus in the analysis of temporal constitution. Husserl understands this act as the very act that donates time originary, given that it consists of apprehensions of the now (*Jetzt*).

If one uses this interpretative model to understand the perception of a temporal sequence as the sequence of sounds do, re in a melody, and one considers that the do-sound is actually perceived as a do-sound *now* actually present in consciousness, then this means that this do-sound is only actually conscious while its content of sensation is animated by a “perceptive apprehension of the actual now”. However, when a new sound sounds the do sound recently perceived does not simply disappear, it is still conscious as a *past do sound* through an “apprehension of the past” operated by a primary memory (also denominated as a fresh memory; Husserl will later characterize this originary consciousness as *retention*). If, in the perception, the actual now is originally donated – in the perception the now is donated in flesh – primary memory is originary donation of the past, it is immediate consciousness of the “already been”. Only through primary memory in the past accessible: “only in primary memory do we see what is past, only in it does the past become constituted – and constituted presentatively, not representatively.” (Husserl 1991, 43)

The intentionality that aims at what is going to be given in the future, in the *now becoming* (for instance, a mi sound that follows in the melody), is immediately connected with the intentionality of perception that aims at what is given in the actual now and also connected with the intentionality that aims at what is given in the past. This direction that aims at the future as an always open possibility, empty intention, to be fulfilled in the actual perception, is characterized by Husserl as primary expectation. This threefold dimension of temporal constitution of an object is a “triple intentionality belonging to each perceptual phase” (Brough 1991, XLIV). This triple

intentionality constitute the phases present, past and future within which a temporal object is always perceived. Each individual phase of an object must encompass a continuum of contents and a continuum of constitutive apprehensions. Hence, perception is a “continuum of these continua.” (Husserl 1991, 239)

A new and decisive element arises from this analysis of the temporality: the notion of *temporal object* (*Zeitobjekt*). Husserl uses this notion to explain how the object apprehended temporally is not only a “unit in time”, but “contains in itself temporal extension.” (Husserl 1991, 24) Hence, if one takes the sound of a melody as an example, a temporal object is the apprehended sound as one and identical in its multiple modes of temporal appearance (actual present, past and future). What is new here is that the temporal object can be transcendent or immanent. The object considered regarding its real determinations is still understood as a transcendent temporal object, but the object considered in its “way of appears” is an immanent temporal object. It is easy to notice a great modification regarding the conception of object expressed in the *Logical Investigations*. There, the object was exiled in the transcendence sphere, here the objects itself is located in the interior of consciousness, in the immanence. Nonetheless, it is not every single object which is immanent to consciousness, but only the *object in its how way* (*das Objekt im Wie*) of temporal appearance.

One cannot forget in order to have an understanding of the whole of temporal constitution, that there are also secondary memories and expectations. Primary memory is possible only due to its specific intentionality, which after that forms a basis of content for the secondary memory. Hence, secondary memory is an act of *presenting* (*Vergegenwärtigung*) – while perception is always a presentation (*Gegenwärtigung*) – because it reenacts something from the past. Husserl says that memory is always reproductive, it re-presents something that is past “as” (*gleichsam*) present. Hence, secondary memory is not an act of originary temporal donation, i.e., in secondary memory there is no originary donation neither of the now present, nor of

the past. In secondary memory there is only representation of the past as the now.

Secondary expectation is also *reproductive* consciousness of the now. Nevertheless, this anticipative consciousness certainly does not simply reproduce the past, it represents a future process in images. In so doing, intentions founded on this kind of intentionality are characterized as “open”, in other words, according to Husserl, “the intuition belonging to expectation is memorial intuition turned upside down, for in memory’s case the intentions aimed at the now do not ‘precede’ the event but follow after it. As empty intentions directed towards the surroundings, they lie ‘in the opposite direction.’” (Husserl 1991, 57-58)

Husserl also states that not only temporal objects have in themselves temporal extension, i.e., duration in time, but also the constitutive acts (apprehensions) of time have in themselves temporality. This consideration of the temporality of acts is due to the fact that Husserl understands that, if the acts are immanent structures, they must also necessarily happen in the interior of the consciousness, given that they have in themselves temporal duration. Because of the fact that the acts last in a temporal course, one can go back to the acts through *reflections* which are properly speaking acts that turn themselves to other acts of consciousness. This process of turning back to the consciousness aims at capturing the unity of the aimed at acts. Hence, reflection is always consciousness of consciousness.

In a first part of the investigations pertaining to *On the Phenomenology of the Consciousness of Internal Time*, Husserl is uniquely concerned with an analysis of the constitution of temporal objects based on the scheme “apprehension-content of apprehension”. In the later studies, in the texts between 1909 and 1917, Husserl finds problems when applying this scheme to understanding the deepest level of the constitution of temporality, and thus abandons this scheme, incapable of phenomenologically describing the lowest level of time constitution. In what follows, we will see what these problems are and how Husserl managed to solve them.

3. The abandon of the scheme “apprehension-content of constitution” to describe the deepest level of time constitution

In several of the texts in the *On the Phenomenology of the Consciousness of Internal Time* posterior to 1908 Husserl presents a critique of the use of the model apprehension-content of apprehension to the deepest levels of time constitution. Generally speaking, this critique refers to two aspects: 1) the understanding of time constitution founded on the “prejudice of the now” (in the words of Brough 1989, 275); 2) the inevitable infinite regression one falls in when one understands the deepest level of the constitution of temporality through acts, apprehensions of time.

The first aspect of the Husserlian self-critique regarding the application of the model apprehension-content of apprehension is developed in the section IV of Part B in *On the Phenomenology of the Consciousness of Internal Time*. In these passages, Husserl criticizes his still immature analysis of the temporal constitution (up to 1909), pointing out to the same types of prejudices which he found years before in Brentano’s theory of the origin of time.⁵

In 1905, Husserl observes that in Brentano’s theory of originary association, the “moment of time” was given by phantasy as an addition to sensory content. Because of his theory, according to Husserl, Brentano has to deny the perception in the succession and alteration: “we believe that we hear a melody and therefore that we still hear what is just past, but this is only an illusion proceeding from the vivacity of the original association.” (Husserl 1991, 14)

Nonetheless, was Brentano led to deny the perception of succession and alteration? According to Husserl, the problem resides in the very fact that Brentano understands that we become aware of the phases of past and future of an object through an alteration in sensory contents. However, sensory contents are themselves present, are now and, being so, are “incapable of presenting, or appearing as, past or future contents. They are simply ‘now’, and nothing could overcome that fact.” (Brough 1991, XLVII) Brentano indeed understands

the moments of past and future as unreal given, that real is only the now moment. In 1905, Husserl observes that, because Brentano founded his theory on the prejudice of the now, and because of this static understanding of time constitution, he was not able to answer in a definitive way to the question regarding the origin of time.

In 1909, however, Husserl addresses the very same critique from 1905 regarding Brentano's theory of originary association to his own understanding of time constitution based on the scheme apprehension-content of apprehension. Husserl notices that, when considering that the constitution of temporal objects happened through a process in which the contents were animated through apprehension of present, past and future, as a matter of fact, these contents, while actually apprehended, were themselves present in the actual momentary phases of consciousness (be it in the phases of perception, memory or expectations). In other words, these contents, even when apprehended through memories or expectations, were always present, always tied in the now. If on the one hand, Husserl demanded that the contents in themselves were "neutral" in relation to their temporal determination, given that temporal constitution should happen through temporal apprehensions, on the other hand, the other hand his considerations led to the conclusion that the contents that formed the basis to the apprehensions were always present in the actual phases of consciousness, and thus were not at all neutral, but either present or now. According to Brough, the situation is thus given: "the contents in the actual phase of consciousness are not temporally neutral but present or 'now', and that no 'past-apprehension' could make them appear otherwise." (Brough 1989, 275)

The second aspect of Husserl's self-critique refers to the inevitable infinite regression, which is brought about when one considers that the last level of the temporal constitution consists of *objectifying acts of apprehension*. An infinite regression is inevitable because the acts have in themselves temporality, that is, once the actual moment of the realization of the act is past, the act remains still in the consciousness as an experienced past. Hence, the act becomes itself a temporal

object of consciousness. But, if it becomes an object, its temporal determination of past must be constituted of another constitutive act of time. This second act, by its turn, also becomes an object of consciousness and demands a third act that constitutes it as a temporal object, and so *ad infinitum*. Husserl's conclusion is that there must be a last term that does not demand beyond itself any structure that could constitute it, that is, a last term which is not *constitute* but that is only the source of *constitution*. Husserl finds this last term and designates it as *absolute flow constitutive of time*.

4. The discovery of the absolute flow as the deepest level in temporal constitution

The absolute flow is discovered in 1909 as being the last level of the constitution of all temporality. In the paragraph 34 of part "A" of *On the Phenomenology of the Consciousness of Internal Time*, Husserl describes three levels of the temporal constitution as follows: the first one is the level of the objective constitution of the empirical thing (transcendent) in objective time (time that must be reduced in the phenomenological reduction). The second one is the level which refers to the phenomena that occurs in immanent time, the immanent units such as acts, temporal objects and sensation (sensory contents). The third and last one is the level of the absolute flow of the constitutive consciousness of time.

The absolute flow which must hinder the infinite regression is understood by Husserl as being timeless (*zeitlos*) because if it were a unit *in* time, there should be another consciousness that would constitute it thus leading to an infinite regression as described above. The absolute flow is not a process *in* time, it does not possess in itself any sort of duration, nor alteration, that is, it is not and cannot become an object in time. Hence, the absolute flow can only be the *atemporal form (unzeitlich)* of the flow of consciousness. The last constitutive instance of time can only be named in a *metaphorical way* as "flow" (*Fluss*), as Husserl says: "This flow is something we speak of in conformity with what is constituted, but it is not 'something in objective time'" (Husserl

1991, 79). He sees the necessity of lending a name of something that is *constituted* to name the *constitutive* because when one tries to name and describe the sphere that is the pure origin of time “we lack names” (Husserl 1991, 79). Flow is to be understood now as absolute constitutive consciousness of time, i.e., understood according to its absolute properties of being “something to be designated metaphorically as ‘flow’; of something that originates in a point of actuality, in primal source-point, ‘the now’.” (Husserl 1991, 79) The predicate “absolute” does not bear any metaphysical trait, it is a grounding structure, the last level of constitution.

When Husserl takes up the investigation of time constitution and of *temporal objects* after discovering the absolute flow, the analysis of a melody, for instance, will happen as follows: when one directs oneself to the *sound* of the melody, one notices that this sound “begins” to be conscious in a determined phase (or mode of consciousness), and this “beginning” will be characterized as source-point (*Quellpunkt*) named as primal impression (*Urimpression*). Given that the constitutive process of time is a flow of constant production of modifications of modifications, and that a modification constantly produces a new modification, the originating impression is the beginning of the process of modifications, it is “the primal impression, the absolute beginning of this production, the primal source, that from which everything else is continuously produced. But it itself is not produced; it does not arise as something produced but through *genesis spontanea*; it is primal generation.” (Husserl 1991, 106)

Husserl identifies the primal impression as an *originary sensation* (not to be understood as a simple sensation, constituted sensation, but as “originary mode of consciousness of the now”), it is something “new”, received spontaneously by the consciousness. In other words, there is no active productive operation of consciousness involved in the birth of this “new” element. Hence, this constitution can only be understood as a passive operation, once it “brings what has been primarily generated to growth, to development.” (Husserl 1991, 106) The now is a source-point that sets in motion the continuum of modifications of past and future; the primal impressions are

intimately linked to retentions and protentions, and it is in the passage of the impressional “mode of consciousness” to the retentive (originary consciousness of past) and to the protentive (originary consciousness of the future) that the temporal constitution takes place.

One can notice that it is in this new moment of Husserl’s analysis of temporal constitution that a terminological replacement occurs. In fact, it is not only a terminological replacement, but rather a decisive conceptual alteration related to the originally constitutive phases of time. If Husserl understood initially that time was constituted through a *continuum apprehension act* (perception) characterized as now-perception, primary memory and primary expectation, now the constitutive phases are characterized as *primal impression, retention and protention*. The novelty is that the primal impression, retention and protention *are not acts* but *modes of consciousness* or *constitutive phases* of the deepest level of time constitution, thus pertaining to the region of the absolute flow, thus being *atemporal (unzeitlich)*. Hence, through the discovery of the absolute flow Husserl is able to abandon the model of constitution apprehension-constitution of apprehension to describe the deepest level of the constitution of temporality.

Final considerations

When one follows Husserl’s itinerary in the first analyses of temporal constitution, from the application of the scheme of apprehension-content of apprehension to the description of the constitutive operations of temporal constitution up to the overcoming of such scheme, one observes that this path is a process of constant reformulations and deepening of the description of the lowest levels of the constitution of temporality. If, on the one hand, the analyses carried out by Husserl from 1909 in *On the Phenomenology of the Consciousness of Internal Time* show a great advance in what concerns the analysis of time constitution, on the other hand, the texts posterior to *On the Phenomenology of the Consciousness of Internal Time* that deal with time constitution (namely *the Bernau Manuscripts* and *the C-Manuscripts*) also

seek to reformulate and deepen the understanding of temporal constitution as exposed in *On the Phenomenology of the Consciousness of Internal Time*.

However, what one must highlight in *On the Phenomenology of the Consciousness of Internal Time* is that it is a *starting point* to the analyses that follow this set of texts: the deepest levels of time constitution cannot be understood through the application of the scheme apprehension-content of apprehension. The investigations of time constitution posterior to *On the Phenomenology of the Consciousness of Internal Time* that follow this principle consist of a constant process of stratification of the consciousness. This process can be seen, for instance, in the frequent use of the prefix *Ur-* to characterize the lowest levels of time constitution, given that in the *Bernau Manuscripts* the last level of time constitution is characterized as *Urprozess* and in the *C-Manuscripts*, as the *Urzeitigung* (besides many other terms used by Husserl to describe this last level, as *Urbewusstsein*, *Urhyle*, *Ur-Ich*, etc.).

The analyses in *On the Phenomenology of the Consciousness of Internal Time* regarding the status of the absolute flow and the critique of the model of apprehension-content apprehension represent a first investigative step that is fundamental to the realization of a complete elucidation of the “last and true absolute” (*letzte und wahrhafte Absolute*) (Husserl 1950, 198) (expression used by Husserl to characterize time consciousness in the *Ideen I*). One must recognize that the texts from *On the Phenomenology of the Consciousness of Internal Time* are not at all “dead”, but they are rather texts that constantly invite new and fruitful readings of Husserl’s phenomenology of temporality.

NOTES

¹ The abandon of the model of constitution apprehension-content of apprehension refers exclusively to the analysis of the deepest layers of time constitution. Husserl maintains this model to describe other constitutive acts. For a detailed analysis of this discussion, see Lohmar (2009, 12-19).

² Original title: *Zur Phänomenologie des inneren Zeitbewusstseins (1893-1917)*. The volume X of *Husserliana* is composed of two parts

and was integrally published in 1966 (edited by Rudolf Boehm). It is the fourth part of a course taught by Husserl in the winter semester of 1904-1905 in Göttingen, entitled "Important Points from the Phenomenology and Theory of Knowledge". Part "A", *The Lectures on the Consciousness of Internal Time from the Year 1905*, consists of the lessons from 1905 with an addition of texts from 1901 to 1917. The texts from this part were prepared and organized by Edith Stein, Husserl's assistant, and first published in 1928 in the *Jahrbuch für Philosophie und phänomenologische Forschung*, Bd. IX, Martin Heidegger being its editor. Part "B", *Supplementary Texts Setting forth Development of the Problem*, is composed of manuscripts from 1893 to 1911, some of which unpublished, some reproduced from part A. See Boehm (1966, XII-XLIII) and Brough (1991, XI-XVIII).

³ One must pay attention to an important distinction between "reel" and "real". *Reel* means immanent, i.e., the sphere of consciousness as a whole. *Real*, on the other hand, refers to the sphere of transcendence, the mundane determination of things.

⁴ "Wie nehmen wir durch Akte ein Zeitobjekt wahr?" (Niel 2011, 11).

⁵ For a detailed critique of originary associations in Brentano see Husserl 1991, 11-20.

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When Tacit is Not Tacit Enough: A Heideggerian Critique of Collins' "Tacit" Knowledge

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Abstract

Some of the problems that Harry Collins has faced in his general framework for theorizing tacit and explicit knowledge are, I will argue, due to an inadequate formulation of the problem. It is this inadequacy that has led to pseudo-problems regarding the 'tacit' in general. What-is-more, the vehicle for his theory as objectified in 'strings' is symptomatic of the problem that his division of tacit and explicit faces. I will argue that the philosophy of Martin Heidegger will give us adequate conceptual tools to re-think Collins' general framework, to help us understand the origins of these problems, and possibly indicate a way to solve them. To which ends I suggest that either the tacit Collins has in mind is either not truly tacit or it is not tacit enough.

Keywords: tacit knowledge, fundamental ontology, present and ready-at-hand, Harry Collins, Martin Heidegger

I

Harry Collins' work on tacit and explicit knowledge is part of a long heritage from the early schools of phenomenology (see Husserl 1900-1901; Merleau-Ponty 1945), social philosophy (see Polanyi 1958), and post-positivistic epistemology (see Dreyfus 1999). What I believe has hampered this on-going project which currently resides in AI projects is to frame problems of the pre-conditions for knowledge and language in a metaphysics that already presupposes how knowledge, language and inquirer already relate. A critique of this general model of reality is from Martin Heidegger's (1962) book *Being and Time* first published in 1927. Collins in his analysis of the

problems of socialization and knowledge takes on board an interpretation of this tradition but one that derives from analytical and not from European continental traditions.¹ In Collins' admirable attempt to give a formal account of different types of knowledge and the actions they allow, he is forced to the conclusion that explicit knowledge is the rarer condition and most of human life is conducted by tacit means. Collins' project of defending what is uniquely human to people, is itself quite Heideggerian, but his method of demoting the body and promoting, "society in the understanding of the nature of knowledge" is, for me, to hold one of several metaphysical divisions that will ultimately leave the problem of tacit and explicit knowledge unanswerable in its current form (Collins 2010, 8). The insolubility of this problem, as described by Collins is raised by Stone (2012, 2) where "Collins, most notably, argues that interactional expertise develops through a socialization process of linguistic immersion and that socialization, as such, is precisely this kind of black box that cannot be explicated." Collins at the same time tries to demystify tacit knowledge but in doing so sets up a mysterious transference process of knowledge and understanding. I believe this mysteriousness is one the resultant pseudo-problems of having a theory of tacit knowledge that is itself founded in knowledge and language. Rather what we should be looking for is the conditions that fore-structure knowledge and language, which is found in Heidegger's notion of "Being-in-the World".

II

Before we get to how Collins' general framework generates its own problems I will spend a few moments unpacking and explaining the terms I will be using. Firstly, Collins identifies problems with how the "tacit" has been discussed, confusions over definitions and its uses. He settles on Polanyi's definition that "we can know more than we can tell." (Collins 2010, 4) Collins tells us that he wants to "reconstruct the idea of tacit knowledge from first principles so the concepts disparate domains have a common conceptual language." (Collins 2010, 2) He then gives a three-fold classification of "tacit knowledge", which is loosely defined as that which cannot

be explicated, however, as we will see there are exceptions. In order of how difficult they are to explicate Collins ranks “relational tacit knowledge” (RTK), “somatic tacit knowledge” (STK), and then “collective tacit knowledge” (CTK) (Collins 2010, 2-3). *RTK* is knowledge that is tacit for no deep reason but its tacit-ness rests upon social contingencies, *STK* is brain-body limitation of humans which can in some instances be replicated by machines and animals, lastly *CTK*, which is what Collins takes to be the truly tacit. *CTK* could be a shorthand term for “socialization”, and as language users, who interpret their surroundings, we acquire knowledge through some sort of osmosis that *has yet* not been defined. This is not to say in principle it cannot be defined but only as of now we have no means for replicating it. The idea of understanding/action replication is important for Collins as it is also a delineator of the explicit/ tacit divide. Collins picks out two types of actions as being relevant “mimeomorphic” and “polimorphic” (Collins 2010, ix). The difference being that mimeomorphic actions require RTK and/or STK, this is a strictly mimicked action which carries none of the meaning or understanding it would if performed by a human. This could be a parrot talking or a computer generated response. Polimorphic actions can only be accomplished with the addition of CTK. For example, riding a bike can be mimicked by a robot but “bike riding” is a uniquely human activity as it only has significance for people who also understand, leisure activities, highway codes, environmental issues, social norms and so on. None of this can be gained from RTK or STK, which is what makes CTK so problematic. Collins ties together the notions of tacit and explicit knowledge, mimeomorphic and polimorphic actions by way of “strings” and “string translation”. Strings are “bits of stuff inscribed with patterns” whereas language takes place when those marks are interpreted (Collins 2010, 9). Strings can undergo a physical transformation, that by reading those marks out aloud, which convert to sound, which then act upon someone’s ears, the receiving person interprets those sounds as words and through a further transformation-translation makes sense of those words. Those things that allow strings to be transformed and translated are explicable. Where knowledge of the

transformation-translation process is unknown knowledge remains tacit. It is important to note that strings for Collins are abstract, meaningless, inert bits of potential information.

Summaries of Heidegger's work are not easy and will necessarily leave out details but within the confines of this paper I will attempt to explicate what is most important to this thesis. First and foremost Heidegger's philosophy is based upon a core distinction between "beings" and "Being", or ontological difference. Humans have the unique ability to realise both, that we are indeed "beings" (objects) but we also reflect on our existence as a potential. Our ability to do this comes from our awareness of our Being. From this fundamental condition we can acknowledge that we exist in a way that no other being does, or real terms, matters. Here "Being" is not a thing, object, or mental state. What-is-more, the grounds for having "beings" are founded in our "Being" (Heidegger 1962, 33-34). This makes Heidegger's philosophy an ontological one, which he finesses with another distinction. When we speak about "beings" (objects) we are discussing regional ontology, such as, the things that make up our daily experience. When we discuss "Being" (non-object) we are discussing the very possibility for things to show themselves as things, this we call fundamental ontology. The crux of Heidegger's critique of Western philosophy and most thinking in general is that we are constantly getting this order mixed up. We account for "Being" in terms of "beings" (atoms, DNA, mental states), and we discuss regional ontology (equations, scientific laws, theories) as if it were more basic than fundamental ontology (that which allows beings to show themselves). To demonstrate ontological structure Heidegger uses two ways of relating to the world. He calls these "present" and "ready-to-hand" (Heidegger 1962, 98-103). The present-at-hand is when we are able to reflect, theorise or abstract not only ourselves but the world around us into categories, propositions, or principles. The ready-to-hand is how we are ordinarily in the world in that we use it with no intentional thought. The present-at-hand calls the world to our attention from which we can inspect and objectify it. It highlights the regional ontological structure of our worlds. The ready-to-hand is the opposite, here the world is invisible to us

as we are so familiar with our surroundings and how we should be acting. In making the world more present or distant it also makes our Being more present or distant to us.

What the present and ready-at-hand reveals or hides from us is our “Being-in-the-World”. Heidegger means this in a very specific way. We belong to our worlds. World in this sense is not a thing, a place, or location but what structures our experiences. This relationship is circular in that because we are aware of ontological difference we as “beings” can relate to ourselves and the world through the present or ready-at-hand which in turn reveals or hides our “Being-in-the-World” which is predicated on the awareness of ontological difference.² It only against the backdrop of ontological difference and “Being-in-the-World” do we get to experience things as things in the first place. As with the reversal of ontological order Heidegger suggests that due to the success with which the present-at-hand perspective has allowed and the ease with which we speak about things, we now take it to be more fundamental than the ready-to-hand. That our average state of involvement with the world is explicable from an objective basis which requires the present-at-hand. In the terms of this paper we can identify “explicit knowledge,” and “string translation-transformation” with the “present-at-hand” and we can identify Collins’ form of “tacit knowledge” with the “ready-to-hand”. What Collins seems to have no analogue for is “Being-in-the World” which is dependent upon ontological difference. He does not appear to have a way of fore-grounding or pre-structuring understanding as we get with fundamental ontology. His entire argument appears to be conducted at the level of regional ontology, i.e. strings, language, intentions, cultural norms and so on. He never makes the move to fundamental ontology as his framework prevents this from being an option. Or, put another way, his “tacit” is *regional* tacit-ness (could be but has not yet been explicated), not *fundamental* tacit-ness (is not a thing to be made explicit). As Collins’ theory is not ontological but epistemological “tacit” appears to be as yet unexplicated knowledge. What I would like to say is that “tacit” is not “knowing” anything at all but it is the condition for knowing something, it is the condition for making something explicit.

So with our terms defined next I will present Collins' general theory and framework and then try to identify where the pseudo-problems are created and how using Heidegger we might resolve these problems. I do not hope to be able to give a solution to what Collins calls the "socialization problem" but only show that this form of the problem is irresolvable as it is (Collins 2010, 7; 81; 89; 149).

III

As mentioned Collins' idea is very Heideggerian in nature but I think it succumbs to the same problems that Heidegger diagnoses with Western metaphysics. In mapping out the concepts to be used and how they are deployed we may already see a similarity in projects. What Collins wants to get at in "tacit-ness" or "that which can not be explicated" is echoed in Heidegger's notion of "Being". The crucial difference is that for Heidegger Being cannot be explicated because it is not a thing, one may talk about it as we are doing now but that is only to relate to it through the present-at-hand. Being is not an object or quality that is possessed by the person it is a lived-relation structured by the world. In contrast two of Collins' "tacit" forms (RTK, STK) cannot only be spoken about but can be known, and the third (CTK) is some sublimated process which, in theory, is not impossible to know. Lowney (2011, 20) criticises Collins conception of the "tacit" by arguing for a distinction between ineffable, the tacit, the explicable, and the explicit. His worry is that "the tacit runs the risk of collapsing into the ineffable, i.e., that which cannot, in the strongest sense, be put into words or modeled...the ineffable drops out as a supplementary nothing or nonsense." We can arrive at this by having the entire argument remain at the linguistic or epistemic level. Here we can argue over how anything can be known at all if any knowledge is in some sense tacit. A brief point that I do not have space to develop is that binary of tacit-explicit. If we understand that one receives its meaning by standing in relation to the other, that the tacit is somehow the absence of the explicit, we can see the whole project set up as a metaphysical question. Heidegger (1978/1929) gives a more

fundamental formulation of this question in *What is Metaphysics?* where he tells us that science is concerned with “beings only, and besides that – nothing; beings alone, and further-nothing; solely beings, and beyond that – nothing.” (Heidegger 1978, 97) Heidegger then raises the point about how we know about this “nothing” if it is truly “nothing”? He then goes on to argue that the logical form of negation is rooted in the nothing rather than logic being primary (Heidegger 1978, 107). I think both Collins and Lowney suffer by this that if both tacit and explicit are just states of knowledge, something that is not knowledge (or even a thing) is a negation of the tacit-explicit. Rather Heidegger wants to tell us that this way of thinking is itself rooted in the “nothing” which is an ontological condition not epistemological.

