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# META

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# Herméneutique et mystagogie. Pluralité des hiérarchies selon Grégoire le Sinaïte

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**Abstract**
**Hermeneutics and Mystagogy: Plurality of hierarchies according to Gregory the Sinaite**

This article investigates the reception of Dionysius Areopagita's hierarchical conception by one of the most famous spiritual authors in Byzantine and post-Byzantine times: Saint Gregory the Sinaite (ca 1275-1346). Written in the last period of his life, the text *On the Four Hierarchies* represents a synthesis of his spiritual and liturgical thought and a witness to the importance of the Dionysian notion of hierarchy for Byzantine theology. Gregory the Sinaite responds to the question concerning the place of monasticism in the Church's hierarchical structure in a way that is hermeneutically more original than that of Niketas Stethatos but at the same time more liturgical oriented. A key concept for understanding the creation and the Church, the hierarchy is also a hermeneutical tool for reassembling ecclesiastical life's sacramental and liturgical structure with the preeminent role of monastic spirituality.

**Keywords:** : Gregory the Sinaite, hierarchy, angels, authority, hermeneutics, mystagogy, monasticism, liturgy

Une histoire complète de la réception de Denys l'Aréopagite à Byzance reste encore à écrire. Les dernières décennies ont vu une reconsidération de vieilles thèses (Hausherr 1936 ; Meyendorff 1957) et une mise en lumière de la dimension dionysienne de la théologie et de la spiritualité byzantines (Golitzin 1994a ; Ritter 1997 ; Rorem, Lamoureux

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1998; Rigo 2004; Louth 2008 ; Edwards, Pallis, Steiris 2022). La succession des lectures de Denys n'y est pas une répétition des mêmes idées et formules, mais une véritable opération herméneutique de sélection et d'adaptation d'une pensée considérée comme émanant d'une autorité doctrinale et spirituelle incontestable. Au long de cette « odyssée » byzantine (cf. Pelikan 1987) on rencontre parfois seulement des allusions en filigrane, parfois des commentaires et des scholies, ainsi que de véritables traités composés en miroir par rapport aux écrits dionysiens. Un revirement de l'intérêt pour l'Aréopagite s'est manifesté au XI[e] siècle chez Nicétas Stéthatos dont le texte *De la hiérarchie* s'avère être particulièrement significatif notamment pour les rapports entre la mystique de saint Syméon le Nouveau Théologien, appelé « le second Denys », et la pensée dionysienne (Darrouzès 1961 ; Golitzin 1994b ; Lauritzen 2014 ; Purpura 2018). La découverte des annotations sur *Les quatre hiérarchies* de saint Grégoire le Sinaïte, un des maîtres de la spiritualité hésychaste, dont l'œuvre et l'influence dans la spiritualité orthodoxe sont encore plus importantes (Ware 1972 ; Balfour 1982a, 1982b ; Tachiaos 1983 ; Rigo 2002), et l'édition critique fournie par Antonio Rigo (2005) permettent de prendre la mesure des convergences, des continuités et des mutations qui marquent la réception de Denys à Byzance[1]. A partir de ces progrès de la recherche, nous nous proposons un approfondissement herméneutique qui essaye de faire confluer les études historiques avec les interprétations des écrits dionysiens proposée par des auteurs contemporains tels von Ivánka (1990), Golitzin (1994a), Beierwaltes (2000).

## 1. Lectures des *Hiérarchies* de Denys

Chez Grégoire le Sinaïte, dans les chapitres sur les hiérarchies, on retrouve un des enjeux fondamentaux de la réception byzantine de la vision dionysienne : la correspondance entre le monde des anges et celui des hommes, plus précisément entre la structure de l'univers des esprits célestes et celui de l'Église[2]. Cependant, Grégoire indique l'existence d'une pluralité des hiérarchies à l'intérieur de cette correspondance, car après la hiérarchie des anges ou « intellectuelle » (*noerà*), présentée dans la succession proposée

par Denys, avec les trônes comme termes ultimes de l'échelle invisible, il y a une autre hiérarchie, qu'il appelle « rationnelle » (*logiké*) ou monastique, suivie par la hiérarchie « symbolique » (*symboliké*), qui n'est autre que celle sacramentelle ou ecclésiale, à coté de laquelle est mentionnée une hiérarchie « légale » (*nomiké*), qui relève de la Loi de l'Ancient Testament (QH 1, Rigo 2005, 2)[3]. Il s'agit certainement d'un commentaire de la définition dionysienne de la hiérarchie ecclésiastique, considérée à la fois comme « céleste et légale » (*ouranía kai nomiké*), c'est-à-dire comme ayant une position intermédiaire entre le monde des anges, modèle iconique, et les préfigurations de l'Ancienne Alliance[4]. Denys y soulignait les deux aspects de l'Église : la contemplation, partagée avec les intelligences, et le symbole sensible comme instrument anagogique.

On se rend compte du fait que le regard théologique de saint Grégoire, très analytique d'ailleurs, distingue trois hiérarchies terrestres au lieu d'une seule et qu'il maintient le rapport typologique entre la hiérarchie légale et celle ecclésiale selon la tradition exégétique reflétée par Denys lui-même (Roques 1983, 171-173). Chez Nicétas Sthétatos, on rencontrait déjà une intégration des moines dans la structure hiérarchique de l'Église afin de leur reconnaître la participation au sens initiatique de la hiérarchie comme transmission et préparation à la vie selon l'Esprit. En effet, dès le début de son traité Nicétas parlait de la contemplation de « l'initiation monastique » (*te theoria tes monachikes teleioseos*) comme d'une intention de l'écrit de Denys (H II. 7, Darrouzès 1961, 308). Cela contredit pourtant la vision dionysienne selon laquelle la condition des moines se définit par obéissance envers l'autorité de la hiérarchie sacramentelle qui seule a la fonction de communiquer les mystères, c'est-à-dire un rôle initiatique. René Roques le rappelle très clairement : les moines, selon Denys, « bien que parfaits en leur ordre, ils n'ont aucune mission dans l'Église. Leur place est avec le peuple saint, près des portes du sanctuaire » (E VIII, 1 ; PG, 1088 D-1089A ; Roques 1983, 191). En outre, il faut rappeler que dans la *Hiérarchie ecclésiastique*, il n'y a pas une structure trois fois ternaire, mais une échelle à six degrés distribués en deux grandes catégories : ceux qui reçoivent l'initiation (les fidèles) et ceux qui font initier les

autres (les sacerdotes). Les moines constituent le premier ordre de la hiérarchie des initiés, tandis que les ordres ecclésiastiques proprement-dits forment la hiérarchie des initiateurs[5].