The extent to which Collins project is metaphysical is illustrated by the analogy Collins gives:

CTK, or, more properly, the idea of the social that underpins it, is like Newton’s idea of gravity—you can’t see it, touch it or smell it and it is a kind of mysterious action at a distance, but it still has consequences. Maybe we now understand gravity as curved space-time (or maybe we don’t) and maybe one day we will understand the social. (Collins 2011, 40)

If the analogy is that the “social” is like gravity, then following Kuhn (1970) there is a sense it is paradigm dependent. That is, we have had different theories and understandings of gravity, which may or may not be correct but it has “real” consequences that we measure. Those “real” consequences and particular measurements are themselves also paradigm dependent. We interpret phenomena (beings) through paradigms which is only achievable due to ontological difference (beings-Being). So what falling objects or certain measurements meant for Aristotle are different for Newton and Einstein. We could understand this difference as a product of epistemological frameworks or linguistic variance but what that misses is how all phenomena, including ourselves, are interpreted through the World/paradigm/tacit which supplies us with what can and cannot be meaningfully considered. This may help us make more sense of Polanyi when he says, “explicit knowledge must rely on being tacitly understood and applied. Hence all

knowledge is either tacit or rooted in tacit knowledge.” (Polanyi, 1969, 144) That is, in order for any knowledge to become explicit it must first be structured in and articulated by the world. The traditional approach to this is to start with beliefs, mental states or knowledge and then track how we act on those beliefs which informs what is rational and so on. The Heideggerian analysis suggests that we start with people born into a world that is already meaningfully interpreted for them. We then become familiar with the tacit of the world telling us what it is like, and similarly the feeling of alienation or disenchantment when our ways of living are no longer supported by the world. Once we are in a world, where all things have their place can we then begin to explicate, which is the starting point for anyone that wants to begin with beliefs or intentional states. Beliefs are not about intentional states or neuronal activity but are “about” the world. Beliefs come from and are directed at the world. This maybe the world of things but what we understand those things as comes from “Being-in-the-World” which is itself not a thing. What any explicit systematised body of thought tries to do is reverse this understanding, that we exist like those things and their meaning is self-evident. That we have to work from the world of things back towards ourselves and understand ourselves in terms of whatever dominant school of thought is in fashion. In the terms of this paper we may say that explicit knowledge is a present-at-hand account of reality (any systematised body of knowledge), which tries to convince us that this perspective is fundamental to understanding ourselves. Instead, the more frequent CTK, which Collins struggles to formulise, is an example of the ready-to-hand, both of which require “Being-in-the World”.

If Collins thinks there is no reason why potentially the “social/ tacit” could ever be explicated, I am suggesting, either the tacit he has in mind is not tacit enough or he is mistaken in thinking that the tacit is, even in theory, is explicable. Here I would prefer the term “un-explicated” as this implies potential explication. This is the conclusion I wish to draw but lets see how Collins gets to this stage where the “social” is a mysterious background force like gravity, which may be explicable given

future advances. The term “tacit” in modern philosophy comes to us from Michael Polanyi and it is Polanyi’s lead that Collins follows when conceptualizing the tacit. I do not have the space to establish any causation but there is evidence to suggest that Polanyi’s understanding of Heidegger comes solely from William Barrett’s (1962) *Irrational Man* which, like Dreyfus, comes from the Anglo-American reading of the existentialist movement (cf. Stone 2012).

If Polanyi’s reading of Heidegger is via Barrett and Collins reading of Heidegger is via Dreyfus, Collins’ notion of the tacit is partly a reaction against Polanyi’s notion of the tacit which is influenced by Barrett’s interpretation of Heidegger. In *The New Orthodoxy: Humans, Animals, Heidegger and Dreyfus* (2009) Collins re-describes Heidegger’s main critique of the difference between humans and non-humans but instead of using “ontological difference” Collins calls this “whatever it is’ socialness” (Collins 2009, 77).³ Collins’ sees those mentioned above as favouring the corporeal body of the individual over the omnipresence of sociality and culture. On his reading he would be right as his understanding comes from a line that either did not read (as far as we know) Heidegger directly or did so through the Anglo-American lens, which itself supports a particular metaphysical worldview.⁴ I also suspect that Collins’ understands Heidegger as offering a theory of psychology. That the self-aware, present-to-hand and unaware, ready-to-hand states are comments on cognitive and bodily performance (Collins 2009, 79). What is missed is that Heidegger does not offer the present/ready-to-hand as a psychological theory but as ways of uncovering the ontological structure of Being. They are not about epistemology but fundamental ontology. Despite this Collins quite rightly, goes after the transparent “glass of the social” that has hampered the AI project, the boundary limits of the social sciences and gives the natural sciences its totalizing epistemology (Collins 2009, 76). This convoluted path means that we end up with a notion of tacit that does not break with the Anglo-American existentialist tradition. This goes some way to explaining why his tacit is not truly tacit.

Keeping this in mind I will next look at Collins’ vehicle for explication via the medium of “strings”. In wishing not to

keep this “bodily” image of tacit knowledge alive, which for Collins is a messy mish-mash of RTK, STK, and CTK, he has to find some mechanism, which is not dependent on individuals or practices involving “embodied knowledge”. As Collins (2010, 135) says, “not every individual needs the typical body in order to draw on collective tacit knowledge. This is because collective tacit knowledge is, to a large extent, located in the language of the collectivity rather than its practices.” His solution to this is via the information transfer of strings and the mimetic and polymorphic actions they can represent. For Collins strings are just “bits of stuff inscribed with patterns” that have no inherent meaning. Collins invents the concept of “strings” to avoid the “freight of inherent meaning that makes the notions of signs, symbols and icons so complicated.” (Collins 2010, 9) For Collins “a string is just a physical object and it is immediately clear that whether it has any effect and what kind of effect this might be is entirely a matter of what happens to be.” (Collins 2010, 9) Strings come in analogue and digital form and can be changed. Tacit knowledge is that which cannot be transformed from one string to another. Those which can conclude in some understanding or knowledge, they have become explicit. There are things such as animals and machines that can convert strings, e.g. a printer converts (translates) electrical signals (string) into commands for printing corresponding dots on paper (string). The printer does not understand what it has done and so does not possess knowledge, tacit or explicit. This would be an example of a “mimeomorphic” action, that is, a machine can replicate the actions of a human that can draw, write, or take photographs. A string that can undergo a translation-transformation process, and be understood by a receiver is the process of making knowledge explicit. So what are strings? “Strings are never meaningful” however, we routinely use strings as if they were meaningful; that cookbook contains instructions for cooking a meal or that a photograph is of a particular object or person (Collins 2010, 34). The mistake that Collins believes we are making is that we are confusing a physical object (string) for something that is meaningful to us (string translation into another string of cookery instructions). In the case of the photograph, we are confusing a collection of

dots (string) for an object or person we recognise (translated into a string of sense-memory). As Collins writes, “this book in itself contains strings, not language; therefore it does not in itself contain knowledge” (p.45). For Collins the danger is that if we think of objects or actions as being inherently meaningful, we can confuse RTK and STK with CTK, and mimeomorphic actions with polymorphic ones. Only two of these are truly tacit, CTK and polymorphic, and it is only humans that can exercise them. The resultant danger is that if we view mechanical or animal actions “as if” they were tacitly socially meaningful in the human sense we may begin to interpret ourselves “as if” we were only machines or animals.⁵ Whilst I agree with his sentiment, I think Collins is unable to access that which is special to humans, and ultimately falls back on to ambiguous or vague statements condensed in the phrase the “social problem”. Why this might be a problem for a Heideggerian is for at least two reasons. Firstly, If we hold a metaphysical model of reality in place that allows us to posit objects such as strings that exist independently of meaning, language, knowledge or people, any conception of the tacit that we may develop from it will not encompass the ability to develop such a model in the first place. Secondly, if we cannot access the tacit in this form, not only will there be a lot of wasted time and effort into AI projects but if we cannot adequately theorise that which is unique to humans all our attention is misdirected to giving a proper formal account of the “tacit” as if it were a thing that could be theorised. If we align “tacit” with “Being” we would understand that they are both pre-theoretical. Both “tacit/ Being” are the fore-structuring of understanding, they are what precede knowledge, language, or existence.⁶ This misdirection covers over the important aspect of ontological difference which for Heidegger is the first step to forgetting the meaning to the question of Being. Once we accept that this question is nonsensical resulting from the inappropriate conceptual tools with which we framed it we then begin to lose what is uniquely human to us, the ability to interpret ourselves.

Next I will explain why for Heidegger something like “strings” cannot be our starting point for understanding the tacit. I will then map over Collins “explicit-tacit” on to

Heidegger's "present-ready-to-hand" and then finally show that what is lacking in Collins general framework is an analogue for "Being-in-the-World". Due to this Collins' theory remains epistemological, but as the truly tacit is pre-epistemological it requires a fundamental ontological inquiry.

IV

What is clear is that Collins is able to separate "knowledge," "language," "practices," and "meaning" from people and the world. His mechanism for doing this is through the string translation-transformation process. We start off with strings, which are just meaningless bits of stuff, and through skilful interpretation we extrapolate meaning. What separates humans from computers (so far) is that the tacit knowledge that is conveyed in social settings means we can demonstrate a fluency and understanding which could not be gained by mere replication. A Heideggerian response to this would be, that we can think about the world as if it were made up of distinct objects, that can exist in isolation of meaning or interpretation, for this is what the sciences attempt, but the mistake is to think this view is fundamental. Collins' description of information exchange via strings is what I would identify with Heidegger's "present-at-hand". That it is an abstract, theoretical, objective account of a process. In short explicit knowledge is the "present-at-hand". The binary to this is the messy socialness, or polymorphic actions can be associated with the "ready-to-hand". Here we are immersed in our worlds, getting on with things, navigating our way intuitively. Here tacit knowledge is the "ready-to-hand". For Heidegger both of these ways of interpreting the world are "correct" but one is not to be made dominant. They are just different ways of interacting with the world that could lead one into the ontological investigation of Being. One way of interacting Heidegger did take to be more fundamental based purely on everyday experience, is that for most part, we are "ready-at-hand". This echoes Collins concern that the majority of human interaction is tacit. What Heidegger means by this is that for the most part we just use the world around us, we do not

deliberately think about walking, breathing, negotiating the high-street, how to act in a shop and so on. We just do it. For Collins some of this can be explained by RTK and STK (walking and breathing), high-street negotiation and shop etiquette would be CTK and much more difficult to model. The problems start when we appreciate that the ready-to-hand (tacit) is how we are the majority of the time but then try and offer a present-to-hand explanation for it. This is what Collins is attempting with his notion of strings and how they are set up in the world, that we can move from a present-at-hand through the ready-at-hand, which if successfully explicated returns us back to the present-at-hand. Collins theory as it stands is all about epistemology, how do we know x ? How do gain knowledge of x ? If I am metaphysically constrained by epistemology I can only defer to language and some mysterious osmosis of knowledge through contact with a society. What Collins is prevented from doing is starting from a position of ontology as he has no analogue for Heidegger's "Being-in-the-World." Another consequence of presuming the present-at-hand to fundamental in explanation is that it carries with it a totalizing effect. That Being is reducible to beings. Collins has a sense of this when he writes, "string transformation and mechanical cause and effect are, to speak metaphysically, just two aspects of the same thing. This is why we have a strong sense that when we explain some process scientifically we have made it explicit; this is the "explicable" part of the antonym of tacit with its "scientifically explained" connotations." (Collins 2010, 50) Yet what has been made explicit is knowledge of our regional ontology. These change but by giving a place name as opposed to a real name to the things that make up our world it appears as if strings can help us explain how knowledge becomes explicit. For example to think that there was once a string that said the universe was slowing down in expansion, but now we have strings that say the opposite. What happened to that old string? Again we might tie ourselves up in pseudo-problems trying answer questions about where strings go if they are not believed or used anymore.

This leads me to ask, are strings really necessary for explicit knowledge? Did we need strings in order to posit

strings? What prevents a Heideggerian from conceding that strings are essential for knowledge, meaning or language is that any theory or model we have of the world and our place in it is given to us by already “Being-in-a-world” that is interpreted for us. It is nonsensical to speak about objects as being uninterpreted or independent of meaning because to view the world like this is to already be in a relationship with it so as to be able to decontextualise it into contents or its aggregate bits. It is an oxymoron. It might be that Collins does not mean “meaningless” in the strong sense as devoid of any comprehensible quality, for if he did, strings would not be obvious as an explanation. True meaninglessness is to be separate from history and culture. There is a weak meaninglessness such as “jbsd%k8vb” but even this has a context and for Collins this could be subsumed by RTK such that just because I do not understand it does not make it devoid of meaning. The fact that it even appears to me as meaningless means it has some cultural, social currency. True meaninglessness is indistinguishable from the absence of something. Prior to Lavosier and Priestly no one had thought of “oxygen” not because it did not exist but because it meant nothing. Putting “oxygen” in a time before its discovery, apart from being anachronistic, shows how the world structures its meaning for us. The discourse, ideas, theories, ways of acting, and so on had not taken shape before the discovery of oxygen so it is not that no one had reason to express thoughts or opinions on oxygen (even if hypothetical) but that it could not be expressed. It is this same internal logic that is at play in calling “strings” meaningless or uninterpreted. It takes a very specific historical metaphysical worldview to conceptualize the world as made up of such things. Without something like Cartesian subject/ object division, or present-at-hand perspective, and the realist/scepticism problems it generates, the whole problem about how my mind gains true knowledge of the outside world, through language and experience would not make sense.

For Heidegger “Being” does not make sense unless it is contextualised with “Being-in-the-World”. Both “Being” and “World” are for Heidegger not to be confused with “beings” and “Earth”. Neither “Being” nor “World” are things. “Being” is

what grounds “beings” and “World” is what fore-structures our experiences. Both of these are what we would call the truly tacit. They are not propositional but non-propositional, they are not theoretical but pre-theoretical, and they are not ontological but pre-ontological (Heidegger 1962, 8-9). They are the conditions for knowledge not knowledge itself, knowing is a “founded mode of existence” (Heidegger 1962, 86). Stone (2012) tries to show “how it is possible to reflect on one’s own pre-understandings such that one can see that and how one’s understanding is structured, how one can then change it, and one can see how that pre-structuring is operating in the thinking and in exchanges with one’s collaborators” (p.14). How successful that would be I am not sure as “Being” and “World” hold a counter-intuitive relationship with one another. We do not want our Being or World to be an issue for us else we would not be able to achieve anything. Heidegger suggests that the majority of us live in “flight” of our own Being or existence (Heidegger 1962, 40). That is, living and interpreting ourselves in full understanding that we will die. For Heidegger it is this possibility that means we can choose to “Be-in-the-world” authentically or inauthentically. What these mean will not concern us as it does affect the overall argument, needless to say that, it highlights for Heidegger the existential-ontological structure of Being and the World. When neither of these are an issue for us they are invisible but it is this “familiarity” or “comfort” with our surroundings which does not force us to reflect on them we are coping at our very best. Everything makes sense, we know how to conduct ourselves, and our understanding is such that both the World and our Being disappear. We do not see the world as a spatial location full of distinct objects but a “totality of references” where we use it as a series of “in-order-to’s” which ultimately refer back to our own Being (Heidegger 1962, 107). For example I do not see a car which requires x amount of procedures to operate, I use it “in-order-to” get to work, “in-order-to” earn money, “in-order-to”...etc. The end of this process will usually involve my happiness or wish to accomplish something, be it authentically or inauthentically. It is when we cease to be at home in our worlds that this relationship becomes fractured, everything

becomes present-at-hand to us, there is no longer a “totality of references” but individual events, and dislocated objects. The World and our Being become very present to us but not as a something familiar as a series of “in-order-to’s” but something that no longer makes sense. This we would commonly refer to as an existential crisis, where our existence (who and what we are) and what are worlds are made up of (cars, jobs, money) come under question.

Even though this maybe a dramatic example, the pre-condition for any knowledge, whether it is self-knowledge, or systematic inquiry such as science requires that Being be hidden from us. When science begins to question the assumed basis for the reality of its objects (aether, philgoston, strings) it begins to descend into crisis. Those objects no longer hold the same meaning in relation to a totality of references that they once did. As I have been arguing whilst we maybe able to pair up present/ ready-at-hand with RTK, STK/ CTK. In order for Collins to produce a framework that has strings, language, knowledge and meaning all separated out is to have already closed over what is tacit. This is the paradox with asking such a question about what the “tacit” or “Being” is. Once you understand “Being-in-the-World” as the pre-condition for knowledge you realise any answer you may give to what is tacit/Being can only be in terms of things (beings) or what can be known or spoken about. Tacit/Being is not a “what” but a “how”, which can only be identified by people’s involvement with the world. Lowney (2011, 31) tries to offer a solution in “practical wisdom” and “phronesis” but where they both get it wrong is in keeping the problem of tacit knowledge as a product of language or epistemology. Lowney writes,

“Collins wants to look at what knowledge is apart from what it is for human knowers (TEK, 6), and he believes that Polanyi made the mistake of making knowledge too personal. But although knowledge may be held collectively in language, it is developed and affirmed personally and there is no knowledge without an interpreter. Knowledge, though objective, is intrinsically dependent on meanings and personal judgements.” (Lowney 2011, 33)

A Heideggerian response to this would be that you cannot have knowledge without a person, and you can not have a person

who would exercise that knowledge as meaningfully understood without a world. World here is what is tacit. Neither language nor knowledge can remain in absence of a world through which it makes sense. Tables, chairs and computers do not have worlds (Being) they are of the world (beings). They do interpret themselves through their daily existence. We could set it up so that a computer could appear to mimic self-interpretation and acquired learning but its own existence would not be a problem for it. Humans naturally interpret themselves in terms of the things they are surrounded by. We have, especially with the aid of science, no problem in understanding ourselves as if we were things, existing in a world like everything else. What-is-more, due to the productive success of this worldview we take abstract equations, objective measurements and the like, to be the origin of technological and epistemological advancement. Due to the success of this present-at-hand account of seeing everything explainable in terms of beings it is not difficult to take this mode of understanding as being primary, or how we “really” are in the world. Here we understand CTK or ready-to-hand as the derivative state and it is that which actually needs to be explained. What this does is by-pass tacit “Being-in-the-World” which is how we always already are and then begins our inquiry with a metaphysical problem which requires a highly specialised and contrived worldview to even to be able to consider “what knowledge is apart from what it is for human knowers”. (Collins 2010, 6)

While this might all appear highly abstract it seems to have real world consequences for how we theorise about knowledge relations and ourselves. The project of Artificial Intelligence (AI) has had to shift its goals over the past thirty years what the Heideggerian approach has to tell us is not that (AI) is impossible but artificial human intelligence is impossible. Human creativity and ability to found knowledge starts with the fundamental ontological distinction between Being and beings. There is nothing to prevent us from forgetting this distinction as Being activity looks to hide. Where we start to interpret ourselves in terms of objects and derive our Being from beings such as the brain understood through the metaphor of computing or humanity in terms of capital,

productivity or efficiency, here we start to forget the question concerning the meaning of Being. If we ever fully accomplish this we can not only replicate human intelligence but exceed it. Given the right neural nets, feedback systems, and so on we could create a machine that lived, learned and understood the world as a human did. It would not be that machines and technology had improved but that what it was to be a human had diminished.

V

Under my Heideggerian analysis I have argued that whilst Collins' project is indeed very Heideggerian he has by way of a particular interpretation of Heidegger has been forced to conceive of the "tacit" as something still essentially epistemological. It is Collins' inability to break from regional ontology (the things that make up knowledge), which keeps the problem of the "tacit" as one of epistemology rather what foregrounds epistemology. I have argued that his mechanism for conceptualising tacit and explicit knowledge is inadequate in the form of strings. By making "strings" the vehicle for explanation Collins achieves a number of things. Firstly, it presents a present-at-hand account as being dominant over the ready-to-hand. Secondly, it utilises a metaphysics that hides the ontological structure of "Being-in-the-World", and thirdly, due to the conditions of his framework it produces a number of pseudo-problems that in its current form is ill-equipped to resolve. We have the present-to-hand accounts of RTK and STK and we have the ready-to-hand of CTK. Collins identifies RTK and STK as examples of explicit knowledge whereas CTK is what represents tacit knowledge. These for Heidegger, however, are just ways of relating to the world, and what is more fundamental is "Being-in-the-World". It is not only that Collins has no analogue for this concept in his theory, but as his starting point is to give a present-at-hand account of the tacit, this ultimately makes his theory epistemological and not ontological. In absence of a fundamental ontological explanation Collins cannot give an adequate basis for the truly tacit.

NOTES

¹ Collins alludes to this elsewhere when he states his “knowledge of Heidegger is minimal” and any understanding he has is of “Dreyfus’s Heidegger.” (Collins 2009, 75)

² This issue is never resolved in Heidegger and by the end of “Being and Time” one has a sense of how the transcendental becomes historically embedded. To this end interpreters of Heidegger have been divided about what is more important, his transcendental phenomenology (Cromwell and Malpas 2007) or his historical hermeneutics (Kisiel 2002).

³ Emphasis in original.

⁴ My own reading of Heidegger is within the European, continental, post-positivistic tradition but even so I do not see Heidegger favouring the individual. Indeed he argues against it as an inauthentic representation of the individual by ‘the-they’. It is how ‘the-they’ would describe what Heidegger is saying.

⁵ This bears another similarity with Heidegger and the thrust of his essay “The Question Concerning Technology” (1954).

⁶ Existence here refers to ‘beings’. Being is what allows beings to be known.

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Mission Impossible? Thinking What Must be Thought in Heidegger and Deleuze

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Abstract

In this paper, I discuss and compare the (im)possibility of thinking that which is most worth our thought in Deleuze's *What Is Philosophy?* (1994) and Heidegger's course lectures in *What Is Called Thinking?* (2004). Both authors criticize the history of philosophy in similar ways in order to reconsider what should be taken as the nature and task of philosophical thinking. For Deleuze, true thinking is the creation of concepts, but what is most worth our thought in fact cannot be thought. For Heidegger, Being calls on us think, and to think rightly is to be underway toward thinking itself, a grateful heeding of Being. In this paper I explore the very possibility to think that which is most worth our thought. I will argue that although for both authors proper thinking as such is possible, thinking what is most worth our thought seems remarkably both possible as impossible.

Keywords: Heidegger, Deleuze, philosophical thinking, Being, presence, immanence

1. Introduction: Do You Think We Can Think?

Do you think we can think? There seems already a paradox involved in the very phrasing of such a sentence. The line of reasoning that brings us to conceive of this apparent conflict is one that belongs to the heritage of Descartes; for how can one question or doubt that one can think without still being involved in thinking? Despite its contradictory appearance, it is this question that will be our central concern in what follows. The very nature of philosophical thinking itself, its true domain, limits and aims, is radically reconsidered and redefined in Heidegger's later thinking. In the interview in *Der*

*Spiegel*¹, Heidegger considered *What Is Called Thinking?* as one of his least read books but nevertheless as one that addresses the most fundamental of all philosophical questions. On the French front, it was most notably Deleuze who drew attention to the very same question, via a reconsideration of what we have traditionally taken to be philosophical thinking.

With regard to the question ‘what is philosophy?’ in Deleuze, we should be careful to discern, as with Heidegger, that which *has been* called philosophy and that which *should be* regarded as good philosophy. *Difference and Repetition* (1994) deals to the largest extent with the representational image of thought of traditional philosophy and expands on four ‘iron collars’ of representation and eight postulates of traditional philosophy which accord with this classic image of thinking. In *What Is Philosophy?*, by contrast, the ‘image of thought’ has become more or less synonymous to the notion of ‘plane of immanence’ and now concerns the true nature of all proper philosophical thinking. The four philosophical illusions, which tied us to representational thinking, in *Difference and Repetition* (1994), can be regarded – in a parallel fashion to Heidegger’s *metaphysics of presence* – as Deleuze’s starting point for arriving at a novel understanding of what it means to philosophize. For Deleuze, genuine thinking requires a re-installment of an original difference and repetition, both of which cannot be thought in themselves as long as they remain subjected to the image of representation. General similarities between both authors can be said to stretch a long way. Heidegger and Deleuze are critical in comparable ways of propositional logic, dialectics and representationalism or metaphysics of presence. However, their conceptions of what constitutes true and good thinking can be argued to differ strongly. For Deleuze, *problems* are true, and good philosophy is knowledge through the inventing and thinking of concepts, which first requires the installing of an immanent plane. Philosophy, and philosophy *alone*, has an often misunderstood vocation for the creation of such true concepts, the truth of which can only be assessed relative to the respective plane.

In *What Is Called Thinking?* (2004), Heidegger focuses more than before on language as that from which Being calls us

into thinking. Language is not the sum of all words and neither is it something like a tool we use; it is rather something *originary* that speaks *itself* through us. Language is taken to play a highly determinative role in the different ways in which Being calls on us to think. By considering language as an originary speaking it allows Heidegger to dig into specific words of which we have forgotten what they once spoke. Consequently, we can move through language – especially the German² – like the ‘billowing waters of an ocean’ and retrieve a particular call to think, one which is perhaps more hidden from us now than ever before. For nowadays, everyone can speak with our language; we all have opinions, knowledge of facts, have questions and answers and we can all more or less reason logically. But does this mean that we can all think? To the contrary: precisely this modern way of thinking constitutes our forgetfulness of thought itself, thus *preventing* us from thinking, and in a way, *that* is what is most worth our thought today: the fact that we do not *yet* think. But our question remains: can we think at all?

2. Heidegger and the Call for Thinking

For Heidegger in *What Is Called Thinking?*, the primary way to move toward a new understanding of thinking is by turning back towards our past. To consider the title question requires already that we distinguish several sub-questions. Firstly, we need to ask what the words thinking and thought signify, and secondly, what meaning we have usually given to them throughout our philosophical tradition. Thirdly, we may ask how we can think rightly, a question considered almost unanswerable, and lastly and most importantly, what it is that *calls on us* to think. For Heidegger, the fourth question has a certain priority over the others. Perhaps this primacy comes from the fact that it concerns the very nature and origin of thought itself, namely that from which it originally comes to us. The difficulty, however, is to find a more or less unbiased point of departure from which we can start our contemplations. With respect to this, a great deal of Heidegger’s fascination goes to the pre-socratic philosophers, the thoughts of which he takes as

being yet unspoiled by the western philosophical tradition. It is here, then, that we may look for clues that bring a more original understanding of what it means to think closer into view. For Heidegger, one way to start such investigations is to take language for what it is. Precisely the ‘floundering in commonness’ with regard to our contemporary use of language makes Heidegger refer to it as a ‘high and dangerous game’ in which we ourselves are the stakes (Heidegger 2004, 119). It is the peculiar nature of language – which speaks through us rather than being a humanly controlled tool – which allows for a sort of retrieval of forgotten meanings. By means of a kind of philosophical etymology, Heidegger aims to retrieve what the word ‘thinking’ originally spoke before it got its permanent logical stamp through which we are still destined to consider it today. We will see that, if we are thus enabled to near a thinking about thinking in the fourth way, this would prove already to be a true thinking that is *underway*.

The old English ‘thencan’, to think, in its relation to ‘thancian’, to thank, constitutes one of the windows opened by Heidegger through which we may peek into a more original understanding of what is called thinking. The German word for memory, *Gedächtnis*, also stems from *thanc*, and it still carries a connotation to thinking and similarly a clear relation to thanking (*danken*) in it. These relations have been forgotten today but were essential to our pre-logical understanding of thinking. According to Heidegger, memory, in its original sense, is not just a thinking or recalling of past events as we are used to taking it. Moreover, it is a thinking and at the same time a thanking of past, future and now, a meditative state of heeding that which is gathered and compressed in the living present. Memory, in this respect, is essentially a *keeping safe*. This keeping is, for Heidegger, not a human capacity; it is rather something that happens. Memory is a keeping which we as humans *inhabit*. As Heidegger emphasizes: ‘Keeping alone [...] gives what is to-be-thought, [...], it frees it *as a gift*’ (Heidegger 2004, 151).

Consequently, the word thinking does not merely denote a thinking in its ordinary sense of reason and logic; it is said to have a close affinity to thanking and to memory as well. These

activities taken together constitute an original thinking that is a keeping safe and gratefully heeding of a gift. This stands in need of some further clarification. For one: what is kept in such a thankful keeping safe? For Heidegger, it is the presence itself, Being, which is heeded and most worth our thought - not as the presence of things but as a play of concealment and unconcealment. It is from the presence of that which is present that there speaks an essential duality of Being and beings, of a presence and what is given as present. This duality is already elaborated on in much earlier works by Heidegger such as *Vom Wesen des Grundes* (1928), where it is referred to as the 'ontological difference' standing at the heart of the transcendence of Dasein. This duality or difference continues to play a crucial role in Heidegger's late thinking. An essential difference with this earlier work, however, is that in *What Is Called Thinking?* (2004) the human being does not execute this transcendence; it only keeps it.

The difference between presence and that which is present – between Being and beings - is at the very essence of thinking; it is that which first allows for thought and also that which calls us into it. Heidegger's discussions on how exactly this presence comes into view phenomenologically speaking and how we are to understand this are in my opinion somewhat unsatisfactory. I think that Husserl (1997) does offer satisfying analyses of similar intentional processes in discussing the origin of the constitution of the categorial objectivity (Husserl 1997, 217-313). For some reason, this connection is not made very often in secondary literature. Although Husserl's writings are highly complicated in their own ways, I believe that a short excursion to one of them will prove fruitful. I will try to briefly interpret Husserl's analyses in *Experience and Judgment* (1997) in the light of Heidegger's ontological difference in order to clarify the latter. For this, I will focus on the 'empty judgment' and the 'judgment of existentiality' which play important roles in Husserl's investigations. The empty judgment is a judgment which is not intuitively actualized in external perception at the moment of judging, something which is possible through the sedimentation of such originally intended judgments which are then retentionally retained

while losing their connection to the originary, actual fulfillment in perception. In other words, the empty judgment allows for a peculiar temporal distance within consciousness through which the judgment is separated from the immediate perceptual givenness of the about-which of the judgment. The empty judgment can again find its original fulfillment, making the intention and the actual givenness match again, and if the ego actively runs over this passive process of matching, the judgment-content gets apprehended in a fundamentally different way than before. Husserl call this process 'substantivation', by which he means that a judgment such as 'P is s and q' which originally required multiple rays of attention (from P to s, then to q and back) can now be grasped in a single ray, namely as something like 'the *fact that*, S is p and q'. For Husserl, this is an intellectual achievement and therefore he calls this new, single object - namely this single 'fact that' - an 'objectivity of the understanding' or a 'categorical objectivity'.³ This process of constituting categorical objectivities here described in extreme simplicity is one in which consciousness apprehends an object which is not itself receptively given; it constitutes an *ideal object*. Furthermore, it is this process in which there is necessarily instituted a peculiar difference which is needed for the experience of truth and the judgment of existentiality (being). For Husserl, truth is the active experience of a peculiar synthesis of coincidence or fulfillment (Bernet 2003): the match described earlier between an anticipatory intention (of an empty judgment) and its actual fulfillment in experience. Hence, the experience of truth requires this difference, and because of this difference there is a possibility of doubt intrinsic to all judgments of truth or existentiality. For there will always be the need again and again to reassertain that the intended sense really corresponds to the actual experience, due to the fact that empty judgments have lost their connection to the original evidence. The important point for us to consider is that it is precisely here at the active synthesis of fulfillment lying at the heart of truth and the categorical object that we find the institution of a unique difference in consciousness between the intended sense and the identical object corresponding to this in experience. In the case

of a successful synthesis, we predicate the 'being' of the sense to the actually given object in perception. Here, consciousness thus transcends the objects immediately given and institutes an intellectual difference between the being of an object and the being it is.

Now let us return to our question as to what is kept in the thankful keeping safe which Heidegger has called thinking. We already noted that this kind of thinking has its connections to memory, which in turn should be viewed as a keeping safe - not only of something that has already past, but of everything which has gathered itself before us in the living present. We also noted that what we keep safe is the presence of the presented, the Being of beings, and that we as human beings only inhabit this keeping. Such a keeping is a heeding of Being; it allows Being to stand open. Consequently, we should note that thinking and Being, in this respect, really are two sides of the very same coin. For Being means presence and thinking keeps this presence of the presented and thereby frees it as a gift. As such, this duality or difference of beings in Being is also that which is most worth our thought, namely by heedfully keeping safe that which is gathered before us at any time: *beings in Being* (Heidegger 1961, 156). It is thus this duality itself which as a gift is most worthy of heedful keeping; it is what gives us 'food for thought'. By taking a halt, paying heed and keeping close to heart that which lies gathered before us at any time, we may allow the presence to be freed as a gift. What is thus most thought-provoking is the memory as a keeping, something by which we first *allow* the call to think to become manifest. This is how we are *called into thinking*. It is interesting to note that Heidegger's ideas stand in close affinity to Husserl's analyses. For Husserl, the judgment of existentiality, of predicating being, is an activity of the spontaneous understanding in which this being is produced. In other words, the ideal object which consciousness apprehends is nothing but *the activity of synthesis itself* (Husserl 1997, 207); here too, the being *is the thinking*.

Clearly, what we thus think by way of heedfully thanking is not a *that* in the sense we are today used to conceptualize thinking. To think is not to consider a problem

and to attempt to find answers to it. There are no answers to be attained in genuine thought; one does not reach a point at which one has grasped *that* which is most worth thinking. Rather, it is precisely our common disposition to use thinking in this ontic sense which is worth our thought *now*; the fact that we expect of thinking that it would yield such results. Hence, that we are today not *yet* thinking and are perhaps at the greatest distance ever from it, is most worth our thought.

It is this last phrase, 'that we do not *yet* think', which allows us to distinguish a two-folded structure at the roots of what calls us into thinking. Firstly, that we are not yet thinking means that we are called for thinking *now* because less than ever do we think in the right manner. This means that it is worth to think *because* we do not think. In a second sense, we are *always* called to think, for that which calls on us is the fact of Being of which we always already must have an understanding. Ultimately, what gives food for thought in this latter sense is *thinking itself*. What is worth thinking is the fact that things are and that we think them: precisely *that* we think is worth thinking. In other words, the thinking that comes from Being is itself what is worth to be thought; thinking *is* what is worth thinking. Although Grey says in the introduction to the translation of *What is Called Thinking* (2004) that Heidegger is 'persuaded that man is naturally inclined to thinking' (Heidegger 2004, xv), this phrasing is perhaps misleading. An inclination or affinity between thinking and Being makes it sound as if Heidegger needs such an affinity as a subjective presupposition. But the togetherness of thinking and Being is not presupposed; they are, to Heidegger, essentially one. Surely, it is not so that when we speak of Being we immediately intend to say thinking. But the meaning of thinking Heidegger is after is ultimately so tied to Being that both are inseparable. If we now compare our two senses of thinking just distinguished, what is worth thinking is precisely and simultaneously *that we think* and *that we do not think*.

This does not constitute a satisfactory answer to our question yet: *can* we think what is most worth our thought at all? It is already admitted by Heidegger that the involvement with thought is rare, meant for a small number of people only.

On top of that, whether we are capable to think at all depends on whether we can let ourselves become *involved* in the call (Heidegger 2004, 126). But hereby not much is said, since thinking in fact *is* the being involved in the very question of thinking. To think is to be involved with it and as such to be on the way toward it. For Heidegger, then, true thinking is never to ‘think the thought’, that is, it is never to *attain* the thoughtful by thinking; rather it is only in movement toward it, and this being toward *is* precisely and already to think. The situation might remain vague unless we supply thinking with multiple meanings. In one sense, one never can think what is worth thinking, as if it concerned a thematic holding in grasp of the thoughtful, a *that*. But in quite another way, one *can* properly think what is worth our thought, namely by being underway toward thinking, a grateful heeding of Being. In this latter sense, it is not at all the difficulty of thinking which stands in our way, but rather its *simplicity*: to think is simply to let lie before you, and take to the heart, beings in Being.

So how are we to understand the very possibility to think that which is most worth our thought? There seem to be several sides to this that concern us. What should strike us above all is the self-sufficiency of our reading of Heidegger. Given the close ‘affinity’ between, or better, the essential unity, of thought and Being, we can say that the fact *that we think is itself worth thinking*. Consequently, thinking and that which is to be thought come together in an apparently formal tautology. In thought, nothing in fact gives itself *but* itself. This tautology is quite clearly phrased by Heidegger: ‘the keeping *itself* is the most thought-provoking thing, [which] *itself is* its mode of giving’ (Heidegger 2004, 151 italics added). There is no essential difference between what is kept and what is given, between the thinking and that which is thought. In this sense, there seems to be a remarkable *emptiness* in thought, and neither is any-*thing* to be gained by its practice. Is the mere listening to the call, itself an empty giving, *itself* thinking? Does thinking become the mere attempt at an empty reflection on what is given to us? If the nature of thinking is indeed a formal apprehension, could it allow for more to be given than mere *intentionality itself*?⁴ It should be clear, at any rate, that

thought for Heidegger cannot be said to move forward in whatever way; it is rather circular. In line with this, Heidegger responds that in following the call from Being, we are admittedly never freed from what is asked of us; we can only respond to it by remaining underway (Heidegger 1961, 12).

Can these apparent difficulties which seem to make thinking collapse into itself harm Heidegger's true intentions? I think that it could at least be argued that the structure of thinking here considered, much like Heidegger's understanding of truth as concealment and unconcealment, is so broad and all-encompassing that it is threatened by unclarity⁵ and even by a vicious circularity. Similarly, it risks losing all bonds with the meaning we commonly ascribe to thinking. On the other hand, one might argue that we risk mistaking Heidegger's aims by reducing them to the logical structures of the argument. If we follow Samuel IJsseling's (2007) reading, we reach a different understanding, one in which thinking means that the grateful human being thinks and rethinks what is given to him, is thankful for this, and thereby participates in and completes the event of Being (IJsseling and Sevenant 2007, 41-43). Ultimately, according to this reading, to think is simply to be *thankful*; to gratefully rethink what has gathered itself before us. It is Being which deserves our gratitude and which we are called upon to keep safe.

3. Deleuze and the Plane of Immanence

Although Deleuze's writing style is a world apart from Heidegger's, to interpret the first in its relation to the latter seems almost inevitable. Deleuze's attacks on representationalism do not take the Heideggerean form of a metaphysics of presence; neither do they make use of Being, the ontological difference or Heidegger's truth notion. Whereas much of Heidegger's terminology can be grasped and understood by practicing phenomenology, much of Deleuze's vocabulary may make a metaphorical impression upon the reader. Nevertheless, his approach is perhaps more systematic than that of the later Heidegger. For Deleuze, four 'iron collars' guide traditional representational thinking and eight

postulates are said to constitute the dogmatic image of thought of which representation forms a part.⁶ It is said that we have been alienated from what it really means to think by the traditional image of thought, in its turn guided by the Same and the Similar, which resulted in a subordination of the true powers of an imageless thought: difference and repetition.

For Deleuze, good thinking is a two-sided constructivist's task; the creation of concepts and the institution of a plane of immanence. Although both are strongly related and intertwined, they are also strictly separate. According to Deleuze, the history of philosophy consists in a certain way of the institution of new immanent planes. In traditional philosophy, perhaps with the exception of Spinoza,⁷ immanence got tied up to various forms of transcendence. An example of this would be Husserl's absolute consciousness and immanent essences thereof, a model which maintains a relation of immanence to the subjective transcendent correlate of the ego. When the immanent plane is derived from or located in beings, one risks binding the autonomous immanent field to transcendent objects. There are striking similarities between Deleuze's account of this relation between transcendence and immanence and Heidegger's metaphysics of presence or onto-theology (Heidegger 2009). In both cases, there is an absolutization of something to a permanent presence whereby sameness is prioritized over difference. For Deleuze, each good philosopher of the past has instituted its own plane and many of these were made dependent on transcendence. In fact, Deleuze argues that it is impossible to think and create immanence that is not dependent on transcendence. The plane is like a 'section of chaos', a chaos which is even more original and fundamental than the plane. Ultimately, the choice will always be between a transcendence which can structure the chaos and the chaos itself (Deleuze and Guattari 1994, 51). Here, then, both authors do have a disagreement; for whereas Deleuze sets metaphysics at the heart of good philosophy, Heidegger in his later life argues that philosophy as a whole has come to an end (Heidegger 1966).

In every single case of instituting a particular immanent plane this allows for the creation of certain concepts that could

not have risen on other planes. Hence it can be said that there are multiple immanent planes. On the other hand, however, Deleuze seems to opt for a distinction between a multiplicity of immanent planes throughout time and ‘the plane of immanence [which] is always single, being itself pure variation’ (Deleuze and Guattari 1994, 39). At any rate, planes ‘change’ throughout time in whatever sense of the word; the image of thought of Plato is not the same as that of Descartes. That we ought to distinguish between the plane of immanence and concepts respectively becomes clear when the plane is characterized as the framework of thought itself, which means that it itself cannot be a concept (Deleuze and Guattari 1994, 34).

In order to understand whether we can think that which is most worth to be thought according to Deleuze, we will distinguish between two different uses of the term plane of immanence – even though Deleuze does not explicitly separate them. On the one hand, when we talk retrospectively of the various planes of past philosophers, we are conceptualizing these different frameworks of thinking and thereby we consider their multiplicity. As we have seen, we can speak of such planes as being “tied to transcendence”. On the other hand, we can also speak of *the* plane absolutely, that which is always the unthinkable framework of thought which we should conceive of as being independent from any transcendental determination. *The* plane is itself infinite, unthinkable and formal; a ‘One-All’ principle (Deleuze and Guattari 1994, 35, 39). It may appear as if *the* plane of immanence would be nothing but a formal abstraction. For Deleuze, however, the answer seems to be no: immanence is not an abstraction from transcendent experience but rather something original. It is not, as in Husserl, a flux related to a transcendent subject; it is rather a neutral, a-subjective field, presenting only events and allowing for concepts and worlds to be created.

Although the plane of immanence is pre-philosophical, it has to be ‘instituted’ by the philosopher. Thinking, for Deleuze, requires a plane to start from. We have already seen that philosophy is dependent on the institution of a plane, for it can only become philosophy by giving structure to chaos. Philosophy, in this respect, should acquire consistency without

losing difference and chaos out of sight (Deleuze and Guattari 1994, 42). At the birth of any plane, however, stands not just chaos, but also something which the author often refers to as 'stupidity' [*bêtise*] (Deleuze and Guattari 1994, 35, 39). To ground something, as Deleuze says, is to 'determine the indeterminate'. Determination does not just happen, but rises out of an empty ground, a faceless existence which is called a *groundlessness*. This groundlessness is something peculiarly intrinsic to thought, even though it often goes unrecognized.⁸ Stupidity, in this respect, is a specifically human trait, intrinsic to thinking and to any instituted plane. It is the greatest weakness of thought and *simultaneously* its highest power.

How do we understand stupidity as the highest principle of thought while at the same time being the groundlessness of it? Czech phenomenologist Patočka discusses the relations between meaning, significance and meaninglessness which may help us grasp the essence of Deleuze's paradoxical phrasing. According to Patočka, the Fregean distinction between *meaning* and *significance* supports a classic metaphysical dichotomy, as they are understood to make reference possible to autonomous, objective qualities. If reality is understood as bearing such objective significances, whether inside or outside 'reality', then the *meaningfulness* of objects is ultimately guaranteed by these objective meanings. Consequently, a full loss of meaning is never truly uncovered, as the meaningfulness of reality is inherently given according to the particular rules which stand for determining significance. The history of philosophical metaphysics is for Patočka, as for Heidegger, bound to treating meaning as having objective value, which safeguards the meaningfulness of the world. However, meaninglessness as an experience is never completely alien to any philosopher, whether he reflects on it or not. Thinking, as it first rises in the Greek *polis* with Socrates (Patočka 1996, 62-63), is *grounded* in the experience of a 'shakiness of meaning' and all thinking is a way of dealing with and often an attempt to overcome the intrinsic possibility of a complete loss of meaning. The philosophical tradition is thus regarded by Patočka as ways of dealing with meaninglessness, which is characterized by Patočka as 'care for the soul'.⁹

Patočka's loyalty to Heidegger is more evident than Deleuze's; it is only through our experience of *meaninglessness* – compare *anxiety* (Heidegger 2012, 225-228), *boredom* (Heidegger 1929, 5-6) or *Abgrund*,¹⁰ that we achieve an explicit relation to Being, by which genuine thought is first evoked. Care for the soul, in this respect, is the philosophical result of the unconcealment of Being which runs in a parallel fashion to Heidegger's metaphysics of presence and in a different way to Deleuze's representationalism.

Understood from the viewpoint of Patočka's *meaninglessness*, we can see firstly how stupidity can be the greatest weakness of thought. Thought rises from the experience of a nullification of meaning or ground, and has to take this as its starting point for all attempts to determine that which has already given itself as inherently indeterminable. As Deleuze says: 'No image of thought can be limited to a selection of calm determinations, and all of them encounter something that is abominable in principle' (Deleuze and Guattari 1994, 54). Consequently, it is clear that with regard to stupidity as *weakness* there can be said to be hardly any distance from Heidegger or Patočka. That stupidity is also thought's highest power, is to say that it is prerequisite to thinking; it is what comes before it. Thought is thus *grounded groundlessly*: stupidity is its weakness as its groundlessness; it is its strength as its ground. Deleuze immediately follows up his discussion of stupidity with a quote from Heidegger: 'what gives us most cause for thought is that we do not yet think' (Deleuze 1994, 275). We should, however, be careful to take this sentence here in its Heideggerean fashion. What this quote in fact says in this context is that stupidity as groundless ground for thinking is the ultimate cause for thought. 'That we do not yet think', this means here: thinking rises from an abyss of non-thinking. Before thought, we thought not. This is contrary to Heidegger, who as we have seen also saves the more literal sense of the sentence; that we, twentieth century-born human beings, have the task set to reconsider what it really means to think.

To come back to my central concern again: *the* plane of immanence, as Deleuze himself calls it, is what must be thought but in fact cannot be thought (Deleuze and Guattari

1994, 59). It is the base of all possible planes, the pure and unthinkable immanence in every thinking. How again to understand these awkward phrasings? Husserl makes a distinction between inconceivability and unimaginability which may help us understand this. According to Husserl in *Ideas I*, formal or ideal concepts, which allow for mathematical precision or exact determination, are such that one cannot in fact 'see' them (Husserl 1983, 166). That is to say, their content is essentially different from the nature of things as experienced in simple, perceptual intuition, in that the latter allow for intuitive fulfillment in external perception whereas the former do not. Consequently, it is perfectly possible to *conceive* of, say, a color without extension, but one cannot *imagine* it, that is, intuitively fulfill such an intention in imaginative intuition (Soffer 1990). We could say that *the* plane of immanence in Deleuze's philosophy is idealized and non-intuitable. Certainly *the* plane of immanence is conceivable, but it cannot be fulfilled in intuition. This does not imply that Deleuze thinks it would be unreal. We can now understand why Deleuze calls it *the unthinkable within thought*, stating that it is the most intrinsic to it and at the same time the most extrinsic. It is never to be within the reach of thought, even though it is always inherent to it and most deserves our attention. Regardless of this, there still lies a single most important task for philosophers: to show that *the* plane is there, even though it is never to be thought. The philosopher should try to think that which most deserves its attention, thus showing the *unthought within thought* (Deleuze and Guattari 1994, 59-60).

4. Conclusion: What Must be Thought, What Cannot be Thought

The interpretations I have given of Heidegger's as well as Deleuze's reconsiderations of thinking show the complex structure of both expositions. Both Heidegger and Deleuze naturally hold that thinking is possible, but neither wants to commit to a form of correspondence and hence their characterizations of thinking are bound to become difficult and unfamiliar. Heidegger's break with tradition seems the most

radical; thinking does not learn or attain any-thing; it only keeps. Thinking is a keeping and heeding of the event of Being. By heeding, thinking helps to bring the event of Being to completion. The togetherness of Being and thinking in Heidegger is so strong that it appears an essential unity. However, the price for Heidegger's radical break is quite high. What Tugendhat (1967) says about Heidegger's extension of our traditional understanding of truth so as to make it so wide that it risks losing all of its traditional meaning, might equally apply to the notion of thinking here discussed. With respect to what is most worth our thought in Heidegger, I have argued for a two-folded structure. Firstly, that our generation does not yet think and has the greatest difficulty to do it constitutes one side of what gives food for thought now. However, what at all times is worth our thought is the call for thinking itself, regardless of how it is manifest to us. We are called into thinking and to think about this is already to listen to it and thereby to pay it heed. Thought in this sense is not after knowledge which it can or cannot attain; it merely keeps safe beings in Being. We have seen that this exposition of thinking is threatened by circularity. Regardless of this, we may conclude that to think in this most important sense is an essential possibility for every human being rather than an impossibility. Thinking is a call from Being, and whoever is related in whatever way to Being – whoever is *Dasein* – has the essential possibility of proper thinking.

With respect to *What is Philosophy?* (1994), I have shown that for Deleuze thinking primarily means to create and invent concepts and to institute a plane. Good thinking does justice to the original forces forgotten by the traditional image of thought, difference and repetition, which form the abyss around which thought is bound to circle. Clearly, thinking is an essential possibility for Deleuze as a creative process. What is most worth our attention is *the* plane of immanence, the unthought within thought which by definition cannot be thought. This unthought is not a senseless abstraction; it is rather intrinsic to the structure of thinking.

I have already pointed out important agreements between both thinkers with regard to the classic picture of

thought, characterized by means of metaphysics of presence, representationalism, propositional logic and dialectics. It is only on the basis of these commonalities that both set off into different directions with regard to redefining the meaning of thinking. One important similarity we may now add to this list pertains to that which is most worth our thought in both philosophies. For Heidegger as for Deleuze, what is most worth our thought is essentially *unthinkable*; hence it is not *that* which is most worth our thought. In the final account, for Deleuze as for Heidegger, the philosopher's task is not to think the impossible: rather it is to participate, to create, to accomplish, to keep and to heed. Thinking does not set out to let something out there enter it and to subsequently gain knowledge about that thing. Consequently, it is ultimately neither an intrinsic impossibility nor a tautology which we ought *itself* to think and to let enter our minds. No: the impossibility must not and cannot be attained directly; we should rather say that it should be *circled around*. By regarding thinking as an *activity*, we can now think how we can think what is most worth our thought even though to think it is impossible. For Deleuze, the most important task for any philosopher is the activity of *showing* that which is most worth our thought even though it cannot be thought. For Heidegger, what is most worth our thought is the activity of *heedfully keeping* that which lies before us. For both authors, then, despite all difficulties, that which is most worth our thought can indeed be thought in this sense: that we can actively participate in the problem of thinking.

NOTES

¹ The interview bears the title 'Only a God Can Save Us' (Heidegger 1966).

² Heidegger conceived the German language to be the most suitable for doing philosophy due to its close affinity to the Greek language (Heidegger 1966, 62).