Donc, Nicétas Stéthatos avait fait le premier pas[6], en accordant aux moines une dignité « dionysienne » que Grégoire le Sinaïte développe sous la forme d'une structure à part et même spirituellement supérieure à celle sacramentelle (QH 7, Rigo 2005, 8). Car la vie des moines, dans sa progression intérieure, se trouve, selon Grégoire, dans une proximité plus grande par rapport au modèle céleste que la vie des ceux qui ont reçu la consécration. Quel serait-il le critère afin de distinguer entre les deux hiérarchies terrestres qui sont contemporaines (car celle qui caractérise le temps de l'ancienne Alliance est considérée comme préfiguration dans l'histoire du salut) ? C'est là, peut-être, une des contributions les plus originales de saint Grégoire à la réception byzantine de Denys : il opère une distinction en fonction de la nature des dons qui sont portés par les divers structures hiérarchiques. D'un côté, on a l'immatérialité des offrandes, partagée, mais de façon différente, par les intellects et les moines, et de l'autre, on est conduit à voir une relation, sous son aspect « matériel », entre l'agneau pascal et le pain eucharistique (QH 1, Rigo 2005, 2). L'herméneutique de saint Grégoire est essentiellement liturgique, en confirmant par cela le sens même de la vision dionysienne (Bornert 1966, 66-72 ; Golitzin 1994a, 219-232 ; Louth 2001, 17-32), mais elle ne peut pas être comprise sans prendre en considération les réflexions sur « l'autel de l'âme » et le « sacerdoce spirituel » qu'il avait fait dans ses *Chapitres en acrostiche* (cf. Rigo 2005, 22). En effet, là on trouve les arguments pour l'existence à part d'une hiérarchie « rationnelle » qui a comme activité la liturgie intérieure ou la liturgie du cœur, « vrai sanctuaire » d'une célébration toute spirituelle et, ce qui est plus significatif pour l'ontologie de la condition monastique, d'un avant-gout des réalités eschatologiques.

Revenons à Nicétas Stéthatos, grand précurseur philo-dionysien, que saint Grégoire admirait d'ailleurs, pour prendre la mesure des convergences ainsi que des éléments distinctifs de leurs lectures de Denys. Pour Nicétas,

> si donc notre hiérarchie possède une structure égale à celle de la hiérarchie céleste et un office en tous points commun, il s'ensuit nécessairement qu'il y a entre elles communauté de grâce, d'ordres et de sièges, puisque les grâces divines et les dons de Dieu nous sont communs avec les puissances d'en haut et nous sont donnés à nous comme à elles, quand nous sommes élevés au-dessus du sensible et unis avec elles et avec Dieu. (H 12, Darrouzès 1961, 315)

Ainsi il établit une analogie entre les trois premiers ordres célestes, en les faisant débuter avec les trônes (c'est une première différence par rapport à Denys, même si, chez Denys, il y a une ambiguïté sur ce point), suivis par les chérubins et les séraphins, et les trois premiers rangs dans l'Église de son temps : patriarches, métropolites et archevêques. Ensuite, à la seconde triade angélique formée par les dominations, les vertus et les puissances il fait correspondre la triade ecclésiastique constituée par les évêques, les prêtres et les diacres. La troisième structure ternaire des êtres célestes, principautés – archanges – anges, a comme réflexion dans le monde ecclésial les trois offices représentés par les sous-diacres, les lecteurs et les moines (cf. H 22, Darrouzès 1961, 326). Là il faut remarquer, d'une part, la dignité à laquelle Nicétas élève des fonctions assez humbles des sous-diacres et des lecteurs, mais qui avaient à l'époque un rôle important dans le bon déroulement des offices liturgiques[7], et d'autre part la relation entre les anges et les moines, devenue traditionnelle dans la spiritualité ascétique sur la base d'une analogie concernant le mode de vie.

De son côté, lorsqu'il veut décrire les ordres de chaque hiérarchie, Grégoire le Sinaïte suit avec persévérance la triple structure ternaire du modèle céleste dionysien, sauf dans le cas de l'Ancien Testament, où il indique seulement les triades : lévites – scribes – hiérarques (surtout « prophétiques », ajoute-il, cf. QH 3, Rigo 2005, 4). Dans le cas de la Nouvelle Alliance, il y a, d'une part, la hiérarchie ecclésiastique formée – dans une progression ascendante, cette fois-ci – par les diacres, sous-diacres et hiéro-diacres (première triade) ; prêtres – évêques – archevêques (deuxième triade) ; et finalement par les patriarches, tous égaux (la troisième triade) ; et d'autre part, la hiérarchie des moines qui reprend la formule de la première triade ecclésiale, tandis que la deuxième triade reste liturgique

(*psaltai – psaltodoi – leitourgoi*) et la troisième fait correspondre à la fraternité des Patriarches celle des contemplatifs (QH 4, Rigo 2005, 4, 6). Il faut y noter que saint Grégoire applique aussi un autre critère afin de distinguer les triades de la hiérarchie monastique : il s'agit du progrès spirituel selon laquelle on peut parler des ordres des « subordonnés » (*hypotaktikoi*), des « pratiques » (*praktikoi*) et des « contemplatifs » (*theoretikoi*). En superposant les deux manières d'organiser l'échelle des moines, on obtient un tableau complet des offices et des étapes spirituelles, car les offices doivent être des services quasi-liturgiques et des expressions des vertus acquises. Même si la distribution des fonctions ecclésiastiques, surtout celles inférieures, et la correspondance entre les hommes et les anges ne sont pas identiques chez Nicétas et saint Grégoire, l'idée commune est celle d'intégrer dans cette harmonie préétablie à neuf étages la hiérarchie des ordres liturgiques de leur époque. Avec saint Grégoire on assiste à un effort de récupérer, comme l'a très bien montré Antonio Rigo, l'héritage de saint Maxime le Confesseur, car seulement une lecture anagogique peut soutenir le rôle des *psaltai* et des *psaltodoi* dans la distribution de la science hiérarchique[8].

On remarque au niveau de la troisième triade, la plus pure et la plus proche de Dieu, l'existence d'une communion plutôt que d'un ordre hiérarchique. Les patriarches sont considérés égaux, tout comme les contemplatifs, mais les contemplatifs ne sont pas identiques : ils ont des affinités subtiles avec les anges les plus hauts – car il y a des contemplatifs séraphiques (caractérisés notamment par la vertu de la pureté) ; il y en a des semblables aux chérubins (qui excellent en connaissance et en sagesse) ; et il y en d'autres analogues aux trônes : Grégoire les appelle « doux », « simples », discrets jusqu'au total effacement – Dieu repose en eux car ils ne connaissent que Dieu (cf. QH 4, Rigo 2005, 6 ; 28-29). Cela reflète une lecture de la *Hiérarchie céleste* de Denys, surtout de la partie concernant la triade supérieure, qui met l'accent sur le fait de partager un don de façon différenciée, mais dans l'unité même d'une communion, et non sur un ordre de pouvoir[9], même s'il s'agit des pouvoirs (*dynameis*) à l'intérieur de chaque ordre :

ces pouvoirs relèvent de la force des vertus, de l'activité hiérarchique et de ses effets purificateurs, illuminateurs et unifiants.

## 2. Hiérarchie et vie spirituelle

Le thème qui lie profondément les deux auteurs, Nicétas et saint Grégoire, est celui de la correspondance entre les deux hiérarchies, céleste et ecclésiastique : „considérez dans toute sa force cette vérité que notre hiérarchie est de même structure (*homoeides*) que la hiérarchie céleste », écrivait Nicétas (H 7, Darrouzès 1961, 309). Cette correspondance, qu'on pourrait qualifier de spéculaire, est fondée sur le rôle de la hiérarchie de transmettre la lumière, la grâce, ou bien l'amour de Dieu, et reflète l'exemplarité de la structure et de la dynamique du monde des anges par rapport aux hommes et plus particulièrement par rapport à la constitution hiérarchique de l'Église (Golitzin 1994a, 119-141 ; Louth 2001, 38-43 ; Vlad 2021b).