³ For the sake of simplicity I have here skipped many steps in this process of objectification, such as the constitution of the 'state of affairs' and the role of the 'two-membered predicative synthesis' – not to mention the passive syntheses also operative at the same time. For the core part here discussed see Husserl (1997, 237-239).

⁴ Derrida uses this phrasing in his introduction to Husserl's *Origin of Geometry* (Derrida 1962, 139).

⁵ Ernst Tugendhat argues this in the introduction to his dissertation (Tugendhat 1967, 4-5).

⁶ I will not expand on the postulates of the image of thought here. For the briefest summary see Deleuze (1994, 167-168).

⁷ Deleuze is known to refer to Spinoza as the 'prince of philosophers' (Deleuze and Guattari 1994, 60).

⁸ Among the eight postulates of the classic image of thought Deleuze posits the reduction of the trinity of stupidity, malevolence and madness to the single figure of external error. Error, in this respect, is only the failure of good sense within a framework of presupposed common sense, rather than being recognized as a necessary structure of thought (Deleuze and Guattari 1994, 150).

⁹ Care for the soul is one of the main topic in many of Patočka's works (Patočka 1996, 1998).

¹⁰ For a brief introduction to Heidegger's idea of *Abgrund* see Backman (2005, 175-184).

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From a Non-Formal Ethics of Values in Scheler to the Thresholds Zones in Waldenfels: Ethical Implications of the Understanding of Personality

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Abstract

This research intends to develop the ethical implications of the concept of personality through the phenomenological approaches of Scheler and Waldenfels. For both philosophers, an ethics based on a moral formalism would be very pernicious to the concept of personality and even for ethics itself. For ethics, it would bring a kind of arbitrariness and for the person a sort of depersonalization. In order to advance a concept of ethics grounded on the values of a person, Scheler introduces the idea of God's love for us as intuitively given atwart the values of holiness itself. From this given intuition, Scheler will build up the idea of good in itself as a model, so that a person could form a good personality through an accurate rank of values. Waldenfels would say that even the personality grounded on such mystical experiences would have the consequence of a depersonalization of the person in his relation with the other, the world, and with himself. Waldenfels will find, through a genealogy of the constitution of order thresholds zones that will prevent a borrowed concept of personality only from an inside, or an outside. As an open process of what happen with us, the personality cannot be static, but latent as it is done responsively.

Keywords: Scheler, Waldenfels, personality, ethics, threshold, responsivity

1. The givenness of values and its bearers

Max Scheler, in his book (*Formalism*), makes a criticism of Kant's erroneous identification of goods with values, and Kant's opinion that values are to be viewed as abstracted from goods (Scheler 1973, 9). Nevertheless, Scheler agrees with Kant's

rejection of all ethics of goods and purposes as having false bases. For Scheler, according to Kant (Kant 2011, 17), if we consider a dependence on goods from the relation to a realm of existing goods or evils we, also, need to affirm that the goodness, or depravity of the will is dependent on their particular contingent existence of this realm. For Kant, it would be an absurdity. All ethics would be based on historical experience so that it would be impossible to follow all its changes. For example, if a thing changes in the realm of things it would necessarily change in the realm of goods. We would be faced with the “relativism of ethics” (Scheler 1973, 10).

Scheler says the insight of Kant posited that the ethics must exclude as presuppositions all the concepts of good and bad and all values of a no-formal nature. Notwithstanding, by correctly setting aside actual goods in the foundations of ethics, Kant, also, excludes from consideration the values which represent themselves in goods (Scheler 1973, 11). Also, every no-formal ethics would be characterized as an ethics of goods and purposes (Scheler 1973, 12).

For Scheler, a value cannot simply be derived from characteristics and properties which do not belong to the sphere of “value-phenomena.” (Scheler 1973, 14) Scheler writes: “The value itself always must be ‘intuitively given’ or must refer back to that kind of givenness.” (Scheler 1973, 15) As an example, it would be senseless to ask for the common properties of all blue or red things, since they have nothing in common except their blueness or redness; so, it is senseless to ask for the common properties of good or evil. That means, if a fire extinguisher loses its chemical inside or even loses its color outside, red will be always red. The same happens with good and evil, no matter if we become more tempered or nicer, or even if the legislation constantly change its rule; the value will always have its own distinct relation as value-qualities independent of a realm of goods that can suffer change in history.

Going ahead, Scheler says that “all values are non-formal qualities of contents possessing a determinate order of ranks with respect to higher and lower.” (Scheler 1973, 17) To attest that the values have specific contents and a determinate order, he concludes that values are true objects (Scheler 1973,

19), and are different from things and feelings. For example, independent of the disposition of color and objects of a masterpiece, and how we feel about it, the value of it will not be measured by the intensity of colors or the level of feelings about it. Goods, like a masterpiece, are thoroughly permeated by values. Thus, it is given in its way of appearance with its own internal order. As the object appears independent of the content we ascribe to it, so the good appears independent of our conception of the realm of goods. We can say that the objects is the bearer of meaning and not that the meaning is the bearer of the object. In the same way, we can say that the goods are bearers of values.

The value “good” (Scheler 1973, 25) appears, by way of essential necessity, on the act of realizing the value which is the highest. The value “evil” is the value that appears on the act of realizing the lowest value. First, that means that morally good is the realizing act which agrees with what is preferred. Second, the act realizes a positive value within the higher level of value-ranks. The purest good is given in the act of that kind of willing which occurs immediately prior to a choice. Different from Kant, Scheler conceives good and evil as values of the person and not exclusive to a fulfillment of a law or will. Scheler says: [For Kant], “the value of the person is determined by the value of the will, and not the value of the will by the value of the person”. (Scheler 1973, 28) Scheler will not say that the bearers of moral values are the concrete acts of the person, but the directions of his moral “to-be-able-to” (Scheler 1973, 28-29) which precedes any idea of duty, and yet is the condition of the possibility of duty. In conceiving the goods and evil the values of a person, Scheler amplified the moral values as belonging to the person, including will and deeds.

The phenomenology of values and even the phenomenology of emotive life are completely independent of logic, having an autonomous area of objects and research (Scheler 1973, 64). If it would be dependent on logic, the nature would be a thing controlled, would be considered as hostile, and as having a chaotic disposition. A phenomenology of values presupposes a cognition of the essence of good, not the presupposition of it, but the cognition of its givenness in its

interconnection. The interconnections are given like essences (Scheler 1973, 68) and not as a product of understanding. They are not made, but intuited. For Scheler, the a priori of the value-content as the content of essences of the world is opened up (Scheler 1973, 73), and the distinction between “thing in itself” and “appearances” breaks down. Thus, the value-content has its own interconnection (logic). For example, the value cannot be based on the necessity of an ought. On the contrary, only what is good can become a duty; it is because it is good that it is necessary ought. It is the oughtness that must be founded in values (Scheler 1973, 82).

The height of a value is “given” in its essence through the act of preferring (Scheler 1973, 87) that is different from “choosing” in general. The act of preferring occurs in the absence of all conation, choosing, and willing. For example, when I prefer love, instead of hate, it will not be a matter of choice, but an attitude of living in the act of love.

The values are higher the more they endure and the less they partake in extension and divisibility. As Scheler says: “A value is enduring through its quality of having the phenomenon of being able to exist through time, no matter how long its thing-bearer may exist.” (Scheler 1973, 91) The values are higher the less they are founded through other values and the deeper the satisfaction connected with feeling them. For example, I love is absolutely higher than I am feeling good today, because it causes a deeper satisfaction connected with feeling. Thus, when I am feeling good I not necessary need to have love for it, but when I love, the “feeling good”, may be one of the bearers of this loving feeling. The values are also higher the less the feeling of them is relative to the positing of a specific bearer of feeling and preferring. According to Scheler: “The essential (i.e., original) characteristic of a “higher value” is, then, its being less “relative”; of the “highest” value, its being an ‘absolute’ value.” (Scheler 1973, 99-100) The value must be considered higher as the more absolute it can be seen. We can perceive that some values are independent of all other values (self-values) and others possess phenomenal relatedness to other values (consecutive values) which is necessary for their being (Scheler 1973, 103).

According to Scheler, the laws that we have in our minds are not given as laws in the form of perception, of being conscious of, but they are experienced as fulfilled or broken in the execution of acting (Scheler 1973, 141). For example, the acting artist is controlled by the aesthetic laws without applying them. The acting criminal breaks laws and experiences himself as breaking them. In both cases, it is not necessarily a thought for the realizing act, they are recognized in practice. They must be confirmed in practice. As Scheler says: "Confirmation lies, rather, as a fact between the moral tenor and a deed, that is, the deed is experienced as a confirmation of the moral tenor in a special and practical experience of fulfillment." (Scheler 1973, 120) No one will be judged for having bad thoughts (we have them all the time) but by their fulfillment into practice. The basic moral tenor possesses a realm of no-formal values which is independent of all experiences and any success in deeds. These values are objectives and they are given a priori.

The feeling as bearers of values

The morality must be based on values that are objects and not in blind subjective imperatives, or on the disapproval or approval of the usefulness in society, as the utilitarianism would believe. Also, the disapproval or approval must be grounded in values. We cannot try to find a logic that measure all the values through conscience, or that is based on useful economy, for the values itself already have its own logic.

It cannot be said that the value-judgments express an *ought-connection* (Scheler 1973, 183), a should-be, instead of an ontological connection, saying that good and evil just would represent different kinds of this ought. For example, this picture is beautiful, doesn't mean that it should be beautiful. In the same way, this is good doesn't mean it should be, because good is good by itself as the beautifulness has its own aesthetic value as well. The moral values and the aesthetic values as another's values have its own onto-logical connection; they don't need any ought-connection to prove its essence.

According to Scheler, neither the concept of duty, nor of norm can serve as a point of departure for ethics. Much less can they function as a measure (Scheler 1973, 190) for the establishment of the possible distinction between good and evil. The concept of duty brings a necessitation that is subjectively conditioned, and not founded objectively in the essential value of the matter of fact. As Scheler says: “The mere ‘from within’ does not give the idea of duty any higher dignity (Scheler 1973, 193)”. The idea of a measurement or a foundation of values from inside brings an element of *blindness* (Scheler 1973, 192) that can shorten the surpass of the values itself.

For Scheler, every ought has its foundation in values, but values are not founded in the ideal ought. From this comprehension, Scheler draws two important axioms: “The being of a positive value is itself a positive value; the being of a negative value is itself a negative value.” (Scheler 1973, 206) The evaluation of values is due by itself and not by an internal law that comes from within. The idea of duty should be place in an attitude founded on values and not in a duty that is floating in the air (Scheler 1973, 211).

As the values have its own givenness and they are given in feelings, it does not follow that the values exist only as they are felt or can be felt (Scheler 1973, 244). The feelings are bearers of values and not their essence.

The history of philosophy has caused a prejudice in making a division between reason and sensibility (Scheler 1973, 253). In doing so, the rational was constituted as absolute and a priori; whereas, emotions was constituted as relative and empirical. Interpreting Pascal, Scheler says that the “reason of the heart” (Scheler 1973, 255) shows the givenness present in the feelings. Thus, Scheler will uphold a priori non-formal (material) on the feelings, with its interconnections, so that they can bear the values in its essences. What we feel, we feel immediately. That “what” (Scheler 1973, 259) of the feeling is a value-quality that comes over us as its manner of givenness. We are not previously conscious of feeling itself, but there is an execution of feeling that requires an objective reflection that should be based on the value-quality itself and not on the feeling-state (the intensity we feel it).

It is not the changing ideas about values (e.g. love and justice) that must be investigated, but the forms of moral attitudes themselves and their experienced order of ranks. Also, it is not the action that is considered noble or useful, or conducive to well-being, but the rules by which such values themselves were preferred or placed after (Scheler 1973, 302). Scheler writes: “The rules of preferring that belong to an old ethos are not abolished as a new ethos *grows*. Only a relativizing of the whole of the old ethos occurs.” (Scheler 1973, 305) Scheler, with this phenomenological view, tries to avoid relativism and absolutism. Absolutism by its formalism disregards a no-formal givenness of values and the relativism disregards the a priori of value itself. Both absolutist and relativist ethics disregard a priori givenness of values.

Taking the values as the base, the execution of all willing based on loving, for example, is always pleasant, and all willing based on hate is always unpleasant. It doesn't matter if I feel pleasant when my hate is satisfied or unpleasant when my love is not corresponded. That appears as a paradox that Scheler tries to solve, considering the fact that there is a conterstriving against positive values felt as positive values and that there is a striving for negative. According to Scheler, we need to look for the essential condition of it. First of all, the values that we are talking about are values of a person. Thus, the self-destructive character of evil rests on the idea that the evildoer must destroy himself and his own world. That means that this false value is self-destructive and, for this reason, will destroy the character of a person, and will pervert the feeling that accompanied it. Therefore, concludes Scheler: “Every preferring of a higher value to a lower one is accompanied by an increase in the depth of the positive feeling. Every placing after of a higher value is accompanied by an increase in the depth of a negative feeling.” (Scheler 1973, 356) That follows necessary that, if the value is good it will be accompanied by positive feeling and if it is not good, although it will cause a transitory pleasure, the feeling will be in its nature a negative feeling. Thus, the paradox is solved by the nature of the value itself that will always invoke positive bearers (feeling), and the

feeling, in turn, will reveal a true nature of the values that our subjective cannot reveal.

For Scheler just a good person is truly blissful (Scheler 1973, 359). The blissfulness is a value of a person and can produce virtue. Thus, happiness cannot be based on the will; we cannot chose to be happy, or conceive pleasure as a way to be happy, or even find in revenge a satisfaction that lead us to happiness. The blissfulness is a feeling of the good person. Even if trouble comes or misfortunes, etc., a good person will not lose the feeling that he is doing the right thing. An example would be the early Christians when they were about to be killed by the lions in the Coliseum, before their death, they would sing psalms of joy.

Formalism and Person

Scheler conceives a degradation (Scheler 1973, 371) of a person an ethics based on formalism, because it subordinates a person to the formalism, to an impersonal *nomos* under whose domination he can become a person only through obedience. What should be a person in Scheler's conception?

The person is an essential unity, a concrete essence (Scheler 1973, 383) of being of acts of different essences that, per se, precedes all essential act-differences; it is the foundation of all possible essential differences. That means that a person is not an empty "point of departure" (Scheler 1973, 384) of acts, but he is the foundation, a concrete being. It follows as well that, abstract act-essences can be considered concrete only by belonging to the essence of the person. So, a moral that are not based on a concrete person is abstractly floating in the air.

The person is not behind or above acts, but experiences himself (Scheler 1973, 385) only as a being that executes acts in the way his whole person is contained in every complete act, varying together through every act, but without being exhausted in his being through the act itself. For Scheler, the identity of a person lies in this becoming different through a quality direction. According to Scheler, we cannot grasp the nature of a person considering just past experiences, because

the person lives his existence in the experiencing of his possible experiences (Scheler 1973, 386).

The ego for Scheler is a function and is perceived in inner perception, consequently, it is an object because it is perceived, whereas the person is not perceived, because he lives in his act and the act cannot be grasped, or to be an object of inner perception. As Scheler writes: "First, all functions are ego-functions; they never belong to the sphere of the person. Functions are psychic; acts are non-psychic. Acts are executed; functions happen by themselves." (Scheler 1973, 388) That does not mean that acts are psychic, but that both act and person are psychophysically indifferent (Scheler 1973, 389). Therefore, a person can perceive himself as well as his lived body, and the exterior world, but that does not imply that a person can become an object of representation or perception.

Then, Scheler presents certain characteristics of the person. To be a person it is necessary to have a sound mind so that someone can "be-able-to-understand" (Scheler 1973, 478) in a certain way that he can execute intentional acts that are bound by a unity of sense. A person that is not able-to-understand cannot be considered a person, because he cannot exercise his autonomy as a free bearer of values. That means, for example, children during their early years, people with mental problems cannot act as a concrete person in concrete acts. Next, Scheler brings the idea of belonging. A person who experiences his lived body as yours, as belonging to himself is a person. The concept of person with the idea of "belonging" (Scheler 1973, 489), phenomenologically, forms a condition for the idea of property. That implies that a slave cannot be a person, because he is unable to perform his freedom as having a lived body and property. The slave is not able-to-do just because he is a property of the master. This idea of person will drive Scheler to the conclusion that the personality can be conceived beyond an ego-being and a soul. For example, slaves, as well as children both have an ego-being and a soul, but it does not follow that they also can be characterized as a person.

Intersubjectivity based on the concept of person

The person is the touchstone of all ethical ideas. This peculiar individual value-content is the basis, and should be, for all ethics concepts. This source is based on the God's love for us: "[...] so to speak, which God's love has of me and which God's love draws and bears before me insofar as this is directed to me." (Scheler 1973, 390) This is intuited as a good-in-itself that the historicity, logical argumentation and knowledge cannot extinguish. It can lose its base and be conducted to mistakes if, otherwise, our concept of person would be based on an objectivism of any kind.

According to Scheler, the understanding of the good-in-itself is good-in-itself for me, in the sense that it brings this good for me. Scheler designates this value-essence as well as "personal salvation" (Scheler 1973, 489). This personal salvation does not mean that I do not need others, but the other person can show me the path to my salvation through his love for me and my love for him. This reciprocal (Scheler 1973, 535) love serves as the foundation of solidarity (Scheler 1973, 512) that is the base for a community of love. For Scheler, all of society must be based on the principle of solidarity, which in turn reveals the individual value-content of a person. This idea intends to avoid an ethic based on institution, state, a singular person as the ideal person, law and everything that is not essentially based on the person as good-in-itself. For Scheler, any kind of foundation that is not based on the individual value-content of a person, even if we base the foundation on a collective idea of a community as ideal one, we are causing a depersonalization of the person and that will be based instead on a kind of an ultimate formal ought.

The idea of reciprocity is not connected essentially with interest, contract or an object of will, but it rests on the acts that require as ideal correlates responses of love (Scheler 1973, 535-537). The one who loves not only can bring salvation to himself in realizing a positive-value, but also, in loving, becomes a bearer of such value for the beloved. That means that responding love, as love, also bears the positive act-value of love (Scheler 1973, 537).

A concrete person that is loved by God, with God's unchangeable love, through his intimate relation to God, brings about the most indivisible value, called holiness. The value of holiness brings the love that I experience in God to concrete acts. Through these concrete acts we realize ourselves as a person in loving others. This solidarity propitiates the very idea of a person as having an intimate sphere as a social one (Scheler 1973, 561).

When a person becomes a bearer of the love in the act of loving, he also can become a model in the sense of this value. "And we have maintained that the divine goodness itself becomes indirectly a possible model-content only in the forms of these types of the value-person." (Scheler 1973, 590) This means, if these types and their ranks are "fulfilled" (Scheler 1973, 589) in factual models it also follows that they are objectively good, and if that does not happen, they are bad. Here, we will find the necessity of the effectiveness of models (Scheler 1973, 583) realized by a concrete person based on the God's love for him, and, through his concrete actions, can be able to become a bearer of such values. In becoming a bearer he also could become a model. This model is not to be obeyed or imitated, but considered as a bearer of the truly model that we can find intuitively in God through the highest value of holiness. For Scheler, it does not mean we can grasp the essence of God's Love, but in becoming a bearer and not a mere copy, we can share through the value of holy the experience we have with God.

Even though Scheler avoided the reduction of the concept of person to an oughtness, he still reduced it to the essence of God's love for us. That means that without God, a person would not exist, much less an acting person. This idea would be very tempting for theologians who conceive of God as the creator of all things. Nevertheless, despite our belief that a thing was created by God; it does not follow that this thing is essentially connected to the Creator; the creature may have a total different identity. We are not saying that the phenomenological mystical experience would not influence a person in his concrete actions; we are saying that it would be very problematic to reduce all ethical achievements considered

good to a mystical experience. We are not saying that we could not have religious ethics based on such individual or collective experiences; we are saying that a descriptive theology would be arbitrary for the ethos of a people, for the concept of personality, and even for the religious mystical experience itself.

Scheler places all possibilities of the good of our phenomenological relationship with God's love for us. Again, we are not saying that we cannot build religious ethics based on a mystical experience that influences our concrete acts, we are saying that it could contradict the idea of the personality itself. In other words, so many things can influence the personality, like institutions, ideologies, religions, cultures, laws and so on. However, all these factors influence our personality but do not exhaust the personality itself. How could we conceive the concept of personality without it be attached or reduced to a law, to God, to a sound mind, or to possession?

2. The thresholds

Analyzing the genealogy of order, Waldenfels also develops a concept of personality neither borrowed from outside (God, laws, institutions...), nor from inside (subjectivity), but through an open process whereby the personality will constantly be faced with thresholds revealing its margins, its twilight zones. The margins will disable a static personality because leaves the personality itself responsive. As responsive it comes before our will or thought, it develops from its way of givenness. Waldenfels recognizes the outside and inside influences on personality, but the personality has also a surplus, a doubleness that goes above-and-beyond.

According to Waldenfels, there is a surplus and a decorative exuberance despite all functionality in our actions, when we cook, play soccer or swim, for instance, we can overpass a mechanical activity. Waldenfels quotes André Leroi-Gourhan in his work "Gesture and speech" to show a kind of functional plasticity we have:

"There always remains a certain 'functional plasticity' (G&S 301) and an 'envelope of style', whose particularizing effects lead to the

omnipresence of 'aesthetics' (G&S 299ff.). 'The purest art always plunges deepest; only the uppermost tip emerges from the plinth of flesh and bone without which it could not exist' (G&S 273) (Waldenfels 1996, 8)".

Waldenfels is interested in the possibilities that emerge from the threshold of our lives. These thresholds are deeply imbricated in our being so that they are unavoidable (Waldenfels 2006, 39-45) and force demand challenges upon our safe ground. Normally, we establish a comfort zone that prevents us to see the thresholds that surround us. It is easy to lose sight of the thresholds when we walk through the streets of our cities, performing the common daily activities. For example, going to the bakery, going to the supermarket, working in our jobs, walking our dog, etc., but if instead, we go to a forest everything becomes different. The straight street well signposted and organized disappears and our points of reference used to indicate the roads, are no longer present. We are in a wild place. It is no less different in our megalopolis, and even in the cities we don't know quite well. Easily, it shows the chaos of their economic and social architectural structures. Nevertheless, we don't need to go to a forest and to another city to experience the thresholds. They are connected with transition experiences (Waldenfels 1996, 11) like falling asleep and awakening, health or sickness, leaving and arriving. Our comfort zone provides a logic that blurs this threshold area through a science of cause and effect, constructing instead a kind of transition synthesis.

For Waldenfels, the thresholds represent a gap whereby our logic cannot reach. This gap brings new possibilities that a one-sided logic is unable to demonstrate. This gap or fissure will be transformed as a field, area or even a zone of exploration by Waldenfels.

From a safe ground we cannot take possession of what lies beyond the threshold (Waldenfels 1996, 12). What lies beyond offers possibilities that are accessed by its own way of givenness and that can be covered by our one-side objectivity. Through this threshold zone, Waldenfels will reveal some ethics consequences that we can find in the dynamism of a responsive ethics. The responsive movement occurs in my relationship

with the world and this relation is asymmetrical (Waldenfels 1996, 18), because when I respond, I precisely do not do the same thing as the other person does. The action of response celebrates always a bodily encounter (Waldenfels 1996, 23). What comes towards me reveals its originality, its own form, its own weight, its own movement, its own temporal rhythm, and its own surrounding world (Waldenfels 1996, 22).

In the responsive event there is certain order which is not an objective order elaborated by our subjectivity. Waldenfels will call this the order of the responsive rationality (Waldenfels 1996, 24) because it plays a role in our own rationality, but it is not rationalized. This responsive rationality happens during an event (action) and affects the actual order. Something comes to our mind, it questioned us, and we precisely don't know how to answer it, like a religion experience or simply a material experience like encountering a smell, or just viewing a landscape. This something remains noticeableness and questionableness so that we can say it is smelling, seeing or thinking, but when we say it is smelling this "it" already brings an interpretation. Waldenfels is not proposing a chase of something free of interpretation, but he tries to see through the responsive movement a possibility that does not encapsulate the richness of the event himself.

The marginalization of orders

When a question comes to our mind, how is an order formed? Waldenfels calls our attention to the terms relevancy or importance. For Waldenfels, three directions of reference are open to us: (a) emergence – something sets itself off from a background; (b) appearance – something presents itself to someone; (c) concomitance – something occurs with something else (Waldenfels 1996, 31).

With the first point (a) something sets itself off from a background because it is important and attracts our attention. Here exists a threshold between the known and the unknown. Nothing until now can be considered a matter of logical determination, because the event just happened toward me. The second relation (b) something appears important to

someone. Before we can make it a theme, it is first a spontaneous occurrence (Waldenfels 1996, 32), a form of self-organization not controlled by an ego. The third relation (c) reviews the occurrence of the things. In the occurrences of things (the relation from one thing to another thing), something becomes important only when it becomes a theme within a context already established where it can be reserved. Waldenfels writes: "The thematization that brings something into the center of focus creates contexts and has a marginalization as its reverse side." (Waldenfels 1996, 34) The regulation of coherence and continuation, and the repression of others reveals selections and exclusions so that a possible change of theme immediately colors its surrounding field.

The margin concept allows Waldenfels to push to the edge the established field such that a new possibility can arise. The event itself brings such originality that happens inevitably towards us. This event cannot be graspable, and always will remain somewhat marginal. That means, this margin concept, in its givenness, is not a new established order in the field (or a new field itself), but represent how an order comes to being. The event that brings the possibility of order in a certain field is itself inevitable and marginal. The constitution process of the order itself will leave always the field open to a new constant process. Thus, a definitive order contradicts its own process. The process itself with its margins gives birth to new orders, and these new orders carry margins so that another order can arise.

As the "lifeworld" cannot be controlled in its givenness, we find through order an illusion that believes that would be possible to form a set of norms capable of arresting the margins itself, normally we characterize it as something pure, such as pure order, pure reason, pure fact, etc. In the attempt to make something more pure – with no margins – we seek greater generalization concerning our rules. The more general the norms become, the more strongly they tend toward the negative form of coercion (Waldenfels 1996, 49).