Le premier sens général de la hiérarchie présenté par Grégoire le Sinaïte, après avoir parlé de la pluralité des hiérarchies, est justement celui de communion et de distribution d'un don sacré, qu'il soit « spirituel » ou « corporel » (QH 5, Rigo 2005, 6). Si on prend en considération le sens d' « ordre sacré », l'accent préféré par Grégoire est celui qui touche à la sainteté de la vie. Par conséquent, on ne peut pas penser une hiérarchie authentique en dehors de la sainteté de ceux qui la composent. La troisième signification est celle d'un « savoir qui se distribue selon la vertu » (QH 5, Rigo 2005, 6). Là encore se dessine un rapport entre ce qui fait la substance même de la hiérarchie – ce qui se donne à travers la hiérarchie – et la capacité de recevoir qui se définit spirituellement en tant que vertu. Le dynamisme de la hiérarchie est exprimé par saint Grégoire en empruntant les mots de Denys : « la ressemblance et l'union à Dieu » (cf. CH III, 2 ; EH I, 3, II ; Rigo 2005, 6, 30), ce qui indique participation à la vie de Dieu selon la mesure de chaque membre de la hiérarchie et par l'imitation de la générosité divine, c'est-à-dire en distribuant ce qui est reçu[10].

Ces accents convergent vers ce qui constitue l'enjeu de ces réflexions sur le sens et la pluralité des hiérarchies : la

place des moines et leur autorité par rapport à la hiérarchie ecclésiale. On se rappelle que Nicétas Stéthatos affrontait ce problème ayant comme toile de fond et comme argument vivant la mémoire de son maître : saint Syméon le Nouveau Théologien (Hausherr, Horn 1928 ; Van Rossum 1981 ; Ware 1982 ; Turner 1990 ; Golitzin 1994b). Il s'agissait de la réflexion sur le « vrai » évêque que Nicétas présentait selon la vision dionysienne de la dynamique de la hiérarchie comme celui dans lequel les trois activités hiérarchiques atteignent leur perfection. Selon lui, il peut y avoir quelqu'un (c'est-à-dire un moine) qui « dépasse les évêques en connaissance divine et en sagesse » :

> Dans ce cas, ce que je viens de dire, je le répète : celui à qui a été donné le pouvoir de manifester l'Esprit par la parole, sur celui-là brille aussi l'éclat de la dignité épiscopale. En effet, quelqu'un, bien qu'il n'ait pas été ordonné évêque par les hommes, a cependant reçu – qu'il soit prêtre, ou diacre, ou moine – la grâce d'en haut de la dignité apostolique, que constitue la parole d'enseignement et la connaissance des mystères du royaume de cieux. (H 36, Darrouzès 1961, 339)

Pour Nicétas, promoteur de l'héritage spirituel de saint Syméon, le défi était celui de penser la place de l'autorité spirituelle à l'intérieur de la hiérarchie bien que cette autorité puisse sembler par ses exigences et ses manifestations comme rebelle à toute soumission formelle, étant reçue d'en haut, comme une nouvelle investiture apostolique[11]. Trois siècles après, pour Grégoire le Sinaïte le problème n'a plus la forme interrogative qu'on ressentait chez Nicétas. La réponse qu'il donne à la question sur la place de moines suppose déjà presqu'une « autonomie » et une « supériorité » hiérarchique du monachisme en tant que vie orientée vers la contemplation et l'imitation des anges[12], en reconnaissant, bien entendu, la « supériorité » propre à la hiérarchie sacramentelle en tant qu'institution divine qui est « mère » aussi pour ceux qui choisissent de mener une vie semblable aux anges : « mère » au moment du baptême ; « mère » au moment des vœux (QH 7, Rigo 2005, 8). Grégoire ne refuse pas (comment aurait-il pu faire cela ?) la conformité de la hiérarchie ecclésiale qu'il appelle « symbolique » à la vie des anges, mais il précise toujours, dans le sillage de Denys, que l'évêque est celui qui

« grâce à la vision divine veille avec un esprit pur sur tous ses subordonnés », étant capable de connaissance contemplative (HQ 5, Rigo 2005, 6)[13]. C'est l'exigence de la vie selon l'Esprit, de l'expérience de Dieu, qui doit traverser la hiérarchie des hommes afin qu'elle puisse être à la hauteur de son modèle et accomplir son sens, qui n'est autre que celui formulé par Denys : « la ressemblance et l'union à Dieu ».

On trouve dans une scholie de Grégoire une image des plus éloquentes qui exprime à la fois l'acuité et l'équilibre de sa réflexion sur les hiérarchies. Car il dresse une comparaison entre les deux hiérarchies – humaine et angélique – et dit explicitement que la hiérarchie ecclésiale, « symbolique », « a la même signification » *théophore* que celle des anges, tout comme la hiérarchie des moines, « aimée par Dieu », a « la même dignité » que celle des anges à condition de mener une vie détachée de la matérialité et pure (« pauvreté », « célibat », « élévation amoureuse vers Dieu »). Donc, ce n'est pas une supériorité inconditionnelle celle des moines. Ceux-ci partagent avec les membres de la hiérarchie sacramentelle l'exigence de la vie selon l'Esprit. Autrement, selon Grégoire, ceux qui étalent les symboles de leur condition consacrée durant la liturgie, mais leur vie ne coïncide pas avec la signification des symboles dont ils sont vêtus, courent le risque de se réveiller au-delà dans la lumière d'une vérité qu'ils ne peuvent ni refuser ni cacher, complètement dénudés, comme des pauvres hommes « mondains » (QH 7, Rigo 2005, 8).

Pour Nicétas, ce n'est pas la place occupée dans la hiérarchie qui institue l'autorité mais l'autorité spirituelle qui est reconnue par la place dans la hiérarchie. De ce point de vue, la mystique supposée « anarchique » converge avec le sens intime et dynamique de la hiérarchie et se manifeste historiquement comme correctif spirituel à une structure qui de temps en temps est affectée par auto-référentialité[14]. Pour saint Grégoire l'exigence se pose de façon similaire pour les membres de toutes les hiérarchies en termes de relation entre symbole et vérité, symbole qui porte les semences de la vérité et l'accomplissement intérieur de cette vérité. C'est la raison pour laquelle les scholies sur les hiérarchies s'achèvent par une mystagogie des vêtements des moines et des liturges.

### 3. « Conformité aux anges » et mystagogie

La dernière partie des annotations de saint Grégoire le Sinaïte peut être lue, d'un point de vue historique, comme un témoignage de l'état de la tradition des commentaires liturgiques byzantins (Bornert 1966). Dans son édition, Antonio Rigo a restitué le contexte de ces réflexions, les particularités du rituel des vœux monastiques à l'époque et les sources mystagogiques : le fameux commentaire du patriarche Germanos I (*L'histoire ecclésiastique*) et sa version complétée par la *Protheoria* de Nicolas d'Andida (Bornert 1966, 181-211), mais aussi les écrits de saint Maxime le Confesseur (Rigo 2005, CIX-CXVII). Le texte de saint Grégoire ne s'arrête pas sur toutes les articulations de l'office liturgique, mais donne une sélection des significations des objets et des gestes puisées dans une tradition déjà consolidée, à laquelle il ajoute parfois ses propres perspectives. Ce que nous voudrions souligner davantage c'est l'enjeu principal de cette suite mystagogique des chapitres et scholies sur les hiérarchies[15].

En premier lieu, il convient de remarquer l'accent que saint Grégoire met sur « la conformité aux anges » lorsqu'il écrit sur la symbolique des habits des moines et des vêtements liturgiques. Il applique, conformément à l'exégèse traditionnelle, le passage de l'Epître aux Ephésiens (6, 11-17) à la condition des moines pour souligner la similitude avec les êtres spirituels : revêtir l' « armure de Dieu » c'est combattre spirituellement « pour le souverain » qui est au-dessus des cieux et « contre les principautés et les puissances des ténèbres » ; porter « la cuirasse de la justice » s'exprime par la « pratique harmonieuse de toutes les vertus » ; « le bouclier de la foi » signifie la tempérance qui sur le plan spirituel consiste dans une « disposition illuminatrice de l'âme en l'Esprit pour la condition semblable à Dieu » ; « le casque du salut » se réfère à la « sagesse de l'Esprit », tandis que « le glaive de l'Esprit » symbolise le courage (QH 9, Rigo 2005, 12, 31). On voit comment ce que saint Paul décrivait en tant que préparation de chaque chrétien pour le combat spirituel devient une façon de présenter la panoplie des vertus que doivent caractériser la vie des moines sous son aspect ascétique mais aussi comme

dynamique de la ressemblance à Dieu. Les anges demeurent les modèles pour les deux démarches – ascétique et mystique – en tant qu'armée céleste et surtout hiérarchie des illuminations.

Si l'on entre plus en détails du rituel des vœux[16], on note que la tonsure comme signe de l'enlèvement des pensée mauvaises et de consécration, à travers un « esprit pur », à une vie d'adoration de Dieu suppose le paradigme angélique (QH 8, Rigo 2005, 10). D'ailleurs, chez Denys, le symbolisme de la tonsure relevait particulièrement de la condition monastique en tant que « vie pure et sans fausse apparence », vouée à l'unification contemplatrice (EH IV, 3, III, Roques 1983, 285). Le couvre-chef (*kamelaukion*), symbolisant le « casque du salut », a comme signification possible « le voile lumineux de la grâce sur l'esprit » du moine, ce qui se réfère aussi à une dimension de la vie angélique, soulignée explicitement par la symbolique du *maphorion* : « imitation des ailes des anges ». Une formule synthétique montre la dignité de la condition monastique : « l'habit indique le diadème royal et angélique » (QH 9, Rigo 2005, 12). Ce diadème se retrouve comme signification de l'*epitrachelion*, tout comme l'*omophorion* de l'évêque représente « l'aspect angélique, être lumière et demeurer dans la lumière » (QH 12, Rigo 2005, 14, 16). En même temps, la polysémie des vêtements met en relief les deux côtés de la condition des moines : celui ascétique et celui anagogique, car, selon notre auteur, le couvre-chef en tant que « voile de l'esprit » peut signifier aussi « l'obscurité des passions » et, d'autre part, le *maphorion* est comme un « suaire » funèbre (QH 9, Rigo 2005, 12). Il ne s'agit pas d'une contradiction, mais de l'ambivalence des signes qui couvre les étapes de la vie spirituelle et son aspiration ascensionnelle et mystique.

Cependant l'intérêt de saint Grégoire est de souligner le double caractère symbolique des hiérarchies des moines et des liturges, en précisant que, sous le rapport « des symboles des habits », la hiérarchie « rationnelle » s'avère être « de très peu inférieure » à celle sacramentelle. On y trouve la même intention qu'animait à la fois la définition d'une échelle à part de la vie monastique et l'équilibre entre celle-ci et la structure ecclésiale. Cet équilibre a comme repère une exigence

commune : la correspondance entre le visible et l'invisible qui se traduit par la fonction anagogique du symbole[17]. Si les habits monastiques sont les symboles des vertus de l'âme, tout comme les vêtements liturgiques, ceux qui les revêtent doivent mener une vie à la hauteur de la signification de ces signes (QH 7, Rigo 2005, 8). Saint Grégoire choisit de parler de participation « à la vérité des habits », qui implique selon lui « une participation hiérarchique à la vérité » (QH 10, Rigo 2005, 12). Cette corrélation entre hiérarchie et vérité donne la mesure de la réception de la pensée dionysienne chez ce grand représentant de la spiritualité hésychaste. Il ne reprend pas des formules pour décorer ses propres réflexions, mais saisit le sens profond des écrits de Denys (Purpura 2018, 47 ; Vlad 2021b) et le préserve même lorsqu'il en fait une lecture novatrice, selon les cadres et les exigences de son temps. C'est la raison pour laquelle saint Grégoire le Sinaïte mérite une place de choix dans l'histoire de la réception byzantine du corpus dionysien.

**NOTES**

[1] Nous allons citer dorénavant, pour des raisons de simplification, les textes de Nicétas Stéthatos et de saint Grégoire le Sinaïte de façon suivante : l'édition du *De la hiérarchie* (H), suivie du chapitre et de la page (Darrouzès 1961) et l'édition d'Antonio Rigo du *Sur les quatre hiérarchies* (QH 2005). Pour les écrits de Denys l'Aréopagite, les références sont à l'édition du *Corpus Dionysiacum*, II (CH – *De coelesti hierarchia*; EH – *De ecclesiatica hierarchia*; MT – *De mystica theologia*; E – *Epistulae*).

[2] EH V, 1. Voir Roques 1983, 171-199, surtout 175 : « Contrairement à notre attente et aux déclarations les plus fermes de Denys sur le parallélisme des deux hiérarchies, la symétrie entre les ordres célestes et les ordres humains n'est pas absolument parfaite ». Voir aussi les remarques de Louth 2001, 52-55 et de Rigo 2022, 271.

[3] Saint Grégoire préfère la symbolique quaternaire, cf. son *Homélie sur la Transfiguration* (Balfour 1982). Antonio Rigo a bien montré la correspondance entre le quadruple sens de la Transfiguration et les quatre hiérarchies chez saint Grégoire (2005, XLVIII-XLIX ; 21-22). Voir aussi Ică jr 2011, 320-323.

[4] Sur la hiérarchie « légale » chez Denys, voir EH II, I ; V, 2.