Selections and exclusions represent the existent tension in the pursuit of the building structure of orders. Important and unimportant emerge in our interaction with the event that

comes inevitable towards us. It follows that orders take part constantly in our actions, but it does not follow that they are definitive once they appear. The orders that arise through the existent tension in selections and exclusions produce their own boundaries (Waldenfels 1996, 51).

For Waldenfels, the origin of the order does not emerge from a kind of teleological order in the cosmos whereby laws are not to be enacted, but discovered (Waldenfels 1996, 53). A cosmos as a total order means that everything fits within it. Thus, the lower beings subordinate themselves to the higher, according to the degrees of perfections and values are found better than others, and that the concept of person is tied to the order of the cosmos or to a god, and not to his “lifeworld”. If we remove the margins we fragment the self in his essential way of living, and consequently we impose instead another personality borrowed from the law, from a god or even from the nature. Disregarding the intertwining of the person with the world, with the other, himself and even with his mystical experiences, and be unable to look for its margins that emerge from such experiences, would conduct us to a depersonalization of the person. A universal point of view is merely chosen (Waldenfels 1996, 62), so that we can follow it or not. Moreover, there is no universalization without facing its margins and thresholds, it exercises pressure by subjecting everything to that viewpoint, disregarding the one-sidedness and origin of this viewpoint. When limited fields of experience and ways of life expand, and combine into a cosmic universal order, no room is left for a personality in its threshold, creativity, and spontaneity. No room is left outside the limits traced by the universalization itself.

Waldenfels is not stepping out of reason, but he tries to show its threshold in the sense of even searching an amplification of our capacity of perceiving and helping the problem of conceiving the morality as an open relational process with the world, the other and even with ourselves. Husserl in the paragraph 53 from his book “Crisis” speaks that the subject is “swallowed up” (Husserl 1976, 180) in his constitutive process. That means there is a split of the self in the sense of its constitutive developments. Waldenfels speaks of a doubling of

the subject (Waldenfels 1996, 80). Both Husserl and Waldenfels are striving against an objectivism that is imposed against the self whereby creating a kind of imputation of a personality.

The person characterized as having the right and duty, guiding itself autonomously by such universal moral guidance, and that denied certain genealogical ontology becomes merely a descendant of an ancient substance or a substrate that determines the basis of everything (Waldenfels 2006, 123). The person cannot be seeing just from his group, institution, the rules he follows, or the creed he believes. The person should be seeing in his original presence as an unrepeatable one, a double one, a mysterious one (never completed deciphered), skilled, creative, provocative, rational and emotive, the one that can trace rules and go beyond. The person must be seeing by its marginal side. The mask (*persona*) in its outside must face the inside whereby the inside and outside are intertwined, and the person appears with his claims (*Ansprüche*), claiming his presence as interrogative and responsive.

The twilight zone

For Waldenfels, the twilight zone of any order allows a criticism upon the order so that it shows its thresholds. It does not mean that Waldenfels defends a kind of chaos, but he tries to review the genealogy of every order, the variety of claims, and the dynamicity of our response through them. An order does not need to end a process or to be self sufficient to be validated, but it has margins that can serve as a new and continuous reflection. This twilight zone of order makes, simultaneously, experiences possible and prevents them, building up and demolishing, excluding as it includes, rejecting as it selects (Waldenfels 1996, 110). The shadow's side is not a negative (Waldenfels 1996, 112) thing, but something is co-experienced in the power and powerlessness of our imbricated experiences.

The twilight zone brings a fissure that means that the context exists, but not a closed one, instead an open process which allows a generative milieu. The questions and answers (Waldenfels 1996, 113) that emerge in their heterogeneity cannot be oriented teleologically toward a comprehensive goal,

because the established connection between them is located prior to the truth claims and consensus demands. For Waldenfels, we cannot determine a clear boundary between what would be a question and what would be its answer. It is not a matter of choosing the right answer for the right question, nor to decide which one would come first, or which time would be properly fitted. The inevitability of the claims has its original interrogations whereby we are intertwined responsively. At this pre-level, belonging to the event itself, we cannot establish landmarks in order to determine the course of what happens.

The reason alone comes too late. It does not mean that reason is out of the event, but it is together with what escapes from itself. It also does not mean that the pre-objectivity could be characterized as a moment of chaos before a moment of order, but we can find a constitutive property of a responsive rationality (Waldenfels 1996, 114) that reveals a twilight zone, appearing as a pre-rationality, ungraspable which comes without we want or project it; it comes responsively. It has its own way of givenness, its own logic. It is not represented as a teleological order in the cosmos whereby everything would be fitted together, but this givenness breaks the endless cause and effects chains, just because it presents an unclear time line, an unclear light (twilight), bringing new possibilities which an established order had banished. There is not a creative universe in a teleological order; there is not a personality from borrowed patterns, nor ethics from moral laws, or divine purposes. The reduction of ethics to a god, to a law or to patterns reveals only a kind of depersonalization.

What we cannot see, hear, say, or do, in the way of its givenness, can be comprehended only in the very saying, seeing, hearing and doing, and has nothing to do with dumbness, blindness, deafness, and inaction. It is rather a currently embodied determinate “over-and-beyond” (Waldenfels 1996, 122). It is neither a *laissez faire*, nor a closed order; it is rather an open process that, through its thresholds, we can see possibilities, creativity, and the responsive person. Waldenfels brings an invitation to speak across the threshold without abolishing it (Waldenfels 1996, 131), because a responsive rationality carries the possibility of an open rationality as well.

3. Conclusion

Scheler and Waldenfels provide a great contribution to the concept of personality. Waldenfels would not conceive a rank of values (Scheler), because that would blur the threshold of what happens, the event itself. A rank of values would presuppose an ethics whereby a person should fit in order to be a good person. For Waldenfels, there are always margins that bring news possibilities for the development of ethics that is not tied to a rank of higher or lower values. There cannot be determinism of values without a history of values. It does not mean that there is not good or bad for Waldenfels, but that there is a genealogy of good and bad that would be not developed through a teleological way. Through a process of inclusion and exclusion the order brings together a history of its margins that cannot be forgotten.

Scheler and Waldenfels try to avoid formalism as a presupposition of ethics, noting an inescapable arbitrariness in a moral governed by a written law or even internal autonomous law. Scheler seeks to place the higher values whereby are the base of ethics, on the idea of God's love for us that, through a intimate relation to God, brings about the most higher value, called holiness. The value of holiness brings this relations experience to God into concrete acts where an individual can realize oneself as a person, sharing with the others love in a reciprocal way, through the solidarity of love for the sake of a collective salvation. Thus, the source of ethics would be based on God's love for us intuitively given by the value of holiness. Waldenfels would try to show that the process itself, the process of moral order, and human conceptions of ethics, through its genealogy, can reveal an open process done responsively that prevents any attempt of determinism, objectivism and subjectivism. Waldenfels does not say that a religious mystical experience cannot bring benefits for humankind or that it would not influence our personalities. Waldenfels, through the idea of the twilight zones, demonstrates that the personality is not tied exclusively to God, to institution, or to a moral law.

This work propitiates us to explore a concept of personality based on a concrete person that lives with other persons. The personality is intertwined with the others personalities, with himself and with the world. Nevertheless, Waldenfels shows that, despite these imbrications, there is an originality in each person that is given in the intersubjective event itself in its relation with the world that discloses its

margins, otherness, preventing a closed conception of personality. The responsive personality is a latent one.

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Responsive self-preservation: Towards an anthropological concept of responsiveness

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Abstract

The aim of this paper is to catch up with a conjecture designated by the term 'responsive self-preservation'. This term appears neither strikingly beautiful nor intuitively understandable. Obviously it is a convoluted terminus technicus in need of conceptual clarification. The reasons for introducing it should therefore be good. That this is the case cannot be guaranteed from the outset. What can be offered here is a substitution of good reasons with high ambitions: the concept of 'responsive self-preservation' is designed to illuminate the *conditio humana*. In all brevity the claim is that human beings are responsive beings. This means that they do not just exist. In order to do so, they must respond to their existence. On the one hand the inner drive and utmost aspiration in human responsiveness therefore lies in self-preservation. On the other hand self-preservation is thoroughly transformed when embedded into human responsiveness. The article will thus use the concept of responsiveness and the concept of self-preservation to mutually clarify each other – in order to open the possibilities and avoid the pitfalls in each of them. In doing so, it aspires to intervene in contemporary philosophical anthropology.

Keywords: Self-preservation, responsiveness, philosophical anthropology, ethics, Waldenfels

La plus grande des responsabilités humaines – physiques et morales – est la responsabilité de notre verticalité. (Bachelard 1943, 47)

1. Homo erectus

To gain a pre-understanding of responsive self-preservation let us begin with the notion of *homo erectus*. This

notion is used here as a heuristic metaphor. Methodologically its function is not to *justify* but to *access* the concept of responsive self-preservation. In this respect it may need to be stretched somewhat – and even then still prove to be insufficient. Nonetheless, the intuition is that it can lead us on the right track.¹ The upright position has become so habitual to us that we usually do not think of it as an achievement. Instead we devote our interest to the vast space of actions it has made possible. And surely what ‘the freeing of the hands’ enables us to achieve is astonishing. Even so, it remains an achievement in itself. To sense this, one need only observe an infant learning to stand and walk. What troublesome endeavour! What admirable persistence!

What is obvious from witnessing this familiar drama is that having two feet on the ground instead of four increases the demands of balance tremendously. Rebellious against gravity means that the infant must carry himself in every move he makes. Life in the upright position is burdensome. It is a life that cannot just be lived but must be learned. And observing the toddler, it is evident that the ability to do so is not innate but learned. It is a skill obtained only in a rigorous training program.

After being subjected to this program the child will have adopted an altogether new relation to the world and to his own body. The latter is no longer just a given medium of spontaneous movement but an acquired one. The experiential immediacy of the lived body is in the upright position always a mediated immediacy. Inhabiting this position presupposes that the child has performed a strenuous incorporation into his own body, which in turn conditions the spontaneity of his highly enhanced *I can*. Henceforth the body is therefore not only lived as a centre from which the child acts out but also discovered as an object he can enact himself eccentrically into. The upright stance is the apprenticeship test in this respect. Later advancements into athletic performance and ascetic endurance are testimonies to this initial making the body an object of techniques.

The basic technique involved in vertical existence is one of balance. And since this mode of existence is extraordinarily

exposed to the risk of falling, even the slightest impact is a danger. In order not to fall the child must become highly attentive to changes in the gravitational field and able to adjust accordingly. Keeping balance means being able to register such challenges – sometimes even before they occur – and to improvise an answer. It is, in short, imperative that the child develops responsive skills. Without such skills he will fall to the ground.

The quadruped, of course, is also exposed to the danger of falling, but not in the same degree. Accordingly a quadruped is not in need of the enhanced responsive skills indispensable to the biped. This is probably why the dog behaves so frantically when it is on a bumpy train and feels the ground moving. That merely standing on its legs becomes such a challenge is unusual, and it reacts promptly by lying flat down. For humans this situation is normal. A being so destabilized must always struggle to maintain balance.

We may therefore say that self-preservation in the upright stance must be exceptionally responsive. Indeed, so responsive that this kind of responsiveness becomes qualitatively different. To put it a bit dramatically, *homo erectus* would fall in every moment did it not perform a *conservatio continua*. Its being is through and through a result of responsive self-preservation. Our metaphor has thus led us to an idea that we get an inkling of when Simmel writes:

Perhaps the structure of existence entails that every being in every moment would be annihilated, devoured and left devoid of a self by what is outside of it – and perhaps also by what is in it – if it did not resist against this by a wholly positive doing and actively asserted its own being. Since this necessity never lessens, not even for a moment, self-preservation is in any case the utmost a being can attain. All that it does is only means to or more accurately the acts of its self-preservation. (Simmel 1996, 117f)²

To walk on two legs is to avoid a fall lurking in every step, as it were. It is continuously to give up balance and find it again. Living vertically therefore means never being in possession of a fixed stance, but always on the lookout for it. *Homo erectus*, then, is truly *das noch nicht festgestellte Thier* (Nietzsche 1999, 81). Every step along its way is accompanied

by the concern: will I find a foothold where I have been anticipating myself standing – or will I fall? It does not have a pre-given stance to preserve, but only an anticipated stance to acquire. In a sense, therefore, it is a being which is not where it is. But it responds to this lack of *Fest-stellung* – this inner utopia – by placing itself outside itself and is always moving towards such *Vor-stellungen*. However, no matter where it decides to go, no matter where it anticipates itself standing, it must always go there in a self-preservative way, i.e. maintaining balance. And so, if we ask what is the self being preserved, we must answer that it does not reside in a pre-given position. Nor will it be found in the anticipated ones. Rather, it is the always accompanying concern – or *Sorge* as Heidegger would have it.

2. Responsiveness and self-preservation

After these preliminary clues, let me now single out ‘responsiveness’. The term is primarily associated with the phenomenology and ethics of the German philosopher Bernhard Waldenfels. The present paper is deeply indebted to Waldenfels’ endeavour. It is, however, not the ambition to give an account of his highly elaborate theory, but to select and perhaps also add certain features suitable for the present anthropological enterprise, taking in each case as point of departure the thesis that *human beings are responsive beings*.

2.1. Do something!

Human beings are responsive beings. They are called upon to respond. No one can escape this. Even *no* is an answer (Waldenfels 1994, 357). But if we cannot not respond, how then can responding be something demanded of us? How can it be an imperative if our very being has already fulfilled it? We may call this peculiarity an ontological imperative.

Usually our notion of an imperative presupposes that we distinguish between the agent and his agency in a way that allows us to say that there is *first* an agent and *then* some prescriptions to which he should conform. This is not the case

in human responsiveness. Responsiveness comes before the distinction between what is and what should be. From basic philosophical training we are instructed not to deduce 'ought' from 'are' or vice versa. And that is perfectly fair and square. It is just that in the case of human responsiveness we do not need such an inference. To respond is not something we should do, but something we are. Yet, it remains an imperative. To say that human beings *are* this imperative means that they have their being only in responding.

In every demand we can distinguish between *what* is demanded and *that* something is demanded. Usually we are attentive to what is being demanded. We are engaged in finding ways to comply with it or perhaps to avoid it. Doing so, we are absorbed so wholly by the fact that we are being subjected to the demands of someone or something that it escapes our attention. To gain an understanding of this often anonymous surplus let us consider a special and illuminating case.

If someone enters my bedroom while I am asleep and shouts *wake up!*, something is demanded of me, namely that I wake up. But it is demanded in a way which brings the *that* of the demand to the fore. For in this case I cannot hear the demand without succumbing to it. To be aware of this imperative is identical with the impossibility of not complying with it. With the imperative inhabiting human responsiveness it is likewise. The *that* of this demand is a surplus in relation to the *what* of the demand. This surplus is in itself purely formal. It does not demand anything from us except that it demands – or rather awakens – our 'demandability'. Pervading all concrete demands, it is a demand that we are inescapably subjected to no matter what we answer.

With this line of thought we have reached another feature of 'the responsive imperative'. Besides being ontological in a paradoxical sense and demanding in an unavoidable way, it is also wholly indeterminate. This is a claim that is not easy to understand though. How can an imperative meaningfully be said to be indeterminate? It seems only fair that if someone were to say *thou shall* I would wish at least to know what I was supposed to do. But to this seemingly righteous question the responsive imperative gives no answer. Being responsive thus

means being *subjected* to a kind of pressure that does not push in any direction. It simply strikes with the experience: *I must do something! I must respond!*

We can perhaps describe being affected in this way as a trembling state of tension susceptible to being released in a certain intention; or perhaps as an accumulation of aimless energy in need only of an occasion to be channelled in a definite direction – or in similar ways. The problem appears to be a ‘too much’ rather than ‘too little’. It is not that a lack of energy – of money, power, time or other ‘resources’ – makes it impossible for the responsive being to do all that it wants. Rather, it does not know what it wants and is at the same time exposed to an abundance of energy that compels it to must want something.

This is illustrated well by a common experience of parents. What parents discover is that the cause of a certain well-known unease in their infant is not only that it is denied something it wants. It is precisely on this initial assumption that the relief of the infant upon receiving what it wants appears so remarkable short. If the unease was caused simply by the distress of not having the thing, the relief should have lasted longer the parents reckon and ask: what then is the cause? Is it perhaps not knowing what to want? If this is the case, getting something is only a transient remedy to the situation. The excess of incentive energy will soon prompt the question: *what now?* The real drama, therefore, unfolds prior to getting or not getting something, namely in the middle of the sentence likely to have the highest frequency of use among small children: the infant exclaims loudly and with obvious distress *I want...* then looks around the room for something it *can* want, notices a cell phone, a candlelight, a postcard, an empty bowl or *whatever* and continues with noticeable relief *...that one!* (Gehlen 2004, 343).

2.2. Too late and too early

Human beings are responsive beings. This has two immediate consequences. On the one hand the existence of a human being is posed to it as a question. On the other hand the human being exists only in answering this question. Spelled out

in this way, it becomes evident that the thesis encompasses a paradox. Human existence is both prior to and the result of human responses. This paradox, however, is not a regrettable fallacy but a significant feature of human responsiveness. And if we refrain from dissolving it into a linear model, it amounts to the idea that human existence extends itself across an unbridgeable divide.

We can describe this structure as a deferral in responsiveness. It implies that the existence of a human being is not only where it apparently is, i.e. *here and now*. It is prior to this as a question that is always already answered; and it comes after this as a response that is never yet completed. We are in this sense both before and after ourselves. This means that for a human being it is always inaccurate to say *here I am*, *this is me* or the like. No indicative can ever capture my being no matter how elaborate it may become. For on the one hand I am too late. Whenever I say *here I am*, I was already there and what I indicate is a certain response to this 'already'. On the other hand I am too early. I am never here yet and what I indicate is therefore at the same time a provisional pretence. This does not falsify my indication. Indeed, it makes it possible. The inaccuracy in indication is a condition *sine qua non*. I could not point to myself – I could not stand out from the anonymous block of being – were it not for this inner deferral.

My responses are thus always *deferred*. They can never wholly catch up with the existential question that I am. They presuppose it. But nevertheless, this question has always been *transferred* into possible answers. I never have it in itself to begin from. What I have instead is these transferences, i.e. the 'metaphors that I live by'. If the question comes first and the answer comes second, as we would be inclined to think, we are thus obliged to say that the first is always already transferred into the second. In short: *the second is the first*.

As paradoxical as this appears, it describes a structure of responsive self-preservation. A responsive being cannot exist without having responded to the question of its existence. Correspondingly, to ever encounter this question in itself, prior to any response, would render it utterly responseless – and this would, *ex hypothesi*, amount to an annihilation of its being. It is

therefore impossible that it has ever been in this situation. Had it been so, it would never have been able to give a response and thus never have come into being as a responsive being. The first is absolutistic. All beginnings from here would have to be purely spontaneous. Otherwise there could be no escape. A responsive being, however, is deferred from this origin. This is the condition for it to know the question that it exists as a response to.

Following this line of thought we can see that it cannot be a simple reversal when Waldenfels proclaims: “In the beginning was the answer.” (Waldenfels 1994, 270) Granted, this puts the answer where we would expect the question, namely first, but in doing so it is maintained that the answer remains second. Even though it is at the origin, it *is* an answer and as such it has the sense of *answering to something*. To say that the second is the first is therefore a statement that invites us to rethink our concept of origin. “When we take our point of departure from the answer, we do not replace the primacy of the question with that of the answer. It is rather that *all such primacies are avoided*.” (Waldenfels 1994, 193)

To illustrate this let us consider causality. Here the first is the first and the second is the second. *First* we have a stimulus and *then*, in accordance with some causal law, a response. In human responsiveness, however, a question-stimulus does not precede an answer-response. As Waldenfels writes: “It is not the case that *something* comes before us, e.g. as a causal stimulus that brings an effect about. We come before *ourselves*.” (Waldenfels 2010, 77) To explain this phenomenon in terms of causality would clearly destroy it – even if we were to invoke the notion of a *causa sui*. For though we *do* precede ourselves, we do so by way of an alterity that we are always and have always been called upon to answer.

2.3. Standing in place of the other

Human beings are responsive beings. But their answers cannot be wholly explained in terms of an order (cf. Waldenfels 1994, 334). The concept of alterity is designed to remedy this shortcoming not just of causal but of any ordering of

responsiveness. It does not designate a class of beings especially strange and challenging to find a suitable response to. It serves to indicate that we are always responding to something that is never wholly captured in our responses. No matter how ordinary the demand and no matter how orderly our response, demand and response will remain separated by an unbridgeable *hiatus*. Waldenfels calls this *the responsive difference*, i.e. the difference "... between the demand, *to which* we answer, and *what* we give as an answer by orienting ourselves toward a goal, a rule or a problem i.e. the answer we always give in a certain way..." (Waldenfels 1995, 420)

It is tempting to speak of an *inner* alterity. We would, however, have to specify then that 'inner' means neither inside the mind nor the body of the responsive being. Rather, it would mean that no matter where challenges come from, if they are given genuinely as challenges, and not just as stimuli that trigger certain reactions, then they are inherent in the deferred structure of any responsive experience. And this structure entails that every challenge comes with an alterity that can perhaps be neglected or suppressed but never eradicated. It is therefore more adequate to speak of a *radical* alterity – something indicated well by the very term 'responsiveness'. Contrary to spontaneity, which signifies that I begin from myself and by myself, it implies that I always begin from somewhere else. And this, markedly, is something to be discovered only *in giving a response*.

Only in answering to what we are struck by does that which has struck us appear as such [...] This answering is thus entirely to be thought of from a being-struck [*Getroffensein*], in the *deferral* of a doing which does not begin from itself but from the other... (Waldenfels 2002, 59).

Responses, in other words, are always in place of that which the responsive being is struck by. Reminiscing Derrida's 'originary supplement', Waldenfels calls this 'originary substitution' and explains: "I designate a substitution as originary if it makes us stand on our own feet, taking at once and from the outset the place of the Other." (Waldenfels 2011, 155) Allowing ourselves a metaphorological observation here, we will notice that we are all of a sudden back to our guiding

metaphor: the originary substitution makes us ‘stand on our own feet’!

A responsive being is constitutively disturbed by an alterity calling it into being. This calling is a demand that something must be done. Consequently such a being cannot just stand where it stands but must find a stance, i.e. it cannot stand in its own place but must find re-placements. This suggests the idea that we respond to alterity by way of substitution *and* that the outcome of this type of response is self-preservation. That this substitution is originary means that our being is not given to us first so that we only afterwards find various substitutions in order to preserve this being. Substitution takes place ‘at once’ and ‘from the outset’. Substitutions, therefore, are responsible for our being. And nevertheless they are not *ex nihilo* creators of it. Qua responses they remain responses to some alterity. As opposed to a well-known anthropological scheme we are therefore not first deficient beings which then compensate for our deficiency. Rather, we are in becoming by way of a substitution. And this substitution is not a substitution of something we already are but a response to an alterity that haunts us and perpetuate our becoming.

2.4. Nothing to preserve, everything at stake

Human beings are responsive beings. The exposition of responsiveness so far has hinted at an intrinsic connection to self-preservation. However, what immediately comes to mind when considering the term ‘self-preservation’ will most likely be a Darwinian struggle for existence and not a complicated, even paradox, concept of responsiveness. Our associations are that self-preservation is a *brute, blind* and *egotistic* struggle for the *mere* continuation of *naked* existence. To qualify human self-preservation as responsive challenges these connotations. But what happens to the supposedly well-known concept of self-preservation when it is embedded into the structure of responsiveness?

First of all we must insist that responsiveness is not a supernatural addition to nature. It does not even imply that we

have distanced ourselves *from* self-preservation as the general trend of evolution. Rather, it implies that we, as responsive beings, have come into being as a distance *within* this general self-preservation (cf. Stiegler 2009, 161). This means that in this particular case self-preservation does not begin with itself. It does not originate from the centre of a living being. Nor does it originate from some other being. It is neither spontaneous nor transitive. Rather, it responds eccentrically to itself – it is deferred from its own origin, it is haunted by alterity etc. Such summoning descriptions simply mean: it is not self-evident how I should preserve myself. Life does not live itself, it must be led. I must do something, but what? In my self-preservation I cannot originate from myself and act out. I must respond to a lack of such origination by substituting it or supplementing it with something I can ‘work on’.³

What is this ‘something’ that I work on? One of the usual connotations of self-preservation is to think of the implied self as a substance. And indeed, it seems obvious that self-preservation presupposes a self to preserve: *first* we have a self and *then* what this self does in order preserve itself. In this view there is no intrinsic connection between self and self-preservation. A self which in itself has nothing to do with self-preservation is compelled by strictly exterior forces to preserve itself. Self-preservation therefore denotes an ensemble of skills which a pre-given self develops and employs on occasion.

To think of self-preservation as responsive renders this instrumentalist interpretation problematic. A responsive self is a self which is not had prior to but only *in* responding. Responsive self-preservation therefore entails an intrinsic relation between self and self-preservation. It *does* entail an ensemble of responsive skills – but not in the sense of something the self *has*. Rather, the self *is* the ongoing becoming of them. And this genealogy is ruled by the principle of self-preservation. Responsiveness thus prompts the shift from a substantialist to a functionalist concept of self-preservation. Blumenberg alludes to this when he considers one of these responsive skills, the ability to develop self-understandings:

Self-understandings are constructions that aid self-preservation – however, in another sense than the ‘success’ in the struggle for

existence which always ‘appears’ as the possession of a ‘substance’ to be defended. (Blumenberg 1997, 122)

An immediate objection is that there is nothing self-preservation is about if a self is not given to preserve. It seems then that nothing is really at stake. However, quite to the contrary everything is at stake. When the unity of the self is not a substance underneath the surface of changing properties, there is no longer a reserve hidden away from being at stake. The self is entirely absorbed into this kind of self-preservation. Instead of being a given self only to be protected, it is wholly at risk in every step and always to be acquired.