[5] L'appartenance des moines à la triade des initiés ne signifie pas une dévalorisation de la condition monastique dans l'Église, mais représente une forte affirmation de la conception liturgique et sacramentelle de la hiérarchie. Du reste, l'Aréopagite manifeste une haute considération pour la vie monastique comme *philosophie parfaite* (EH VI, 2). Mais dans l'exercice même

de cette perfection, le moine est le réceptacle d'une science transmise par la triade ecclésiale supérieure. Voir Roques 1983, 190-191, et aussi Roques 1961.
[6] On rencontre aussi chez Pierre Damascène une correspondance exacte entre les deux hiérarchies (Rigo 2005, LI ; 2022, 272). Sur Pierre Damascène, voir Gouillard 1939 et Peters 2011.
[7] Le rôle des diacres du point de vue historique et liturgique a fait l'objet de plusieurs recherches. Nous nous limitons d'envoyer ici seulement à Salaville, Novack 1962 et Davies 1963.
[8] Maxime le Confesseur, *Quaestiones ad Thalassium* 55, 335-337, 338-341, ed. Laga, Steel 1980-1990, p. 501, cf. Rigo 2005, pp. 27-28, qui donne aussi une bibliographie essentielle pour les aspects historiques de ces offices.
[9] Voir l'interprétation de E. von Ivánka par rapport à celle de R. Roques. Nous voulons y citer seulement ces considérations : « Et même la hiérarchie de l'illumination perd chez le Pseudo-Denys sa valeur absolue, puisqu'il est affirmé à maintes reprises que l'homme qui nous éclaire (le "mystagogue", l'évêque, le prêtre) accomplit *avec* Dieu, *tout près* de Lui, l'illumination, et que c'est Dieu qui fait tout en tous. Et tandis que pour Proclus c'est essentiellement le rang d'être qui confère aux choses leur valeur, le Pseudo-Denys soutient que cette valeur dépend de la perfection que chaque degré d'être, chaque degré d'illumination, peut par principe recevoir en partage de la même façon et avec la même intensité. Elle dépend de la perfection qui consiste – à quelque rang que l'on se trouve dans l'existence – à être "coopérateur de Dieu" » (Ivánka 1990, 244). L'interprétation de von Ivánka est discutée par Beierwaltes qui met en relief lui aussi les différences de la pensée hiérarchique dionysienne par rapport à celle de Proclus, tout en soulignant l'inspiration structurante du paradigme procléen (Beierwaltes 2000, 74-91.
[10] Voir en ce sens les remarques de Marilena Vlad sur la dynamique de la hiérarchie chez Denys, surtout celles qui concernent l'interprétation de la transmission graduelle du don à travers la hiérarchie non pas en tant qu'éloignement entre le principe et les membres de la hiérarchie, mais en tant qu'adaptation du don primordial à celui qui le reçoit et en même temps en tant que préparation de celui qui reçoit le don (Vlad 2021a, 49-50).
[11] Pour une analyse des rapports entre Syméon le Nouveau Théologien et Nicétas Stéthatos concernant l'héritage dionysien, voir Van Rossum 1976, Golitzin 1994b et 2001.
[12] Voir Rigo 2005, LXV-LXXIII, pour l'histoire du processus de « transfert » du pouvoir spirituel vers la « hiérarchie » des moines à Byzance.
[13] Sur le portrait spirituel de l'évêque (*hierarches*/ *archiereus*), „l'homme qui vit en Dieu", et sa fonction hiérarchique selon l'Aréopagite, voir Roques 1983, 176-183.
[14] Voir Golitzin 1994b comme réponse au commentaire de Johannes Koder sur la mystique de saint Syméon (1969, 60-61).
[15] Un questionnement méthodologique de la démarche mystagogique chez des auteurs antérieurs est proposé par Crîşmăreanu 2024.
[16] Pour une histoire des habits monastiques, voir Adalbert de Vogüé 2001 et Rigo 2005, 31-40.

[17] Antonio Rigo a mis en lumière l'inspiration profondément dionysienne d'un passage des *Chapitres en acrostiche* (127) qui porte justement sur le rapport « pédagogique » entre le visible/ sensible et l'invisible/intelligible (2005, XXXVII). .

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# Origin and Transmission of Knowledge in Husserl and Heidegger

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**Abstract**

In this text a comparison is drawn between Husserl's The Origin of Geometry and Heidegger's The Origin of the Work of Art, two works written in the same period (between 1932 and 1936). It is argued that both deal with the theme of mathesis, understood in its Greek meaning, i.e. as an area concerning learning and teaching, the origin and transmission of knowledge. The fact that Husserl and Heidegger refer to two different areas shows that they understand mathesis in two different ways. For Husserl, it takes the form of a historical transmission aimed at preserving an original identity of meaning and ensuring the supratemporality of truth, while for Heidegger it takes the form of the memory of the difference that produces (and continues to produce) meaning, i.e. the eventual character of truth.

**Keywords:** mathesis, origin, tradition, Husserl, Heidegger, geometry, art

## I.

In his recent book, *Être et genèse des idéalités. Un ciel sans éternité*, Dominique Pradelle, with reference to a well-known claim by Husserl in *Ideen III*: "*Mein Weg zur Phänomenologie war durch die* mathesis universalis *wesentlich bestimmt*" (Husserl 1971, 57), poses an interesting question: Is

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*mathesis universalis* the paradigmatic thread for phenomenology?

Pradelle's answer is negative. Or rather, it is negative if one takes μάθησις in its narrow, regional meaning, that is, as the discipline "of the forms of deductive theory and correlative theory of definite multiplicities" (Pradelle 2023, 86), as is especially clear from *Formal and Transcendental Logic* and *The Crisis of the European Sciences*. Such a science would in fact have three main characteristics: 1) first, it would be an exclusively deductive and non-descriptive science, thus excluding from its field of inquiry all other forms of knowledge based instead on material, and not merely formal, presuppositions; 2) consequently, it would be merely analytic, operating with merely formal concepts joined by syntactic connectives; and therefore, 3) its concepts would be a "realm of universal constructions," we might say a world of pure fabrication or production. (Pradelle 2023, 86-87)

Faced with this characterization of μάθησις, Pradelle notes that it would in fact be at the antipodes of phenomenological research. (Pradelle 2023, 87) Far from sticking to empty forms constructed in an entirely abstract and operative manner, phenomenology in fact addresses objects in their concreteness, in their intuitive and given, which also means qualitative and material, content. The concepts of phenomenology are always descriptive concepts, banishing all forms of deduction and construction. (Pradelle 2023, 87) The presumed universality of μάθησις understood as deductive and constructive science is at bottom that of formal logic: it gives us the formal conditions of truth, whereas this, for Husserl, is instead always directed to a content, namely at the thematization of possible objects. Such objects, however, cannot be constructed or produced, but are given, that is, intuited in their specific mode of being. Referentiality and intuition are thus the real cornerstones of phenomenology, as an alternative to *mathesis universalis* understood as a specific field of formal knowledge. It is the orientation toward a material truth that leads phenomenology far from a logical-deductive science: phenomenology is a descriptive eidetic science of pure

experiences, which must resolve everything into pure intuition. (Husserl 1976, §59 and § 75)

If, then, as Husserl writes, the way to phenomenology has been determined by *mathesis universalis*, it is necessary to understand what this means. The answer, Pradelle writes, is found not so much in the way mathematics, as a regional science, develops its knowledge, namely, as formal, deductive and constructed knowledge, but in the way it constitutes its object. Mathematics, namely, is an exemplary science of individuation of a region of being by means of an originary eidetic intuition, that is, the intuition of an essence which, again, is material, in the sense that it expresses and determines a particular object field, the one of mathematics, that is, the "numerical" (*Zahlhafte*).