Of course we might ask why we should speak about self-preservation at all then and not simply self-acquisition? The reason for insisting on this is the following: there is in a sense no self to be preserved, granted, but there is a self which *only in a self-preservative way* is to be acquired. The human self is, in other words, always becoming – not in the sense that we will have to wait and see if it does indeed turn out to be a human. Rather, the human being *is* a becoming-human. And self-preservation is the mode of this becoming. No matter where we aim at going – no matter what we succeed in or fail at becoming – as humans we are always subjected to the task of preserving balance in going there.

3. Responsive ethics and responsive anthropology

3.1. The *experimentum crucis*

In Levinas self-preservation is emphatically rejected. This is most prominently done in a dispute with Spinoza’s concept of *conatus* and Heidegger’s concept of *Sorge* – but also with the Darwinian notion of a struggle for existence. At the root of this contention we find a main concern in both Levinas and Waldenfels: how is it possible to engage with the other without annihilating his otherness?

If self-preservation was the overall impetus of subjectivity, it seems that it would not be sensitive to the demands of the other – or at least only in a derivative way. But it is not, according to Levinas, a concern for self-preservation

that constitutes subjects as subjects. It is rather a constant subjection to the demands of the other. Subjectivity always has its point of departure not in itself, but in these demands. It is always engaged in responding. As a result sensitivity to the other is built into its very structure and can never be only derivative.

Following this outlook, ‘responsive self-preservation’ will appear to be a contradiction in terms. But if we hesitate to reject the concept – bearing the above exposition in mind – it may lead to a detachment of phenomenology of responsiveness from ethics of responsiveness. These are of course inseparable within Waldenfels’ framework which echoes Levinas’ discomfort with self-preservation. If, however, responsiveness is turned into the distinguishing feature of a certain kind of self-preservation, they may very well fall apart at the seams – or at least have to be reconfigured significantly. The benefits in doing so should be an anthropologically sounder, even if ethically less saturated concept of responsiveness. In any case, the question of an ethically infused alterity is obviously the *experimentum crucis* in merging responsiveness and self-preservation.

3.2. What is responsive ethics?

Responsive ethics in Waldenfels is first of all not a normative theory. It is not situated at the level of teleological, deontological, consequential, utilitarian, pragmatic, communicative or communitarian ethics. Accordingly, it does not seek to replace such theories with superior goals or better norms. Rather, it supplements them with a corrective. This is necessary because responsiveness cannot, as we have seen, be wholly ordered. The critical address of responsive ethics is therefore neither wrong ethics nor a lack of ethics but unyielding attempts to order responsiveness with ethical norms. In responding we *do* rely on order. Absorbing the radical alterity inherent in responsiveness into a certain order is, however, doomed to fail. With the particular prominence accredited to a cover text the reader thus enters Waldenfels’ *opus magnum* informed that the demand of the other works...

...as an antidote against all attempts to arrive at a rationalization or normalization which underrate their own origin. In line with *a mere preservation of reason or a system* such attempts set those irrational forces free that they pretend to ban away. (Waldenfels 1994, cover, italics added)

Waldenfels seems to view self-preservation as a principle of ordering, perhaps even as the preeminent one. Consequently the phenomenon of responsiveness necessarily evades it. The corrective of responsive ethics makes us aware of this. It reminds us that answering the demands of the other in terms of a certain order is never enough. For instance, when we treat the other entirely just in terms of a law, we are in fact not acting just (Waldenfels 1994, 586). And this is not because the given law is deficient. Further differentiation does not help. Rather, it is because the demands of the other always exceed the rights ascribed to him – just as the saying of something is always a surplus to what is said (Waldenfels 1994, 199). Responsive ethics, in short, is a guard of the responsive difference.

Responsive ethics is also a *genealogy* of ethics. The distinctions between wrong and right, good and evil etc. are in themselves neither. Where do they come from then? Here is a blind spot in all normative theory that calls for genealogy (Waldenfels 1995, 409-423). Waldenfels' procedure resembles here Husserl's more than Nietzsche's. His ethical epoché does not arrive at strong individuals without resentments but at basic levels of responsiveness challenged with pre-ethical forms of alterity. And from this *terminus a quo* the ambition is to show "...that there is a 'non-indifference towards the other', which does not allow a non-ethical neutrality." (Waldenfels 1994, 566) In this regard Waldenfels speaks "...repeatedly about ethical impulses in answering..." (Waldenfels 1994, 557) But what does this mean? 'Impulses' seems a vague word put in a place where decisive questions should be asked.

3.3. Self-preservation: empty...

If responsiveness has its inner drive and utmost aspiration in self-preservation, then this apparent minimum is

in fact a maximum. Contrary to the Darwinian connotation this kind of self-preservation does not fit the model of *first food, then morality*. And contrary to classical Greek thinking it is not something that must be resolved first in order for the free man to leave the predicaments of *mere* life at home and enter the public arena to devote himself to the *good* life. Self-preservation here means something we do whatever we do.

In saying this we will have to emphasize a subtlety. Since all acts of responding are acts of self-preservation, self-preservation is in a sense independent of how it is enacted. *We cannot not preserve ourselves*. Self-preservation is entailed already in the *that* of responding. However, and this is of course equally important, the same does not go for the *success* of self-preservation. This is always at stake. Indeed, it seems that human beings ultimately fail no matter how they respond. All acts of responding, then, are acts of self-preservation, but they are in the end *despaired* acts of self-preservation. *We cannot succeed in preserving ourselves either*.

This is the misery of the human condition! Our self-preservation is not the self-preservation of pure reason. But, and this is its greatness, human responsiveness even finds a response to its own failure. Absolute demands, impossible situations and overwhelming challenges leave us responseless. Nevertheless, we still respond, namely to this responselessness. Not that this rescues us from it. It is just that we find a way to express it. This can, as Plessner has shown, occur in bodily gestures such as laughter and crying (Plessner 1982, 201-387). The most extreme case of a human response to the failure of finding a response, however, is undoubtedly suicide. And this is also the instance that allows us to demonstrate the full formality of self-preservation. For suicide could very well be presented as the obvious constraint on self-preservation. If it was truly an anthropological principle, suicide would be impossible. Obviously it is not. However, self-preservation does *not* exclude suicide – it occasionally entails it.

Only man can live and in doing so be unhappy. He can thus fail in attaining exactly that which seems to him the meaning of his existence. Even when he commits suicide he deploys the last of all strategies: he attempts to preserve himself at any price, even that of

life itself, in order at least not to be forced to deny his identity himself. (Blumenberg 2006, 550)

This observation offers us the opportunity to take leave with another immediate bias, namely that self-preservation is always concerned with life in the biological sense. Being alive is admittedly a very popular way of being human – and this it is even though the current rate of success strongly suggests that it will ultimately be unsuccessful. But it is nonetheless only *one* way of being human (Simmel 1996, 118).

3.4. ...yet profound?

Is any ‘ethical impulse’ left in this kind of self-preservation that seems to rule out nothing? If by ethical impulse we simply mean being affected by alterity then surely yes. This is essentially what responsive self-preservation is. To qualify such an impulse as ethical seems too hasty though.

Let us remark that an ethically downsized concept of responsiveness need not be an expression of cynicism. It may be a matter of saving the phenomena in question. Aspiring to an enhanced sensibility towards the other is certainly an honourable sentiment. Nevertheless, it is anthropologically insufficient. If responsiveness is to be the anthropological concept *par excellence*, it must not only address the pinnacle of humanity, e.g. its authentic or ethical modes. Also ‘the all too human’ – yes, even inhumanity – is part of the human. It is therefore imperative not to confuse anthropological and ethical responsiveness. Indisputably we have different responsive skills and have them in varying degrees, but responsiveness in itself is not a skill. It is our being. Responses that do not qualify as responses in the ethical sense remain responses in the anthropological sense.

The attempt, for instance, to absorb alterity into a given order and to leave no room for a corrective is bound to fail, as Waldenfels rightly points out. As responsive beings humans are constitutively open to alterity. But even as failed such an attempt remains part of the human register of responses. And when Levinas declares his *du wirst nicht töten*, Waldenfels is equally right in noticing that this is not an imperative

disallowing something but an indicative pointing to the future (Waldenfels 2002, 143). It speaks of the impossibility of eradicating the demand of the other. The futility of murder makes this wholly evident. There is nothing more that can be done and still the murderer is haunted by the other. But even so, why should the silencing of the other not be attempted just because it is impossible? As inescapably open to alterity responsiveness is, there is nothing in it that in the least animates the responsive being not to commit murder.

Responsive self-preservation in short contributes nothing towards the realization of any ethics. This is why the term ‘impulse’ is unfortunate. It hints exactly at such a direct genealogy. Nevertheless, there *is* an important sense in which anthropological and ethical responsiveness remain connected. This concerns the simple fact that openness to alterity is a precondition for all ethics. Non-responsive beings cannot be moral, only responsive ones can. We are misguided if, in the name of responsiveness, we opt for the *unsecure reality* of some norm, even just in the form of a corrective to existing norms. What we have instead is the *secure possibility* of normativity. For the ethically minded thinker this will seem little to be left with under the heading of ‘responsive ethics’. But our inclination to expect more should not inhibit us from saving what is only less from the perspective of such expectations. Freed from these we may even come to fathom that this less may have an existential profoundness to it. As Simmel notes: “Nevertheless, it could be that the theory of self-preservation, as empty and logical as it appears at first, is the expression of a thoroughly profound, philosophical and basic attitude.” (Simmel 1996, 117)

3.5. Get it right!

Is responsiveness emptied out to the point of insignificance by self-preservation? Have we gone too far in draining it of normativity? In fact, we might have. At least Waldenfels is on to something in making the following observation:

If every answer were equally good, then the answer would no longer be an answer which connects to what is said and engages with the offers of the other; if there were only one right answer, then the answer would no longer be an answer that replied. (Waldenfels 1994, 576)

All formality notwithstanding, there must be a question of answering appropriately. And so there is! Responsive self-preservation does not only contain a *do something!*, but also a *get it right!* This has to do with something already mentioned: that all responsive acts are acts of self-preservation does not mean that their success is granted. Self-preservation is perpetually put to the test. The question is *as what kind of person can I preserve myself?*

In Kant's concept of the self-preservation of reason this existential question is ordered by the moral law. Here self-preservation is the consistency of the will determined solely by the categorical imperative. The maxims of a life lived in this way form a coherent system. It is, in Husserl's corresponding view, a life lived in unanimity (*Einstimmigkeit*): "The ideal of true self-preservation: the I can only be content and happy when it remains an I in unanimity with itself..." (quoted in Kern 1964, 291). Among the many techniques, exercises and maxims that have been suggested under the general heading of *epimeleia heauton*, this idea of consistency or unanimity surely stands out as a strong one. Responsive self-preservation, however, evades even this type of ordering which, although accused of being too formal, proves not to be formal enough. This can be demonstrated by revisiting Kant's paradigm of a collapse of consistency: the act of lying.

Lying cannot be universalized into a general rule of conduct since lying is only possible on the assumption of a general propensity to speak truthfully. As a maxim it logically negates itself. Needless to say, this does not mean that it is impossible to lie. However, in Kant's view it *does* entail that it is impossible to *be* a liar, i.e. to preserve oneself as a lying person. In the name of consistency the moral law thus rules out lying as a mode of self-preservation. However, the impossibility of something does not rule out the attempt at it. And we must remember that this goes not only for the liar, but also e.g. for the moral person. To lie consistently is impossible, granted, but

to be a thoroughly moral person, to have a holy will, is equally out of reach. Indeed, it is questionable whether human beings are capable of finding any way to be something consistently. And this is not because these ways would not be ways of responding. It is just that human beings will inevitably despair in the pursuit of them. Despair, however, is *not* the end of responsive self-preservation! As indicated, human responsiveness distinguishes itself exactly by the ability to find a response even to responselessness. The *can* in *as what kind of person can I preserve myself* therefore does not depend on consistency. The self-preservation of reason cannot absorb human responsiveness. But how then, if not in the solitary consultation with the moral law, are we to depict this existential test?

At this juncture an almost folkloristic idea suggests itself, i.e. the idea that every person in the moment of death will view their life in its totality confronted with the question whether it is possible to affirm this life without the aid of hope or the sting of regret (cf. Wetz 1996). This idea offers a perspective that spells out in a certain way what *epimeleia heauton* is ultimately about. We have arrived at the notion of *melete thanatou*. This is not a theory on what happens after death, but an exercise to adopt provisionally a certain perspective on your life. Markedly, it is *not* an endorsement of the existentialist emphasis on finitude either, i.e. the idea that only a heroic encounter with the fact that I will eventually cease to be gives life intensity. Sure, death takes away *that I am*, but not *that I have been*. On the contrary it elevates this into an unalterable finality. And the remaining question is if I can affirm myself in this finality or, with an antiquated concept: if I can bear my own immortality. To be able to answer *yes* to this question would be the highest self-preservation. And what we answer to in answering here is not a categorical imperative. Contrary to this, the test of immortality does not offer any order that orders how this test is passed. It offers a perspective that remains completely formal, although normative.

This perspective corresponds with the concept of responsive self-preservation that entails a *do something!* which

is wholly indeterminate, but is nevertheless accompanied by a directional *get it right!* This may sound as a self-contradiction, but on due consideration it becomes tenable that to do something implies trying to get it right. For it is not an ethical addition regarding what shall and what shall not be done. The *get it right!* simply emphasizes that the something in *do something!* is something contrary to some other thing. When you do something you attempt to do *that* particular thing. The predicament, however, is that we do not know how to get anything right! We do not, in other words, know what *eudaimonia* is. We do not, for instance, know what it means to be or how to become a good friend, a good teacher, a good liar, a good murderer or a good saint. We must simply try these things out and put them to the test. As what we can preserve ourselves is not given, but the outcome of an ongoing experiment.

Ultimately we do not know what it means to be or how to become a human being. But to this indeterminacy we respond in multiple ways. And in responding we *are* in fact already *being human* in the only way possible, that is as *becoming human*. Being human is ‘not being finished’. Responsiveness is therefore literally of an in-finite importance. It is therein that our continued existence lies. As Gehlen writes, and I shall conclude with this dense formulation of the idea pursued at some length now:

In ‘naked existence’ it could be that an achievement of infinite importance is carried out. The imperative concerning this achievement is essentially incomprehensible and can only be indicated in a symbolic way because we *are* this imperative (Gehlen 2004, 72).

NOTES

¹ In general I am animated by the elaborate discussion of the concept of *Selbsterhaltung* that took place in Germany in the 1970s (cf. Ebeling 1976). To entertain the guiding metaphor I am applying here I appeal to the reader to have in mind the connection between self-preservation and upright position, which the word *Selbsterhaltung* immediately alludes to.

² This and all subsequent non-English quotations are translated by the author.

³ I use the phrase 'work on' in reverence to Blumenberg's idea of an *Arbeit am Mythos*.

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The Sublimated Ideology of The Object

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Abstract

The idea that ideologies present to us a rationality for making decisions, for getting things done, allows us to avoid the agony of choosing one world or another as a finite being, allows us to forget that it is we ourselves who must do and thus who are also to be done. Due to the work of having to live a human life with others who do not agree with us and will never be our servants, we are all ready to give up responsibilities to the political saviour; already this one presents to ourselves the One and only. By examining our private and picayune dogmatisms, we might gain some insight into why we are ever so often willing to become public fascists. We might well object to being objected to. Along with this, we are also objects in a world of objects. This is routine when compared to the dialectical intersubjectivity of voicing an objection in a throng of objections, of questioning the objectionable in a questionable politics. It is the very mundanity of acquiescence that dulls us to the danger pedestal-dwelling ideologies still represent.

Keywords: rationality, ideology, fascism, Nothing, hermeneutics, Zizek

One of the few ways to counter the origin of fanaticism is to simply be both more subtle and honest about social change. We already know that it is the only constant in modern life. It is this knowledge that produces the anxiety of desiring to ‘stop the world and get off’, as the casual idiom has it. Not that custom or tradition should hold sway just because it has some historical inertia on its side. At the same time, however, the narrative by which we live, including their empirical and even ethical errors must be thoroughly understood, including why rationality has within it both non-rational content and irrational adherences, before committing them to the dustbin:

“Changing basic beliefs tied to powerful customs and familiar institutions, or ‘opening minds’, is a social experiment. It is a dangerous experiment, for opening minds in some respects always means closing them in others. Hence ideas with little support should not be introduced in an aggressive manner.” (Feyerabend 1978, 178) Perhaps it is not so much even ideas that have little support in general, but those that seem to have had a marginal public and official support, but may indeed be held in private, or even at a semi-conscious level emanating from the second ‘nature’ of primary socialization – if one can speak of these aspects of our personhood as being ‘held’ by us in other ways than what has been explored heretofore – that appeals to us as part of the rationality of ideology. We already, at some level, think we know what is being told to us. These people speak our language, finally, after wearying politics which can only make us wary. The one who appeals is kindred with the saviour, for he allows us egress from the routine of self-government, from the labor of decision, and from the always time and energy consuming ‘thinking of others’. We are already, and perhaps always, half-ready to give over power to a few who make their living exercising it: “But there is something in this: domination that is based on force and not on consensus has to be feared, and is effective for exactly that reason. The less a government is based on consensus, the more it has to behave in a totalitarian way – and tolerance then necessarily appears as a weakness.” (Gadamer 1998, 93) Of course, when ideas become the official fashion and history is rewritten by those responsible for the new publicity and dissemination of ‘knowledge’, total rule from above appears to soften. A new mindset is created where citizens might actually support the ruling ideas as they have been introduced; we all might become public fascists, because all of us have our fascist-like foibles that we exercise in private, and continue to do so. Would it not be grand if government acted in the world the same way we might inside our homes? We might even learn something new about ourselves and our own actions through the spread of the new order of knowing and placing things.¹ These kinds of changes, wrought by both subjective desire, including even that mistakenly associated by the child-self with the outer child of

rationalized objection and therefore seeming objectivity – a misrecognition of the mirror for its tain – and ideology ‘in the streets’ and on the billboards, require a new kind of critique to be developed. Because of this, “...political criticism is not solely concerned with ideas, for it must take account of the modes of behavior for which these ideas are more masks than expression.” (Merleau-Ponty 1964, 101) The theater of ideology is itself a rational expression of what we are trying to avoid. In playing out the new order, we can begin to believe that not only is disorder, change, and even mortality not part of the scene – for who can imagine that immortality was not the ultimate order of the ‘new man’ that Nazism hoped to create quite biologically, hygienically, and perhaps eventually, genetically as well? – but that none of these things were ever a part of history, at least, our own history. That they might well remain part of both the order and the history of others is quite enough to warrant altering them or wiping them out. Ideology thus never exposes itself as the new clothes of subjectivity projected into the world of forms, for everyone knows that costume is an integral part of any theater: “The function of ideology is not to offer us a point of escape from our reality but to offer us the social reality itself as an escape from some traumatic, real kernel.” (Zizek 1990, 45) It is perhaps ironic that ideology permits its own rationality to expose social reality as a theater, but to do so in the service of a new production, a new world stage and thus new players, is a *tour de force* worthy of both current social forces and their respective histories. That is, we are content to believe in the pretense of the performance because all we have known has been the pretense of past performances. We are also willing to believe that change alone sets us free by giving us control over what the world would have been had there not been such a change. Of course, this eventually is recognized, by some, as a delusion: “Instead of having the kind of control over things allowed by abilities, which leaves pace for the creative play of self-expression, a new kind of universal slavery has come over mankind.” (Gadamer 1998, 117) Until this time, and perhaps we are entering into an age of rationality where to be rational means to abandon thought entirely, we are enjoying the staged *jouissance* that

features the exposition of the Nothing, *something* that no one has ever seen before. The new show promises to be different, but not in structure, and at once this appeals to both our desire for the comfort of stasis, of stopping the world, as well as, and in similitude with, our impatience about the lack of changes that impede our contentment. Thus fascist ideology appears to have all forms of rationality at its disposal, because it addresses both poles of our sociality, unthinking, unthought, and willing to follow to any extremity of action, simply because action unchained from reflection is a form of freedom that we knew only in passing, as children, and for an all too brief moment. To promise us this is indeed to promise us eternal youth, and thus links us with those who would through us become immortal.

The Birth of Death

Entertaining the exposition of what we cannot know takes us perilously close to the abyss, which was precisely what we were trying to avoid in the first place. The Holocaust and other genocides haunt the edge of an ultimate darkness that casts its shadow far beyond its origin. And indeed, we do not quite know what kind of origin would generate such a living penumbra, ready with a glance to overtake the light of community or compassion. We do in fact become the monsters we attempt to stare down; that kind of abyssal plain is well known and well-marked. But this is not the same place as the abyss of meaning, for inversion, becoming the evil we sought to defeat, is still overfull with meaning. It means to destroy us, on the one hand, as well as being 'mean' spirited. We can recognize it, its face is one of banal and sardonic delight, frozen in the process of becoming non-being. But this process never takes its course. Its shadow does not lift and we are forced to live on within it. In doing so, we generate the next set of meanings which will eventually overturn its hegemony. The abyss filled with the interiority of the monstrous self is never at a loss for words, however guttural they may sound to our visage of civil and polite listeners. No, the abyss of meaning does not find recourse in the inversion of norms or in the projection of fears. It does not desire to be understood or acted upon. It is simply

the presence of a specific form of non-presence, which certainly abuts uncanniness but refuses to be taken into consideration by further and post hoc reflection. It does not offer us a *place* where we can be at home in its language. It does not speak the language of place or of truth, but calls to presence the problem of Truth, viz. why should there be a notion of truth, rather than just a desire for it, and indeed, why should desire bend in this direction, perhaps equally as well as others? “‘Truth’ is an empty *place*, and the ‘effect of Truth’ is produced when, quite by chance, some piece of ‘fiction’ (of symbolically structured knowledge) finds itself occupying this place...” (Zizek 1990, 217, italics in the original) This is one reason, right away, as it were, why the place of Truth is so convenient for any instrumental reason or fascist ideology, or yet even religion if it increasingly rationalizes itself and its institutions. It is not so much non-existent as *inexistent* – it never was and therefore cannot be – and further, it pronounces upon living reason a new kind of finitude that wraps around the existential envelope and doubles back on itself. It says to reason, ‘I am the birth of death’, just as life, in its forced and thrown project, was the death of birth.

Since we have killed ourselves to continue living, and we continue to do so, the truthfulness of the abyss of meaning shows us that, at some point, these serial acts of autohagiography will come to a sudden reversal. We cannot understand this. It has no meaning for us. No experience prepares us for such an event, and even its eventuality is no consolation, as it remains non-present – it too, has never yet occurred to us, and thus it repeats its insistence on the inexistence of meaningfulness and the impotence of interpretation – and non-committal. All of this forces upon us the desire to approach the edge and peer into the void, with the reassurance that we cannot, of our own accord and in our own subjectivity, plunge into its depths. For “...the subject is *nothing but* the impossibility of its own signifying representation – the empty place opened up by the big Other by the failure of this representation.” (Zizek 1990, 236) The symbolic order, generalized other, society ‘at large’, the tain of the socius, or what have you, have prevented the imagined purity of subjectivity – the essence of our being as the one in the many,

as opposed to the one of the many – from self-expression. No person can be only what he imagines himself to be within the ken of others. And are we not always also imagining what others think of us, or, at least how we might appear to others in order to represent ourselves more closely to our own ideals? Self-expression as part of culture and symbol is at best incomplete, and remains so. Is this also the case for self-understanding? This question is not quite the same as the one of origins and rediscovery. The problem of foundations, the auto-ontology of the subject in a world of subjects, and correspondingly, the ‘autotopology’ of selfhood as part of the symbolic order in the object realm, a pseudo-object in the world of things and also in the theater of absences – community, Nothings, and reflections on the uncanny, etc. – has been restated thusly: “How can man find himself – or regain himself -seeing that the action to which the search commits him in one way or another is precisely what estranges him from himself?” (Bataille 1988, 131, italics deleted) The forced vocation of wealth, the iron cage of rationalized wage-slavery, the anomic division of labor are no doubt part of the elements of distancing that we have already seen string our subjectivity across an warped and corrugated tapestry of living threads, scarlet with our own blood, both dripping and coagulated, matted together like ‘the uncut hair of graves’. But surely self-understanding comes to the fore at the very point at which we recognize our dilemmas. We are estranged but we are not complete strangers. We have undergone a separation, from both the birth of the life-process, the birth of dying, perhaps as well as that of living, and we have been separated from the myth of union. Why is the Platonic myth of the soul-mate any weaker than that of the myth of selfhood? We hardly believe in the first. It is not even a theme for Hallmark greeting cards, however sentimental they may be in other ways. We know, even if we tell the other that she is this Thing, biggest of all the Others and the overcoming of the symbolic domination of difference, neither really believes it over the long term, and this is a good thing. One cannot grow if one is already everything, to oneself or to the other. We do not desire soul-mates, and why then should we desire ourselves?