It is then necessary to distinguish, Pradelle observes, mathematics from the mathematical: the former is a regional science that deals with mathematical objects (the numerical); the latter, which responds to the originally Greek concept of μάθησις, indicates the way of learning something. It is in this sense that μάθησις comes to coincide with the very method of phenomenology, that is, with the method of reduction, insofar as it leads back an experience to its eidetic content and to the mode of its manifestation and making itself representable. Thus Husserl can write that "phenomenology of lived experiences is by no means a μάθησις of lived experiences," (Husserl 1971, §8) or rather, as Pradelle adds, it is a μάθησις of lived experiences (*des vécus* – Pradelle 2023, 94) in the sense of a science of such lived experiences grasped in their eidetic purity.

> *Thus, the term* mathesis *does not imply any systematic reference to mathematics*, be it the geometric idealization or the formalization practiced by formal *mathesis*; taken in its generality, it designates *the attitude of research oriented on pure essences* (the latter subsuming pure imaginary possibilities, not actual existences). (Pradelle 2023, 94)

What is decisive here is neither the formalism of mathematics nor its constructivism, but rather the eidetic nature of this science and the way in which it is: through an intuition of such object essences. (Pradelle 2023, 96) But not

every science, so Husserl, belongs to the kind of science that is mathematics. (Husserl 1971, 44)

In elucidating this undoubtedly fundamental problem for phenomenology, Dominique Pradelle refers to a point that Heidegger made in the 1935 lectures on *The Question Concerning the Thing*. Pradelle observes that in his refusal to equate mathematics with the mathematical, which Heidegger argues in §18a of these lectures, he "shows himself to be very Husserlian (*Heidegger se montre fort husserlien*)." (Pradelle 2023, 96) Quoting from Heidegger: "mathematics is itself only a determinate formation of the mathematical." (Heidegger 1984, 68-69; Heidegger 2018, 46) Heidegger justifies this claim on the basis of the Greek concept of μάθησις: μάθησις is derived from the verb μανθάνω, which means "to learn," and consequently also "to teach"; μαθήματα are precisely the things that are learned, and μάθησις is the manner in which this learning or apprehension takes place. The specificity of μάθησις emerges further by comparison with other object fields, which for the Greeks consisted of: (1) τὰ φυσικά, things insofar as they arise and emerge; (2) τὰ ποιούμενα, things insofar as they are made by the human hand, products of his operation; (3) τὰ χρήματα, things insofar as they are used and available: these can be either φυσικά or ποιούμενα; (4) τὰ πράγματα, things insofar as we deal with them, that is, insofar as they are the object, in general, of our action; and (5) τὰ μαθήματα, things insofar as they are learned and taught by us. (Heidegger 1984, 70; Heidegger 2018, 47-48)

It is important to note here that μαθήματα are not a different kind of objects than the objects of regional ontologies, such as physical, usable, etc. beings. Rather, μάθημα indicates the mode of their apprehension, the manner in which such regional essences are identified (learned) and taught (transmitted, communicated). It refers then to the *way they are apprehended*, which consequently determines the *essence* of such things, their categorical being. Μάθησις generally refers to the fact that things, in order to be the object of our action, behavior and consideration as this or that, must be "learned" in some way. Μάθησις is therefore *universalis* since it does not open a particular or regional ontology, but since it concerns the

*general* problem of the way every particular object is given, i.e. learned and communicated.

To show that it is not mathematics that is paradigmatic for μάθησις but it constitutes only one case among others, Heidegger brings the example of a weapon, which is certainly not something "arithmetical," but is rather an object of use (χρήματον) or an artifact (ποιούμενον). "But practicing is, again, only a mode of learning." (Heidegger 1984, 71; Heidegger 2018, 48) To even be able to use a weapon we must already know what it is: to be in possession of "a still more original [mode of] becoming familiar (*ursprünglicher Kennenlernen*)" (Heidegger 1984, 72; Heidegger 2018, 49) that enables us precisely to be able to use it as such. It is this vision that opens to us the *eidos* of the object, its aspectuality or form. The εἶδος is thus the μάθημα (and it is only because of this essential connection between μάθημα and form that mathematics can be considered as a formal science par excellence): it is, as Pradelle writes, the "regional eidetic background of a being, and the μάθησις [is] the intuition of essence that expressly reveals such a background, which would remain hidden in the consideration of a particular being." (Pradelle 2023, 99)

Heidegger then observes that the Platonic saying, which is said to have been placed at the entrance to the Academy, "Let no one enter who is not a geometer! (Ἀγεωμέτρητος μηδεὶς εἰσίτω!)" does not so much mean that geometry is the fundamental science, the condition of all others, but that μάθησις, with which geometry is traditionally associated, is the condition of possibility of all science, insofar as it is oriented toward the apprehension of the regional essence of beings. It means that the knowledge of essences must precede and ground the knowledge of particular beings. This is why Heidegger translates this saying as follows: "No one who has not grasped the mathematical should have access here!" (Heidegger 1984, §18b, 76; Heidegger 2018, 51) This means that knowledge of the essence precedes knowledge of the individual beings and must justify them. If geometry assumes this particular role, it is in fact only because it is a science of forms, particularly of spatial forms, which, as such, are only one region of being (the one of the space); they acquire a general sense because, more than

elsewhere, they highlight the fact that we are dealing with forms, in the original, Greek meaning of the term εἶδος: with the aspectual configuration of something, with its way of presenting itself and making itself visible.

**II.**

It is in light of these considerations that I shall now turn to two texts that take on particular significance precisely in relation to what Heidegger writes in *The Question Concerning the Thing*: these are Husserl's *The Origin of Geometry*, on the one hand, and Heidegger's *The Origin of the Work of Art*, on the other. The composition of these two texts, as I pointed out elsewhere, (Chiurazzi 2023)[1] is practically contemporary and parallel each other. Finally, both texts are also coeval with the lectures on *The Question Concerning the Thing* from 1935.

In fact, their drafting dates back to the 1930s, specifically to the period 32-36. Heidegger's *The Origin of the Work of Art*, which was published in its final version in 1950, in the collection *Off the Beaten Track*, (Heidegger 1977; Heidegger 2002) was first elaborated in 1932 (published in 1989 in the *Heidegger Studien* – Heidegger 1989). The 1950 version is from a lecture that Heidegger gave in Freiburg in front of the "Kunstwissenschaftliche Gesellschaft" in 1935, and then repeated in 1936 in Zurich and Frankfurt, thus in the same time frame in which Husserl was giving the two lectures, in Vienna and Prague, that form the original core of *The Crisis of the European Sciences*. This work was also published, posthumously, only in 1954, edited by Walter Biemel, while its first two parts came out in 1936 in the Belgrade journal *Philosophia*. In particular, *The Origin of Geometry*, which appears as Appendix III to §9 of *The Crisis of the European Sciences* (Husserl 1954; Husserl 1970), was edited by Eugen Fink and published in 1939 in the *Revue international de philosophie* under the title *Vom Ursprung der Geometrie als intentional- historiches Problem*. These two works display therefore an extraordinarily parallelism in their elaboration, almost responding to each other in an implicit counterpoint, played out on two distinct regional fields: art, on the one hand, and geometry, on the other.

The reference to §18 of Heidegger's *The Question Concerning the Thing*, from which the present analysis began to focus on the theme of μάθησις, seems to suggest that perhaps at bottom this is one of the themes around which these two writings revolve, a theme certainly central to both Husserl and Heidegger. However, whereas *The Origin of Geometry* seems to address the topic head-on, dealing explicitly with a mathematical science, and on its transmission (μάθησις), Heidegger's *The Origin of the Work of Art* appears rather to deviate form this topic. Nevertheless, the remark about the motto affixed at the entryway of Plato's Academy should lead us to think that after all – as strange as this may seem at first glance – even this text could well be ascribed to the same problematic domain: it is in fact not geometry as a particular science that defines what μάθησις is. Indeed, my intent would be to show just that: namely that both of these texts have as their content the problem of the "mathematical", of μάθησις, but that with respect to it, Husserl and Heidegger take a somewhat different position. Indeed, the choice of a different region of being highlights a divergence, not only with regard to how μάθησις should be understood, but also with regard to how μάθημα should be understood (which, as Pradelle pointed out, is here the εἶδος, the "form" or essence), and even to how truth should be understood.

## III.

That the central problem of *The Origin of Geometry* is that of μάθησις appears clearly from the very first lines. For what is at stake is the establishment of a scientific field that can be transmitted from generation to generation (i.e., can be taught to others) from an original intuition of its regional essence (i.e., from the original apprehension of this essence). Μάθησις, as we have seen, points to the two sides of this problem: learning and teaching, apprehension and transmission, intuition and communication. "We understand our geometry, available to us through tradition (we have learned it, and so have our teachers)." (Husserl 1954, 366-367; Husserl 1970, 355) But this tradition immediately raises some problems:

> How the living tradition of the meaning-formation of elementary concepts is actually carried on can be seen in elementary geometrical instruction and its textbooks; what we actually learn there is how to deal with *ready-made* concepts and sentences in a rigorously methodical way. Rendering the concepts sensibly intuitable by means of drawn figures is substituted for the actual production of the primal idealities. (Husserl 1954, 376; Husserl 1970, 366)

The state of geometry – which exemplifies for Husserl the general crisis of the European sciences – is apparent from the way its teaching is imparted, from its textbooks, which simply teach how to use, through a rigorous method, propositions and concepts that are already established. Concepts are made sensitively intuitive by means of drawn figures, which replace – as happens outside the Platonic cave – the original idealities they are supposed to illustrate. But never are these idealities really reactivated: the truth of geometry is consigned to its success, to its practical application, without ever reaching – to remain with the example of the Platonic cave – the noetic, that is, intuitive level of this knowledge. In this way a tradition is constituted, that is, the handing down of a knowledge, without maintaining the authentic sense, the original ideas of its founding, with the consequent risk of drifts, modifications or distortions of the original sense. Tradition is thus presented as a historical concatenation, a purely formal "inheritance" of methods and utterances that spans the centuries, while being emptied of its original sense content.

The inheritance of propositions and of the method of logically constructing new propositions and idealities can continue without interruption from one period to the next, while the capacity for reactivating the primal beginnings, i.e., the sources of meaning for everything that comes later, has not been handed down with it. What is lacking is thus precisely what had given and had to give meaning to all propositions and theories, a meaning arising from the primal sources which can be made self-evident again and again. (Husserl 1954, 376-377; Husserl 1970, 367)

The reasons why this emptying of original sense happens are both linguistic and epistemological. The former are due to the fact that a knowledge, in order to be transmitted, must necessarily be embodied in a language, and even more so

in a writing. Writing ensures the permanence of ideal objects beyond the ephemeral existence of geometers (and first and foremost of the protogeometer, an undiscoverable Thales – Husserl 1954, 378; Husserl 1970, 369), allowing their communication, that is, their teaching to others. But in this way – according to the classical logic of the *pharmakon* highlighted by Derrida, in reference to the Platonic condemnation of writing in the *Phaedrus* (*Phaedr.* 274b-275c; Derrida 1972) – the transmission of content is merely passive, which means grounded in associative or analogical operations, which can distort the original meaning: "Accordingly, then, the writing-down effects a transformation of the original mode of being of the meaning-structure." (Husserl 1954, 371; Husserl 1970, 361) Associative formations – and this is the epistemological side of this problem – constitute a constant danger in the use of language, which can be remedied, Husserl writes, by trying as much as possible to preserve an unambiguous sense, which alone can avoid, at one and the same time, both analogical and, even worse, equivocal relations.

This occurs when one has a view to the univocity of linguistic expression and to securing, by means of the most painstaking formation of the relevant words, propositions, and complexes of propositions, the results of which are to be univocally expressed. This must be done by the individual scientist, and not only by the inventor but by every scientist as a member of the scientific community after he has taken over from the others what is to be taken over. (Husserl 1954, 372; Husserl 1970, 362)

> In inheriting the content of a science, each individual scientist is, in short, like the link in a chain that must ensure the unambiguous and identical transmission of the original meaning, which can thus be transmitted – translated - without transformation. Tradition must be a transparent translation, at least as a teleological goal. (Husserl 1954, 368; Husserl 1970, 357)[2]

What is clear from these remarks by Husserl on the μάθησις of geometry – on its teaching and its historical transmission – is that at bottom, the model of this transmission is the structure of geometry itself. Indeed, in deductive sciences "the fundamental law, with unconditionally general self-

evidence, is: if the premises can actually be reactivated back to the most original self-evidence, then their self-evident consequences can be also." (Husserl 1954, 275; Husserl 1970, 365) Geometry is a deductive science, that is, a science in which every new proposition is in fact already contained in its premises and results from them in a way that preserves their content. The same happens in historical acquisitions of a science (for instance, mathematics), in its tradition as "a lively forward movement from acquisitions as premises to new acquisitions, in whose ontic meaning that of the premises is included (the process continuing in this manner)." (Husserl 1954, 367; Husserl 1970, 356) The logical nexuses of the deductive relation are after all nexuses of identity, and this ensures such permanence, that is, as we said, the "transparent translation" of the original content of the axioms into the consequences. In order for geometry to preserve its sense content, its very historical transmission must therefore reflect, so to speak, its deductive structure. Each geometer functions as a link in the deductive chain that reproduces in itself the same evidence as the first geometer: "The productions can reproduce their likenesses from person to person, and in the chain of the understanding of these repetitions what is self-evident turns up as the same in the consciousness of the other." (Husserl 1954, 371; Husserl 1970, 360) We can therefore say – and this in partial disagreement with Pradelle – that mathematics (in this specific case, geometry) is really the paradigm, not so much of phenomenology as such, but of the way in which Husserl conceives of the historical transmission of a science, a way that alone can ensure, with its concatenation of identical senses from person to person, the supra-historical and inter-subjective permanence of the sense beyond its, moreover inevitable, distorsions.