No, the search for the self is also part of the historically laden quest of agrarian mythos. Here, rather, we can turn to the pre-agrarians for aid. It is vision we seek, and not selfhood. What is the *next* thing that I must know about self-understanding, about being in the world, and not the only thing or the final thing. What do the embers of the dying fire tell me, and is this a different thing that what the flames of the eruption of first love state? (cf. Bachelard 1964, 55) What am I willing to give to possess such knowledge, or better, what can I give of myself to have a new experience? For "A sacrifice can only posit a sacred thing. The *sacred thing* externalizes intimacy: It makes visible on the outside that which is really within. That is why *self-consciousness* demands finally that, in connection with intimacy, nothing further can occur." (Bataille, 1964, 189, italics in the original) What we have given then, is enough to ensure that we can experience what is necessarily the other which has already found a home in the interiority of our knowing language. It is we who have been mistaken about its import, and even about the timing of its device. It is already at rest and we must bring it forth, return it to the world from whence it came, and thus experience it for ourselves, rather than have it experience us for itself, which has already occurred. We could not know it' at the time', as the idiom relates, but we have come to a self-understanding regarding its presence. This takes time, quite literally, as it possess the time it needs to be digested. The presence of time is what is necessary, and not merely its passage. We supply the libation of life-blood to know these things, and the corpus of our aging body is its oblation, for, once again "The victim of the sacrifice cannot be consumed in the same way as a motor uses fuel. What the ritual has the virtue of rediscovering is the intimate participation of the sacrificer and the victim, to which a servile use had put an end." (Bataille 1964, 56) We occupy both existential fates. We cannot be both in terms of social role, and this is why the greater symbolic order from which we take our cue precisely disallows the auto-da-fe of vision. It can provide enlightenment and knowledge, but never knowing and possessing. Recall that 'nothing further can occur'. No thing can follow our lead, but *Nothing can* occur, and it is this occurrence,

necessary and radical, that commits us to be the self-sacrifice that is without a hint of altruism: “The subject of the signifier is precisely this lack, this impossibility of finding a signifier which would be ‘its own’: the failure of its representation is its positive condition.” (Žižek 1990, 198, italics in the original) We are already gone the moment we realize what we now are. What we have been is the victim, what we are is the *aufheben* of the thesis of the perpetrator. We have been the willing scape for he willful one who must experience what it is like to lose the selfhood cordoned and conditioned by both ethos and mythos. We have immolated ourselves and rescued ourselves anew. No external savior can do as much, and it is to our peril that we imagine either the rationality of knowledge or the non-rationality of belief as providing for us a messianic egress from the world as it is, and ongoing selves who, with sparks and flickers, as shadows and errant spotlights, inhabit its viscous manifold.

It is not as if we have not attempted to discover the truth of absence in the form of a new Truthfulness, a language which can only speak of the place that we have been working hard to avoid. When we do so, however, we encounter the time “When one finds it necessary to turn *reason* into a tyrant, as Socrates did, [and] the danger cannot be slight that something else will play the tyrant. *Rationality* was then hit upon as the savior; neither Socrates nor his ‘patients’ had any choice about being rational.” (Nietzsche 1982, 478, italics in the original) We wish to keep ourselves, if not exactly as we had been, then in as much as we have grown accustomed to our own presence, vanity, self-denigration, collusion and projection alike, the kith and kindred of being an ‘individual’. Memory and conscience confront one another and thence decide to attempt to win over our pride. This sometimes succeeds, and it is at this point that we are closest to the kind of truth that emanates from the void of non-Being and intrudes upon our human language. More often, as Nietzsche famously quipped, pride carries the day and we live onward without taking the ultimate risk of self-sacrifice for the new life to begin, for self-understanding to overtake self-expression and expose it to be the dance of avoidance it is. Sine we have already shown ourselves able to transgress the

autonomous self concept and commit it to the flames, we know, in the recesses of consciousness perhaps, that “...some fundamental non-knowledge insists – it brings about the terrifying experience that if we come to know too much, we may lose our very being.” (Zizek 1990, 73) The most important trope in transformational fantasy literature, perhaps beginning with Lovecraft, the ability to disable one’s being by venturing into the other dimensions of what Being there may be is also the only way to find out what has actually been going on. The mystery is solved by the dissolution of the detective. It is the very obverse of the classic formula of detection, for the uncanniness of crime is there only an appearance, as in the famous ‘hound’ in Conan-Doyle. But in Cthulhu and numerous other beings or consciousnesses, the uncanniness is only the first clue. It leads to self-sacrifice and the transformation of humanity into something Other, as big as the symbolic Otherness of Lacan, and larger than all life as we had known it, the ‘thing that should not be’ is actually only ourselves finally ‘in the know’, as it were.

Shifting Sides

What we have digested in order to become this new thing which before, in the security of our socius, was a nothingness that might be given the name of Nothing, is our selfhood and its attendant concept of singularity. This is why “...authentic consumption ought to be solitary, but then it would not have the completion that the action it has on the others confers on it. And this action that is brought to bear on others is precisely what constitutes the gift’s power, which one acquires from the fact of *losing*.” (Bataille 1988, 70, italics in the original) The completion of the sacrifice, loss of self, cannot be entirely condoned by the social apparatus, especially the state. It is one thing to lose the self, but to lose selfhood is tantamount to subjective treason. There are plenty of ‘lost souls’ in the social welfare system, but this does not matter as long as their are warmed-over bodies to be consumed as fuel in the ‘human resource’ sector. This phrase has thus a double meaning, where the second and more literal sense of raw materials is within

mimicking distance of the void. The state anticipates the waxing and waning of the use of its resources, and the categories of humans that use them need to be reproduced at some level, as with the unemployment rates, and full employment is somewhat of a threat to capital within the modern nation, as would be the loss of the marginal. If not, such classes of persons might have been vanquished long ago, along with certain classes of diseases. Ill health is a tremendous drain on the productive system, while at the same time being one the chief results of the system of consumption, especially in North America. It is one thing to concentrate on the elite and exotic developments which, often well funded by the state, have results that can be immediately used to its advantage (cf. Blackburn 1990, 105). A consistent underfunding of those aspects of society which have themselves only marginal utility keeps the fires of material and psychological desire burning throughout the entire social strata. This is always more convenient than attempting to extinguish the remnants of older flames, now mostly ashes in the mouths of those who could not make the transition to the new world order. Once again, it is from these margins that the most fanatical adherents of fascism often originate, and for obvious reasons. Unlike those near the centers, these persons have nothing to lose: “To the less stringent, more Establishment-friendly mainstream notion of order, it seemed excessive to upset production and property rights, and long-settled ways, to such an extent, for such a reason.” (Taylor 2007, 311) Of course, the centers get to define what reason is, and thus aspirants in politics and in philosophy, for that matter, must attempt to harness the reason of unreason as an ally in their affairs. As Nietzsche warned, however, this kind of dynamic often gets away from us, and some other form of life or even form of death, takes hold. Almost every radical revolution in history bears witness to this problem, from 1789 through to 1917 and 1979. What remains of radicality is the edge of the new tyrant’s sword as it severs reason from its once human vehicle. Politicians are hardly the only perpetrators of such a *volte face*: “And let us not forget that many modern rationalists try to increase their power of Reason by increasing the power of the institutions that support it.”

(Feyerabend 1987, 252) As long as rationality is imagined as vacant of human interest, as merely a tool in the ideal sense of something utterly external to subjectivity, and unutterably non-linguistic with regard to human communication, we will always be at risk for the technocratic fascism built out of the social mobility of *techne*, where its love for mastery has overshot its mark and become obsessive.

We can then only note what is symptomatic of such an obsession, the act of stalking, for instance, following the movements of the relationship between the subject and its cognitive means and ends, recording how many times, and in what manner, the tools of reason were used, and committing ourselves to the dour diaries of the asylum. Avoiding a void at all costs is simply not worth it, for in effect what is reproduced in the heart of the hearth – the self-abuse or the abuse of others that takes place within the ironic insularity of middle-class dwellings, the ‘disciplining’ of children or of oneself, and the like – is that very void become monstrous because become kindred with a humanity we have lost in possessing it. We may diagnose ourselves, but the cure eludes us. Indeed, we cannot afford to cure this self-absorption, because we must *have* something rather than *be* someone, for it is the authentic public life practicing the dialogue of the polis that robs us of our egos: “In other words, symptom is the way we – the subjects – ‘avoid madness’, the way we ‘choose something [...] instead of nothing [...] through the binding of our enjoyment to a certain signifying, symbolic formation which assures a minimum of consistency to our being-in-the-world.” (Žižek 1990, 81) This ‘symptomatosis’ invokes the repetitive loop of both production – the ‘rational limitations of desire – and projection – ‘the creation of new needs’ and the ‘irrational indulgence of desire’ (cf. Sontag 1978, 62). Since we cannot avail ourselves of a cure, an end to the cycle of both the self-interested confrontation with the other and the chorus of participation in the productive-consumptive medley, we forestall its deleterious effects by simply being entertained by them. We can have sex with ourselves through media, with other adults through dating, or even with our children through physical coercion which always is on the very edge of the erotic-neurotic source of the very

reproductive system, that is, taking pleasure from ‘discipline’, both of oneself and of others, where general legal and social sanction is held up, at least in public, against such rationalized evils. We are able to enjoy the bodies of others, their corpus of works and perhaps indisciplined behaviors due to the sense that production can remain theoretical, ‘ideational’, as Blackburn (1990, 143) claims even of Marx. The rationalization of our petty desires involving both the subjectitude of the adult self and its half-witted objections to rationality at large, makes our sensibilities regarding our control over others appear to be themselves objective. We must have this control, not merely in the sense of stopping the world, as we have seen, but in the sense that this control is the very something that encircles the nothing that haunts the inner hinterlands of consciousness. We become rather amateur theorists of our own social foundations, child-raising, what sexuality can subsist in marriage, our conflicts with the schools or with government, etc. But we cannot shed our own skins, either subjectively as a life-process or in the discourse of rationality as a social structure: “For although objectivists have discovered, delineated and presented situations and facts that exist and develop independently of the act of discovery, they cannot guarantee that the situations and facts are also independent of the entire tradition that led to their discovery.” (Feyerabend 1987, 60) The most honest way of confronting the obsessive dynamic of the ‘having of something’ is not merely to admit to it in the senses of ‘I want’ and ‘I enjoy’, but to say to ourselves that these possessions can perhaps be used to further more profound aims, in the way that in our economy, one would wish to own a house so that one could retire from wage-labor. The stability of life might be an argument in favor of reflection upon it, rather than a field upon which mere leisure takes place. Mature being need not only to recognize its own finitude in both relation to world and to beings, but its very maturity must accede to having in order to be, of possessing so that one can be dispossessed, at least in part, and of recalling the self to action by demolishing its pretentious duplicity on the very social stage where such melodramas are enacted.

One can destroy oneself without acquiring the force of destruction itself, but transformation need not be transfigurations². We no longer need to become spirits or animals, energies or other beings unknown in order to understand the current human condition. These mythopoetic tropes cover different aspects, even phases, of what humanity has meant to itself in taking the void of non-Being into its presence. They certainly may still serve the phantasmagoric as allegories, but their latter day reincarnation as elements of the pure and perhaps puerile fantasy of plain amusement belies and even sabotages their sacred intentionality: “The crucial point that must be made here on a theoretical level is that fantasy functions as a construction, as an imaginary scenario filling out the void, the opening of the *desire of the Other*: by giving us a definite answer to the question ‘What does the Other want?’, it enables us to evade the unbearable deadlock in which the Other wants something from us...” (Zizek 1990, 128), yet we cannot but listen to the voice which carries nothing but a self-misrecognition in its immediate wake, where we are at once awake to the ‘desire of the Other’, as Zizek continues, but have also at once become attendees at the wake of the Other, simply because we can only translate their needs into versions of our own.

The Reality of The Unreal

Listening as well must the also be thought of as a sacred event of self-immolation, the positive risk of being and the world as it has been. To hear the other is to join him and close off the closure of distance between beings. Like all sacrificial outcomes, this act constitutes a new world: “The world of intimacy is as antithetical to the *real* world as immoderation is to moderation, madness to reason, drunkenness to lucidity. There is moderation only in the object, reason only in the identity of the object with itself, lucidity only in the distinct knowledge of objects.” (Bataille 1988, 58, italics in the original) The attempted purity of the subject, this time *without* the conceptualization of one’s self-projection into the world of objects as a form of subjectivity, ranged over against objects

and their ‘reality’, like a ghost in the machine, a ‘spirit in the material world’ and so on, suddenly allows the unreal to attain its own reality. All further reflection on such a world would bear the stamp of a rationalization, an excuse or a ‘reason’, in the casual sense of the word, for whatever occurred while one was within the altered order of sacrifice and risk. The narrative that is reconstructed from the space of experience which alters our being to the extent that we become unrecognizable as an object – the subject becomes the radical object of the consumer and the consumed, the fire of sacrifice making him both at once – is one in which the goal is to communicate such an experience as believable in the mundane world of free objects, that is, those that are either produced or consumed but not both in simultaneity. Rationalization itself preserves the subject-object distinction, “...so that the tale appears as being half-rational, half dream, as partly subjective experience and partly objective perception, at once plausible in its cause and unreal in its effect.” (Bachelard 1964, 86) One can close off access to the uncanniness of the irreal subject-object union, where creation and destruction save themselves for each other, and where what is produced is consumption while the producer is herself consumed by simply stating that such experiences were ‘dream-like’, or that one was inebriated, as in Bachelard’s literary example. The listener, who is always only half-listening, lest she also fall into the apparent stupor of lost selfhood, can then nod her head sagely and say at once ‘I’ve been there’ and had the same experience, and also in a dismissive manner, in that ‘Such events are really quite juvenile and have little lasting merit’.³ But we must then recall that whatever the effects of such irreal participation in the very processes of life and death as they come together may be, they work upon us as an addition to our self-understanding. Yes, we must do the work of interpretation, for the action of the irreal and its unreality cannot be reflective in the same way that dreams alone cannot help us: “At bottom, dreams are nothing other than a particular form of thinking, made possible by the conditions of the state of sleep. It is the dream-work which creates that form, and it alone is the essence of dreaming – the explanation of its peculiar nature.” (Zizek 1990, 7) The *Traumdeutung* is not an

outcome of rationalization, even though it can be made to make sense to us in the same way as the kerygmatic kernel that emanates through the gibberish of an oracle is made to do so. We do not say, however, that such an interpretation, the meaning of the experience, has little merit. Even the 'public service announcement' style of dreams, where a bodily function is nagging at us to wake up and fulfill it, cannot be sloughed off as mere dross. This most 'material' form of the unreal has a material function. It creates a tension, not unlike the deeper and more dangerous tension that may lead to neurosis and is held within the dreams that attempt to demonstrate the connections of anxiety and life. This tension is as necessary as the one where things have not yet been 'worked through'. It is even found at the level of the politics of the 'wide-awake everyday world of contemporaries', and cannot be becalmed: "If this tension were to fail, a feeling of calm would be completely unwarranted; there would be more reason than ever to be afraid." (Bataille 1988, 188) So what is produced by the work of interpretation, whether or not this takes place after the fact, as it must do, but also if it receives some ground-work, some working effort within the experience, as is the case with dreaming and the projection of action that is the hallmark of daydreams or phantasms is in fact a kind of alertness, something which reiterates to us the need to be aware. It is, in fact one of the sources of concerned being.

This *souci de soi*, the ethically correct negotiation of the absence of narcissism by the care that is directed towards the self, only commits its error when it imagines its task to be one of reclamation rather than of aiding the vital transformation of subjectivity along the torus of ongoingness. We cannot, in other words, take a step back and pretend that we "...are seeking a kind of unity and wholeness of the self, a reclaiming of the place of feeling, against the one-sided pre-eminence of reason, and a reclaiming of the body and its pleasures from the inferior and often guilt-ridden place it has been allowed in the disciplined, instrumental identity." (Taylor 2007, 507) This may be the first effect of whatever insight comes from interpretation – the unreality of the unreal producing a sense of a new self from the sacrificial event, or a holism of the 'team effort' through the

realization that dreams are ‘our friends’, for instance – but we must come to the further realization that alertness and interpretation do not end. The tension between the worlds of experience and the subject must continue, even though to resolve specific issues one must overcome their original impetus, which often has taken the form of an anxiety that is at least recognizable even though ultimately, all anxiety actually does is *mask* its own sources: “To solve political problems becomes difficult for those who allow anxiety alone to pose them. It is necessary for anxiety to pose them. But their solution demands at a certain point the removal of this anxiety.” (Bataille 1988, 14) This is a touch and go, a delicate set of exercises, because it must always enact a specific frame of reference, and not be led into the vision of belief alone that will then attempt to carry all before it. Hope comes before vision, just as community overtakes either the singular love of self or the other, the notorious ‘love of the one’ that Nietzsche displaces, and just as faith supplants the rituals and traditions of mere religion. One lives on to some finite goal in the light of an absolute value, but there is an ever-present potential to reverse these forms of rationality and make the absolute take on the task of absolution, to resolve the tensions of the day and thence call for the resolution of tension. To do so is to entirely miss the point of the unreal, the dream, or the uncanny of the arational subjectivity that now must face its own ongoing demise in the very place where it had imagined was safe from any hint of finitude: “...the paradox of being which can reproduce itself only in so far as it is misrecognized and overlooked: the moment we see it ‘as it really is’, this being dissolves itself into nothingness or, more precisely, it changes into another kind of reality.” (Žižek 1990, 25) This new reality is that of the visionary, where the ethical error is made to generalize one’s experiences. As James noted, it is enough for those who have experienced a vision, interpreting it in a religious manner or not, to take it into themselves as part of the process of self-understanding. It has no portable ability and can make absolutely no claims on anyone else: “That is why we must avoid the simple metaphors of *demasking*, of throwing away the veils which are supposed to hide the naked reality.”⁴

(Zizek 1990, 25, italics added) For the trick, if you will, of the void's very absence of being is that it does not end in a reality. It is the lay of masks inverted, where each screen is as real as the next. It is no hall of mirrors, it is the mirror which walks through a corridor of frames containing only the reflection of our own reflections, the thoughts of are thinking, which then returns to us again as the presentiment of the unthought, questioning us along the edge of the abyss of meaning and perhaps appearing to mock our interpretive efforts with the guttural interrogatives only its voice can produce.

The Whole Untruth

And questioning our 'innermost' thoughts? Yet intimacy alone, much vaunted and highly sought after, whether indiscriminately or no, is hardly enough to brook the shared publicity of hyper-rationality and objectivity that dominates the day to day routines of life, including those in spaces imagined to be wholly private. For what is unique and unshared about the routines of the middle-class domus? Our homes are full of advertising, for instance, it persist and insists upon its presence wherever we turn. Billboards and hoardings are not enough for its insatiable appetite, and we must the be reminded of what manufacturer is responsible for everything from our faucets to our refrigerators to our underwear. At least as of yet there are no logos or slogans on our toilet paper, once unwrapped and ready to fulfill its well-bred function. Privacy, if not intimacy, is a secular and highly individuated playing out of the ancient agrarian soteriology of world-denial. Its sources tend to be Eastern, but nevertheless, its pull, in its ability to temporarily pull us away from the world at large and thus our rather forced larger than life presences within such a world, has been glossed a number of times in Western history. None of these guises of saving oneself through the turning away from the world as it is, is without internal contradiction. For example, "...while monasticism is a pure expenditure it is also a renunciation of expenditure; in a sense it is the perfect solution obtained only by completely turning one's back to the solution. But one should not underestimate the significance of this bold solution; recent

history has accentuated its paradoxical value.” (Bataille 1988, 110) The cliquish quality of concentrating social groups in obscure locations lends itself to a variety of abuses, the regular examples in American media regarding religious sectarians are just one example of this, wherein such ‘compounds’ a diversity of abnormative behaviors develop and reproduce themselves. Not that these ideas themselves that have the chance to be enacted in such social spaces are abnormative – one proverbial example is a few males having sexual access to many more females, including those judged by the laws of specific nation states to be underage and thus legally unavailable, whatever one might way of the ethics of such liaisons – but there are other reasons for curtailing such activities on the larger front. The ‘boldness’ of a world-denying soteriology, however secular or sectarian, rests not in its ability to turn the world off in any actual manner, but in its provocative theater of pretending or imaging that certain human beings are exempt from its condition and dynamic. Yet if these groups themselves attempt to construct worlds anew, they find themselves fraught with the same situation from which they had originally sought egress: “The institutionalization of matters previously in the hands of individuals and small groups also encourages opportunism and cowardice.” (Feyerabend 1987, 260) The cult-like atmosphere of sectarian world denial is matched only by the profoundly inegalitarian and elitist tenor of the corporate boardroom or the think-tank. In these kinds of contrived human contexts, the extremity of privacy and intimacy is forced upon the incantatory acolytes as if they were to be inducted into the Eleusinian mysteries or some such other classical cult. Early Christianity was likely hardly different from these other scenes, which were indeed its first competition. That latter day versions of, or reversions to, these earlier models are often found to be piloted by those the wider society would consider insane is not surprising, for “A madman’s actions may be intelligible, but this does not mean that they are necessarily rational.” (Blackburn 1990, 160) There is even a metaphysical pedigree to the calculation of Jonestown and Waco amongst others, that was well known in ancient literature: “...history, for Sophocles, was too irrational to have been created by rational

gods.” (Feyerabend 1987, 117) History is, rather, the quintessential human act, as it acts upon ourselves as no other agent. We have always and already the potential to enact historicity, transforming our own age and its culture memory through experiencing the ongoingness of the living inertia of history while at the same time being committed to the rewriting of history by our very presence and decision-making, rational or no. ‘Effective historical consciousness’ includes the rationality of understanding the objective suasion of structure, but it also must include the subjective self-understanding of the agency of human beings as they are shaped in the present day by contemporary forces and suggestions. We do not know, in fact, how these encounters will play themselves out, and world-denial as well as the radical subjectivity of the fully ‘private citizen’ who joins no groups but also shuns his individuated public role, are unlikely to provide any reasonable conclusions: “Any admission of ideas and ideals to the rank of prominent historical agents must confront the problem of the ruses of which history has shown itself perennially capable, deflecting ideological and other movements to fates that they never anticipated or might have scorned or feared.” (Blackburn 1990, 158) This is one of the reasons, at a wide structural level, why we must admit to not knowing ‘what’s what’ in any ultimate sense. Even though our present age is one of accelerated motion – some of it contrived by the planned obsolescence that aids the means of over-production and keeps the shill of advertising desperately current – it is clear that no historically known human epoch was without this self-same motion, however painstaking it may seem to us, ensconced in our whirlwind of social change: “Indeed, we cannot speak of a world of the phenomenon, of a world of appearances, except in the presence of a world that *changes* it appearances.” (Bachelard, op. cit. 57, italics in the original) This is generally considered to be one of the elements of the character of appearances, for the Ancient Greeks and their followers, an element that not only exposed its less than genuine nature, where adaptation and motion are only the tools of a disingenuous ingenuity, but suggested to them that there was another world forever untouched by such a dynamic. The task of humanity became more clear for this

sensibility, one which we still largely share: to found oneself once again in the unity of spirit, of the species, of consciousness, of cosmos, of nature or of the divine. Only through this kind of rational action directed at an absolute value would subjectivity liberate itself from its self. The very presence of the should self, the adult self, the outer child and the socius will always be divisive when it comes to working together toward the communion of self-consciousness. The self-understanding associated with this grand task of unification, reflected as well in the sciences that desire a theory of grand unification, an elemental cosmic image which is no longer a mere image: “Spirit is struggling to achieve an understanding of itself as spirit, that is, as free subjectivity, and to see this as the absolute. But with the pre-Greek peoples – except for the Jews – the absolute is still less than subject, it is still bound up with external, hence impersonal reality, nature or the total abstraction of the void.” (Taylor 1975, 394) The sense that one imparts the source of consciousness to a higher being that has, in spite of its superiority or even omniscience, retained within itself an intimate human interest cannot be summarily dismissed as an hypostasized human egotism. It is we ourselves who have divine interest, and this is what, perhaps paradoxically, makes us what we are as human beings. We do not yet know of other forms of consciousness that hold these aspirations, and naturalizing them or rationalizing them does not alter their essential qualities. The gods abandon those who do not believe in them, they are wrested from the tapestry of history and become archaeological monuments, mutely beseeching us to recall them to mind and to presence. We are apparently about to find out that nature as well has this character. The dialectic of human life within history, its task and its gift, continue to present to our contemporary consciousness the rationality of creating for ourselves a reason to continue, to live on within the shadows of doubt and the focused light of a considered self-skepticism. If the rationality of science and philosophy are currently our cultural mainsprings, the authorities we desire to tell us the whole untruth about our existence, we need to leap into them as does the sacrificial risk-taker into the fire. Because of this dialectic, “...the knowledge

we need to understand and to advance the sciences does not come from theories, it comes from participation. The examples, accordingly, are not details that can and should be omitted once the 'real account' is given – they *are* the real account.” (Feyerabend 1987, 284, italics in the original) Telling 'the whole truth and nothing but the truth' is a manes of avoiding the truth of such a telling. Rather, we should be honest about our situation and tell instead the entire untruth, using the reason of unreason, confronting the mocking grimace of sudden and radical death, to gain a more authentic self-understanding. It is not mere self-satire that subsists within such a voice, or is represented on such a visage. This is only half the story, a half-story, as it were, the half that remains sardonic in the face of ongoing life: “I always speak the truth. Not the whole truth, because there's no way to say it all. Saying the whole truth is materially impossible: words fail. Yet it's through this very impossibility that the truth holds onto the real.” (Lacan, cited in Copjec 1989, 53)

Human knowledge does not need the truthfulness of a distended and rationalized objectivity to fulfill either its ethical or existential obligation to its creators. No known history wears only the sardonic mask – or is this the way we know history? – no known rationality sports only the guise of the object – or is this the way we rationalize having to live with objects, is this our way of objecting to them and to our presence as the would-be object? – and, finally, no knowable reality is grasped only through the desire for the unknown. In knowing these aporia, we do not have to cast them into an abyss of meaning. It is more reasonable to follow the contours of the presence of unreason in our consciousness, to attempt to comprehend their fuller significance with a view to understanding the history and culture that found them to be of such magnitude that it both suppressed their influence and yet ignited their passions in unprecedented ways: “That civilization is perhaps detestable; it sometimes seems to be only a bad dream; and there is no question that it generates the boredom and irritation that favor a slide toward catastrophe. But no one can reasonably consider something that only has the attraction of unreason in its favor.” (Bataille 1988, 170) The admittance of the self stating with the

truth of untruth built into it that “I don’t know what’s what’ is always the first step in learning. The untruth of only truth will not help us here. The rationality of reason alone cannot aid us. We need rather to include, without attempting to envelope, the manifold conflicts and diffusely mutable interpretations that coruscate across the surface of the human existentiality. No less so can we ignore the limits of the narrative that only attests to our shadows, fears, and confrontations. We do ‘contain multitudes’, but in this we can find a home in the language of the other. We do not supersede others, but we can find them recognizable in a way that that brings us closer to self-recognition: “A more complete definition of what is called existentialism than we get from talking about anxiety and the contradictions of the human condition might be found in the idea of their being and at the very moment of their opposition to each other, in the idea of a reason immanent in unreason...” (Merleau-Ponty 1964, 70) That we have been the unknowing and unreasoning witnesses to an exposition of consciousness at once biographical and historical can only lead to the visions of rationality a humanity it can no longer afford to ignore.

NOTES

¹ This is hardly new. The symbiosis amongst social movements, technology, and the ideas that are to be spread is of historical moment, if cyclical: “...absolute authority was no longer necessary to convey religious knowledge that could be imparted to an ignorant and isolated population. Printing and the vast dissemination of knowledge that had followed in its wake, had changed not only the quantity of information people possessed, but their ways of thinking as well.” (Von Arx 1985, 74) Today, media transforms both what is thought about and perhaps also what constitutes thought ‘itself’, but we can no longer tell from where the change has come nor where it is going.

² For an historical example, see Bataille (1988, 102).

³ As Žižek suggests, “When we awaken into reality after a dream, we usually say to ourselves ‘it was just a dream’, thereby blinding ourselves to the fact that in our everyday, waking reality we are *nothing but a consciousness of this dream*.” (Žižek 1990, 48, italics in the original)

⁴ Even if anxiety masks its origins, it is itself no mere mask. It does not import to us a theater of its intent, but is an effect of the problematic relationship we have with a theater that absurdly denotes the social reality of all too real expectations. We mistake our performances in the everyday or in the political sphere with a form of life which is equal to the reality of the

irreal. We expect, in other words, to gain as valuable insight from this stage, and thus also think that our interpretations of it – when they occur at all – will be as meritorious as those the difficult work of self-analysis collects on its way to self-understanding. So, rather than an expectation of demasking, we must recall the void *as* it presents itself to us – this is in fact all there is to nothingness, and there is no ‘Nothing’ at which we arrive as a terminus, its Stygian visage looming up as a slightly more dense mass of darkness in a world of shadows – and then we will realize that “It is a question of arriving at the moment when consciousness will cease to be a consciousness of *something*; in other words, of becoming conscious of the decisive meaning of an instant in which increase (the acquisition of *something*) will resolve into expenditure; and this will be precisely self-consciousness that is, a consciousness that henceforth as *nothing as its object*.” (Bataille 1988, italics in the original).

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Book Reviews

Hidden Traces. Memory, Family, Photography, and the Holocaust

Ludmila Bîrsan
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Marianne Hirsch, *The Generation of Postmemory: Writing and Visual Culture After the Holocaust*, New York: Columbia University Press, 2012, 320 p.

Keywords: postmemory, holocaust, second-generation, feminist, trauma, generation after, photography, death, archive, family

Postmemory expresses the experience of those who grew up with the previous generation's narratives of traumatic events, which cannot be understood and cannot be created. Marianne Hirsch analyzes the discourse of postmemory in the works of several artists, be it in narrative, art or photography. The former take centre stage in the understanding of postmemory.

The question “how do we relate to other people's suffering” tends, with Marianne Hirsch, towards the autobiographic and familial, as an attempt to learn how one relates to the past generation's suffering. More than oral or written narratives, photographs are important because they survived massive destruction and return, like ghosts, to resurrect a lost world. The traditional historical archives and methodologies are limited in trying to fathom the bodily, physical or affective impact of the trauma. Thus, a culture of memory and “memory studies” have started to appear and develop increasingly.

Discussions about what Hoffman calls “era of memory” referenced, for Marianne Hirsch, feelings of a personal/ familial nature. The volume inclined towards an ethics and aesthetics of

remembrance in the wake of catastrophe. How do we relate to “others’ pain”? What do we owe the victims? How can we carry on their stories, without drawing any attention to ourselves? How are we involved in the murders whose witnesses have not been ourselves?

Marianne Hirsch proposes the term “postmemory” by relating to her own “autobiographical readings” of works by second-generation writers and visual artists, describing, at the same time, her own relationship with her parents’ stories of danger and survival, during the Second World War in Romania and the ways in which these impacted her post-bellum childhood Bucharest. By reading and seeing the works of second-generation writers and artists, and also by talking to her peers, the children of survivors, she wanted to see if they shared the same traits and symptoms that would make a postgeneration out of them. Marianne Hirsch analyzes two texts (Art Spiegelman's *Maus* and W. G. Sebald's *Austerlitz*) which, in her view, reveal the way in which the work of postmemory falls back on familiar. Art Spiegelman draws attention to his father’s survival story in Auschwitz and the way in which he perceived the story as a child. He relied on his family’s visual archives and on the “narrative traditions”.

“Generation after” is the carrier of personal, collective and cultural traumas of those before them, remembering images, stories and behaviours: “To grow up with overwhelming inherited memories, to be dominated by narratives that preceded one’s birth or one’s consciousness, is to risk having one’s own life stories displaced, even evacuated, by our ancestors. It is to be shaped, however indirectly, by traumatic fragments of events that still defy narrative reconstruction and exceed comprehension. These events happened in the past, but their effects continue into the present. This is, I believe, the structure of postmemory and the process of its generation.”

Marianne Hirsch tries to answer several questions regarding the structure of inter-and transgenerational transmission of trauma. Why is the term “memory” so insisted upon? Why is postmemory particularly a traumatic recall? Which aesthetic and institutional structures, what tropes and technologies best mediate the psychology of postmemory, the

continuities and discontinuities between generations, the gaps in knowledge, the fears and terrors that ensue in the aftermath of trauma? What is the part of the visual medium and especially, of photography?

The first part of the book focuses on the way in which family memory functions, its problems and limits. The author argues that postmemorial work tries to re-activate and re-embody more distant political and cultural memorial structure by offering them familiar and individual forms of aesthetic expression. Throughout this part the author answers key-questions: Why memory? Why family? Why photography? In the transmission process, from the injured participants to the subsequent generations, important is the memory that “signals an affective link to the past – a sense, precisely, of a material “living connection” – and it is powerfully mediated by technologies like literature, photography, and testimony.”

The works of a second-generation, either in the shape of narratives or memoirs, are the long-term effects of the fact that they lived close to pain and next to witnesses who survived historical traumas. The child takes upon himself the responsibility to fix, to compensate loss. Family life, according to Marianne Hirsch, “is entrenched in a collective imaginary shaped by public, generational structures of fantasy and projection and by a shared archive of stories and images that inflect the broader transfer and availability of individual and familial remembrance.”

As to photographs, photographic images survived devastation more than oral or written narratives, becoming the proof of destruction processes and thus constituting the cultural work of postmemory. Georges Didi-Huberman (2008) also proves the testimony of the Holocaust can be transferred from texts and fantasias to incontestable images that try to say the unsaid.

Family photos or the familial aspects of postmemory could be considered less credible than public images or the images showing horrors, but Marianne Hirsch claims that when we look at photographic images of a lost world we look not only for information or confirmation, but also for an affective connection that might get the affective quality of events across:

“Photographs thus become screens – spaces of projection and approximation, and of protection. Small, two-dimensional, delimited by their frame, photographs minimize the disaster they depict, and screen their viewers from it. But in seeming to open a window to the past, and materializing the viewer’s relationship to it, they also give a glimpse of its enormity and its power.”

Throughout the volume the author often references Roland Barthes’ punctum theory that lead to the perception of images, of things from the past, as “points of memory” – intersection points between the past and the present, memory and postmemory, personal remembrance and cultural recall.¹

Marianne Hirsch proposes to frame postmemory on feminist terms, as well, finding it interesting to look for female first and second generation witnesses in order to find a feminist angle to knowing the past. She underlines the fact that our access to the postmemory of the Holocaust was generally shaped by works by and about men, fathers and sons.

The second part of the book answers the questions like: Why have images become iconic so easily? How do artists of the postgeneration use perpetrator images structured by a genocidal Nazi gaze to memorialize victims? The author references several authors that discussed the issue of images that depict atrocities. Susan Sontag (1977) discusses in the pages of *On Photography* the power and danger of photography to anesthetize the onlooker. Sontag warned about the dangers of photography, for the image pierces and anesthetizes.² Photography, in her view, is a medium that flattens, homogenizes all images and the value of all images.

The problem that Marianne Hirsch approaches concerns the fact that in the representation of Holocaust the repetition of the same intense images can be noticed, images that are, in fact, very few, used everywhere iconically and emblematically to recall the event. The fact is all the more intriguing as many more visual documents exist. The Nazis outdid themselves in recording the atrocities they committed, immortalizing both victims and perpetrators. The obsessive repetition of the same few images delimited and radically reduced the visual archive

of this event, thus risking a distancing and a hackneying of a painful piece of history.

Marianne Hirsch claims that, on the contrary, repetition connects the first generation with the second, so that an inherited traumatic past may be transmitted: “The repeated images of the Holocaust need to be read not so much for what they reveal but for how they reveal it, or fail to do so. As in themselves figures for memory and forgetting, they are part of an intergenerational effort at reconstitution and repair.”

When we look at images of the mass graves, a meeting between memory and forgetfulness takes place, so that we see earth, wounds, death, we are overwhelmed by shock and bewilderment, but at the same time the organisms are buried, the traces are hidden, and forgetfulness has begun. The author thinks that each time we look at these images we repeat the meeting between memory and forgetfulness, between shock and self-protection, and the role of the work of postmemory is to unearth the graves, to obliterate the strata of forgetfulness.

Marianne Hirsch also notes, in the second part, an aspect signaled by the theoreticians of photography, who highlight the simultaneous presence of life and death in the photograph: “The indexical quality of the photo intensifies its status as harbinger of death and, at the same time, its capacity to signify life. Life is the presence of the object before the camera; death is the “having-been-there” of the object – the radical break, the finality introduced by the past tense.” Roland Barthes also claimed that each photograph resembles a living image of a dead thing, an image that produces death while it attempts to safeguard life.

In some images, the camera is in the exact same position as the gun, and the photographer in the same stance as the executioner, who is unseen. Moreover, the viewer’s position is identical to that of the gun so that our gaze, just like that of the photographer, takes the executioner’s place. Each photograph represents a moment chosen by a photographer and a gaze. That is why there are often tendencies to transform experience in a way of seeing, to make the experience become identical to the process of its being photographed.

NOTES

¹ To Roland Barthes, photography is “a certain but fugitive testimony”. What Marianne Hirsch wants to express through the concept of postmemory is very accurately found in the experience Roland Barthes describes of “meeting” with his mother’s image, of the intersection of the past with the present: “Photography thereby compelled me to perform a painful labor; straining toward the essence of her identity, I was struggling among images partially true, and therefore totally false.” (66) Unlike oral or written history, in the case of photography, as Roland Barthes notes, we can never deny that *the thing was there* (Barthes 1982).

² As Marianne Hirsch remarked, Susan Sontag reconsidered her statements in her following studies. In *Regarding the Pain of Others* she admits, though, that photography can and must depict human suffering, teaches us how to cope with human loss and devastation across global distances. Nevertheless, Sontag claims that, to connect photographs to emotions and to make these emotions raise awareness, viewers must already have a context in which to place them, thus highlighting the fact that familiarity exceeds the value of the feeling. On the other hand, Susan Sontag emphasizes that we live in a post-photographic era, that photography that depicts pain merely captures reality. Photographs don’t allow one to imagine, refusing fantasy. The fear, here, is not in aestheticizing the images of atrocities or that these could be altered and thus rendered “unreal”, but in they can only be true.

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Postmodernism Revisited: Current Trends and Interpretations

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Stuart Sim, *Fifty Key Postmodern Thinkers*. London and New York: Routledge, 2013, 264 p.

Keywords: postmodern turn, leading postmodern thinkers, breadth of postmodern thought, interpretation, modernism

In the contemporary vocabulary, the term “postmodern” has a central significance. It became a kind of cultural extension, a general milieu favourable for polemics. Postmodernism was theorized in many fields, such as architecture, philosophy, art, literature, geography, but its wide use does not mean that it is also strictly defined or general accepted. Postmodernism is rather a paradoxical concept, with many contradictions that cause hermeneutic difficulties. We can’t talk about a unitary theory, a set of principles and postulates or a unique definition, albeit there are some thinkers who consider that besides differences, the disparate trajectories of postmodern meet in a consistent paradigm. Anyhow, the identity of this phenomenon is still controversial and a lot of interrogations are open: is postmodernism a cultural movement, an academic field or just an evanescent fashion/trend? Does it represent an overcoming of the modern perspective, a radicalization, a negation or just a part of it? After it celebrated several deaths, has postmodernism now become obsolete? Is postmodernism replaced by post-postmodernism, transmodernism or other currents?

In this context, what is the pertinence of a new editorial issue on postmodernism, if the latter has been proclaimed self-contradictory, overdone or even dead? In the same time, its age of glory passed, and from this point of view, does a new book

about this phenomenon represent just an archaeological effort or does its scope surpass this layout? *Fifty Postmodern Thinkers*, published in August at Routledge, fully answers these questions. Stuart Sim is a well known author that contributes to the understanding of postmodernism and of some representative figures of it, such as Derrida, Baudrillard or Lyotard. Sim is specialized in Critical Theory and Long Eighteenth-Century English Literature, and teaches at Northumbria University. His research interests are critical theory, postmodernism and 17-18th-century prose fiction. He authored or edited 30 books and some of them have been translated into 17 languages. His publications include *Beyond Aesthetics: Confrontations with Poststructuralism and Postmodernism* (1992), *Modern Cultural Theorists: Georg Lukács* (1994), *Modern Cultural Theorists: Jean-François Lyotard* (1996), *Derrida and the End of History* (1999), *Contemporary Continental Philosophy: The New Scepticism* (2000), *Post-Marxism: An Intellectual History* (2000), *Introducing Critical Theory* (2001), *Irony and Crisis: A Critical History of Postmodern Culture* (2002), *The End of Modernity: What the Financial and Environmental Crisis is Really Telling Us* (2010), *The Routledge Companion to Postmodernism*, 3rd edition (2011), *Addicted to Profit: Reclaiming Our Lives from the Free Market* (2012). Thus, the author's good immersion in the problematic of postmodernism provides a guarantee for the reasonableness of his book. But, to avoid my potential *ad hominem* sophism, let's see his arguments. Stuart Sim admits the diversity and the diffuseness of the postmodern movement (a more coherent postmodernist movement being traceable only in architecture). The lack of unity is noticeable by the simple existence of many forms of postmodernism, a scenario that replicates the situation of "modernisms". Nevertheless, this doesn't mean that postmodernism has no profile and its work is valueless. It is an important part of the cultural landscape and Sim emphasises two major components: first, the existence of a "definable condition of postmodernity" (3) that insures a set of connections between different postmodern authors. The second one is "its current meaning of a reaction against modernity and modernism, to the extent of constituting an antimodernism in some respects" (3). This orientation is specific for the twentieth century, even if the term were used earlier. Understanding

postmodernism as a reaction to modernism seems to be a favourite approach for Stuart Sim, because it doesn't restrain the concept of postmodernism to aesthetics, but it opens new political meanings (challenging the "grand narratives", the power and the authority).

Regarding the moment of the publication of this book, Stuart Sim affirms that "the time seems ripe" (1) for this kind of project. What are the reasons for this assumption? One reason seems to be the "solidification" of many theories and postmodern ideas along time. This problem reminds me the vexed question of the legitimacy of theorizing the contemporaneity – how is it possible to write academically about a current that is currently underway, since the knowledge is obtained after the crystallization of its object? In this respect, Steven Connor's position seems to be still valid: "The difficulties of knowing the contemporary are well known. Knowledge, it is often claimed, can only be gained and enjoyed about what is in some sense over and done with. The claim to know the contemporary is therefore often seen as a kind of conceptual violence, a fixing of the fluid and formless energies of the urgently (but tenuously) present now into a knowable and speakable form, by fundamental and irrevocable acts of critical choosing" (Connor 1997, 3).

Another reason is the fact that, unfortunately, many major authors that contributed to this field died in the last few years (Jean Baudrillard, Jacques Derrida, Jean-François Lyotard), a situation that makes necessary a reassessment of their work. Moreover, Sim reads the actual state of modernity as being under a great strain and the credit crisis of 2007-2008 serves as an example for the socio-economic difficulties that slow down the societal progress, one of the golden values of modernity. In these circumstances, we might assert that the above condition "makes it all the more topical to look again at those figures who were critical of modernity's stranglehold on world culture, and of the 'Enlightenment project' in general" (1). Thus, the return to the work of postmodern thinkers does not represent a barren act of criticism, a sterile gesture with no effects, but, on the contrary, it seems to be a fruitful strategy to find there some useful ideas for our contemporary world. This "postmodern turn" is not just a conceptual presentation of postmodernism, a path for the cultural heritage and its

memory, but a pursuit for traces that can be eloquent today. In this context, the main aim of this book is “to show that the critique offered by the movement’s major figures is as relevant today as it was when it first broke into the public domain back in the 1970s and 1980s, and that it was always far more than a short-lived cultural trend that has now run its course” (2). In this assertion, we can find a lot of Sim’s presuppositions about this phenomenon (the refutation of the idea according to which postmodernism is a simple cultural fashion, the refusal of the assumption that postmodernism is meaningless or it lacks any form of utility) and it can be lectured as an act of faith in the relevance of postmodernism. Furthermore, the importance of this current, of its interrogations and of its style was recognized by scholars that belong to many research areas. I can illustrate the latter by giving the example of the postmodernism influence in new media studies, within which “most critical work in digital culture has been presented under the heading of ‘postmodernism’ in cultural studies” (Rodowick 2001, 206). Digital textuality may be seen as an incarnation of postmodern ideas and the dominant discourse of online identity in the ‘90s is under the same postmodern influence, the digital self being conceived as mobile, fluid, rhizomatic and textual.

Another complicated problem that arises from the structure of this kind of book is the criteria that are chosen for the authors’ selection. As it can be easily seen from the title, Stuart Sim selected fifty key thinkers that are considered canonical for any survey of postmodernism (Adorno, Auster, Barth, Barthes, Baudrillard, Bauman, Bell, Bhabha, Bourriaud, Butler, Caputo, Cixous, Debord, Deleuze & Guattari, Derrida, Eco, Feyerabend, Foucault, Geertz, Gergen, Gibson, Glass, Greenblatt, Halley, Haraway, Harvey, Hutcheon, Irigaray, Jameson, Jencks, Koolhaas, Kuhn, Laclau & Mouffe, Lynch, Lyotard, McHale, Mandelbrot, Reich, Rorty, Said, Sherman, Spivak, Tarantino, Thom, Venturi, Ward, White and Žižek). This selection task is not easy at all, having in mind the diversity of postmodernism, the domains in which it developed and the heterogeneity of writers. Furthermore, some thinkers considered as being postmodern do not admit this label and never felt comfortable with this association and this is the case for some leading figures of this movement. One example is Michel Foucault, who, when he was asked about the

postmodern project, offered an unexpected answer: "What are we calling post-modernity? I'm not up to date" (Foucault 1988, 33). Another example can be Paul Virilio (who was not included in this book), who, in a conversation with John Armitage, bluntly said: "Post-structuralism? Yes, OK. Postmodernism? It doesn't make any sense to me. Hence, I do not feel linked at all with postmodernity" (Armitage 1999, 25). Totally aware of these problems, Stuart Sim motivates his choices and the validity of his theoretical claims. Thus, Sim does not construct his approach focusing on the objective of exhaustiveness, but on the representativeness of the authors. The selected thinkers are considered emblematic of the twentieth century postmodernism, because in that period "postmodernism as it is now understood came to have a high profile in popular culture and the public consciousness" (1). The thinkers that were chosen are "leading examples" of their domains and the "isolate" postmodern figures were excluded. In this respect, the selection was done according to two principles, namely chronology and "breadth of postmodern thought" (3). Thus, chronologically speaking, Theodor W. Adorno (1903-1969) is the first entry and Nicolas Bourriaud (b. 1965) is the last one. Regarding the second principle, Stuart Sim opted for a plethora of fields, in order to get a comprehensive view on postmodern creation. In this respect, the target audience of this book is also very large, being composed of readers that are interested in philosophy, politics, psychology, anthropology, social theory, religion, feminism or arts. Beyond these principles, we notice Sim's background desire of displaying a sort of connection between sometimes very separate ideas, in a quest for a lost unity: "Every effort will be made to cross-reference between these thinkers, to show the connections that can be made between them that do suggest a common set of concerns running throughout their work" (3).

To be able to present the work of fifty of the most important theorists within the postmodern movement in an accessible format, Stuart Sim put an emphasis on the organization of the articles. The standard structure contains an exposition of the most important concepts of the respective thinker, references to their main works and their impact, a maximum of ten main references and a list of references to other texts. Written in an elegant and concise style, with

substantial information and a special care for the soundness of philosophical arguments, *Fifty Key Postmodern Thinkers* constitutes an authentic academic presentation of postmodernism and also a valuable guide for both students and scholars. As Andreas Huyssen put it, “what will no longer do is either to eulogize or to ridicule postmodernism en bloc. The postmodern must be salvaged from its champions and from its detractors” (1984, 9). The real challenge is to transform postmodernism into a veritable epistemic object, and Stuart Sim’s work is up to this task.

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The blind spot of consciousness

Tudor Cosma Purnavel
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Délia Popa, *Apparence et Réalité. Phénoménologie et psychologie de l'imagination*, Hildesheim, Zürich, New York: Georg Olms Verlag, 2012, 374 p.

Keywords: imagination, reality, possibility, passivity, intellect

Broadly speaking, one could see at least some important themes in phenomenology as outlines against the background of the activity – passivity conceptual couple. This certainly does not mean that they are just derivatives or that they lack the significance of the couple itself. Background and outline are in the end correlative terms: one cannot conceive the one without the other. The activity and passivity in question are to be thought of in relation to consciousness. For a better understanding of the issue at hand, let's imagine a scale with the two concepts acting as its extreme points. My contention is that the way one conceives the theme of, for example, alterity in phenomenology finds itself directly connected with the degree of activity or passivity one concedes to consciousness. The phenomenology of Marion for example tends to reach the passivity extreme of this scale: the consciousness is stripped of its constitutive power, which in turn corresponds to a potent alterity, one that controls the conflict with the ego. On the other hand, a superficial reading of Husserl's phenomenology will find itself on the activity side of the scale: the alterity is in this context a mere derivative of consciousness. Délia Popa's new book, *Apparence et Réalité. Phénoménologie et psychologie de l'imagination*, published in 2012 at Georg Olms Verlag, is an interesting point of access to these themes, as it does this by a

detailed analysis of the imagination. The author has a doctoral degree from the University of Nice and is currently working at the Center for Philosophy of Law within The Catholic University of Louvain. Délia Popa is also the author of a book on E. Lévinas, *Les aventures de l'économie subjective et son ouverture à l'altérité* (2007).

It is my intention in this review to present a brief overview of the book under attention. First of all, the author correctly ascertains the fact that the phenomenal relief pertaining to the imagination is extremely diverse. The oneiric, artistic, mundane etc. instances of the imagination suggest its heterogeneous nature, which in turn makes the task of its definition all the more difficult. Despite this difficulty, a preliminary description of the imagination can be sketched: it, first of all, occupies a space that escapes the reign of the inferential thought; as the prime origin of images and fiction, it seems that the imagination does not contribute to the attempt to understand reality, to master it and, as an end result, to obtain truth. One can therefore easily understand why this faculty could be seen to lack any philosophical dignity, if one would compare it with the function of the intellect. But this is not the whole story, because imagination mediates between the intellect and the actual, sensible experience and thereby succeeds in surpassing the scope of the intellect.

As far as the function of mediation goes, Délia Popa maintains that the imagination negates the reality through its fiction, but, at the same time, by means of this very step, brings it closer. Its performance is therefore to be seen in a twofold manner: both adversary and champion of reality: “Un symbolisme spécifique de l'imagination est à faire valoir comme agissant en deçà de ses productions, soutenant l'ordre de la connaissance au sein de laquelle elles émergent. Grâce à lui, l'imagination relie des aspects divergents, concilie les opposés et unifie l'hétérogène, opérant des synthèses inespérées sans effacer les tensions dialectiques. Il y aurait ainsi lieu de considérer l'hypothèse qu'en niant la réalité de l'expérience que l'on cherche à connaître, l'imagination contribue cependant à l'approcher. La négation de la réalité par la règle de l'illusion est ainsi à relier à la fonction agrégative que la connaissance

mobilise pour former une représentation, l'imagination jouant pour la connaissance le double rôle d'instigation dialectique et d'harmonisation symbolique" (pp. 1-2).

The author insists throughout the book on the bearing the imagination has on knowledge. It first of all has the capacity to bring forth the sensible layers of thought, which is tantamount to recasting the foundation of knowledge: imagination guides thought towards images and by doing this allows it to get a grip on reality. This is however not the most important aspect when one takes into consideration the role of imagination. It succeeds in determining the very make-up of the subject's life by producing unprecedented forms of experience. This helps thought to escape the gravitational pull exerted by the normal and thereby to feel the urgency of the possible. It is the author's contention that the confrontation with the possible is responsible for thought's projections in respect to actual experience: the possible, which belongs to the domain of knowledge, becomes entangled with the reality of experience and thereby reveals its capacity to transform both reality and subject.

The importance of the interaction between the possible and the real cannot be stressed enough, as it reveals the connection between the theoretical and the practical. Délia Popa will favor the latter, because it brings the subject face to face with alterity. Otherwise put, the subjectivity discovers its facticity, its contingency: the meaning of experience is not exhausted through its active oversight, but rather intimately linked with the reality of experience, which is not only responsible for the constitution of sense, but also for the subject itself.

The author makes these ideas clear by distinguishing between the sense and reference of experience. The former is that which escapes consciousness in its constitutive role: it finds itself at the crossroads between the activity and passivity (transcendence) of consciousness. Otherwise put, it is Délia Popa's contention that there is an intimate link between the imagination and that which exceeds the active side of subjectivity, the passivity, which in turn is responsible for the actual construction of subjectivity. It is through these ideas

that the book under review can be seen as taking the side of such authors as Waldenfels and Lévinas in an ongoing debate of phenomenology. It represents an attempt to break free from the Husserlian transcendental idealism through an unexpected challenger, namely the imagination.

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