In fact, with the scriptural incorporation of the sense from time to time it becomes evident that this chaining runs into occlusions (*Verschlossenheiten*) and interruptions, and this is because the writing, at the very moment it seeks to obviate such possible occlusions, cannot help but also be their trace.[3] The continuity of overt sense is, moreover, inevitably compromised by the very conditions of the scientist's life: "When every researcher works on his part of the building, what

of the vocational interruptions and time out for rest (*Berufs- und Schlafpausen*), which cannot be overlooked here?" (Husserl 1954, 373; Husserl 1970, 363) There is, in short, in the concatenation of evidences reproduced in the very consciousness of each scientist, an inevitable intermittency, which the written text tries to overcome, but which precisely because of this it does in the end only denounce, making such intermittency, let us say, more *evident*. Intermittence – that is, the possibility that meaning can encounter gaps, that is, can refer back to something not immediately intuited – introduces an inevitably symbolic dimension within historical transmission. Symbol is in fact the reference to something absent. Geometry, or mathematics in general, is affected by this emptiness because such an intermittent emptiness is a constitutive part of μάθησις, and that is to say, of the historical inheritance that allows its intersubjective and intertemporal transmission. Writing is the sign of this intermittent, that is, symbolic concatenation.

Thus, Pradelle is right in saying that phenomenology is not a μάθησις in the sense of mathematics: it is not a deductive science, that is, a science whose evidence is inevitably intertwined with a reference to a previous evidence, which entails the risk of a break in this chain, especially when it reaches such high logical heights as to make a continuous return to the original sense very difficult, if not impossible. Instead, phenomenology is a descriptive science, which alone can rightfully claim to be faithful to the principle of all principles (Husserl 1976, §24) and its adherence to the originally offering intuition:

> It is quite different in the so-called descriptive sciences, where the theoretical interest, classifying and describing, remains within the sphere of sense-intuition, which for it represents self-evidence. Here, at least in general, every new proposition can by itself be "cashed in" for self-evidence. (Husserl 1954, 373; Husserl 1970, 363)

Only description can then be the very method of phenomenology. But if it must limit itself to the sphere of immediate evidence, how can it meet the demands of μάθησις, which requires that the original intuition be made transferable and teachable beyond the life and experience of the individual

phenomenologist? The μάθησις inevitably opens up an infinite task, precisely because it is a writing, i.e. an opening to something no longer or not yet present, insofar as the memory is not limited to the current intuition. In other words, does phenomenology respond to the task of μάθησις? And what about the fact that "description" or "*Beschreibung*" make inevitably reference, already in their names, to writing? How is it eventually to be thought, μάθησις, if it does not coincide with mathematics?

## IV.

In *The Origin of the Work of Art* Heidegger takes up the distinction – though in a simplified way – that we also find in *The Question Concerning the Thing*: that between natural beings (mere things, τὰ φυσικά), tools (τὰ χρήματα) and works of art (τὰ ποιούμενα, which include χρήματα). Μαθήματα, that is, things as they are learned and taught, do not appear explicitly, but this theme runs implicitly through the entire essay. After all, this is a theme that – as we said – always runs through these regional distinctions as their universal presupposition. Indeed, to ask what the essence of the work of art is, is to ask how we distinguish it from the other beings, how, that is, we learn its essence, and how it is transmitted, giving rise to a tradition and thus to a provenance, the essence being in fact what something comes from, its origin. (Heidegger 1977, 7; Heidegger 2002, 1) Essence is the locus (the source) of a genesis and becoming, as it is in its authentic Aristotelian meaning: τὸ τί ἦν εἶναι.

As is well known, Heidegger's definition of the work of art is "truth's setting-itself-to-work", that is, actualization of truth ("setting-itself-to-work" is the literal translation of the Greek *energeia*, "actuality", a word apparently invented by Aristotle to indicate being in act, at work). This is a definition that clearly stands in contrast to Plato, specifically to his condemnation of art as three degrees far from truth, as claimed in Book X of the *Republic*.

In saying that art is three degrees removed from truth, Plato reiterated the thesis that true knowledge is only the direct, i.e., noetic, knowledge of ideas. As for Husserl, truth is

given only in the original vision of the εἶδος, and any form of further mediation (i.e., *production* from such a vision) can only be an impoverishment or, in Husserlian terms, an emptying of its fullness, which can degenerate into a true "occlusion" of the original evident intuitions. Particularly far from the truth is the painter, because the painter reproduces what the demiurge or the craftsman produces by having a more immediate relationship with the idea.

It is not without significance that Plato, in explaining this concept, refers to the representation of an instrument: the painter who paints a table or flute knows nothing either about how they are made and constructed (because he does not look at the idea) or how they are used (because he is not a flutist – *Resp*. 601c-602b). Consequently, the person who builds and uses an instrument is closer than the painter to the truth. Now, it is precisely with a similar example that Heidegger raises his challenge to Plato, taking as the starting point of his reflections the representation of an object of use: the peasant shoes reproduced in a van Gogh painting.[4]

At first glance, Heidegger's approach to van Gogh's painting is very much in line with Husserl's: when confronted with the work of art, it is necessary to re-present the lived experience condensed in it, to make it evident again. The painting, through the shoes, refers back to an experience, that of the peasant woman, and to a world, the world of life (the *Lebenswelt*). And yet, the doubt remains that such a filling of meaning is entirely appropriate to that iconic representation, that is, that it really captures the truth of it: "But perhaps it is only in the picture that we notice all this about the shoes." (Heidegger 1977, 19; Heidegger 2002, 14) This means questioning whether *truth consists primarily in an adequacy of content*, in the relation between an image (a sentence) and a state of affairs. Maybe, truth (as the work of art will show us) does not consist in the *referential* or *representational* relationship between the shoes and the world of the peasant woman.

It is for this reason, then, that Heidegger turns to another kind of work of art: the Greek temple. The Greek temple, in fact, represents nothing ("*bildet nicht ab*, portrays nothing" – Heidegger 1977, 27; Heidegger 2002, 20.) In this

case, any referential relation is bracketed, falls under the axe of an *epoché* that tends to empty the work of art of any content. The way in which Heidegger describes the coming into being – that is, the pro-duction (*her-vor-bringen*) of the Greek temple – highlights its purely formal, truly "eidetic" dimension in the sense of pure form. The temple emerges as a strife, that between Earth and World:

> The strife is not rift (*Riß*), in the sense of a tearing open of a mere cleft; rather, it is the intimacy of the mutual dependence of the contestants. The rift carries the contestants into the source of their unity, their common ground. It is the fundamental design (*Grundriß*). It is the outline sketch (*Auf-riß*) that marks out the fundamental features of the rising up of the clearing of beings. This design (*Riß*) does not allow the contestant's to break apart. It brings the contest between measure and limit into a shared outline (*Umriß*). (Heidegger 1977, 51; Heidegger 2002, 38)

The temple is constituted as the emergence of a form, of a fundamental design that delineates an outline, a figure: "The rift-design is the drawing together into a unity of sketch and fundamental design rupture and outline. […] This strife which is brought into the rift-design, and so set back into the earth and fixed in place, is the *figure* (*Gestalt*). The createdness of the work means: the fixing in place of truth in the figure." (Heidegger 1977, 51; Heidegger 2002, 38) In its origin, the work of art shows the profoundly "geometric" nature of its production. It is therefore not geometry as a particular science that serves as a model for this opening of truth, but rather it is truth, as the opening and fixation of a form, that is "geometric", as a figure of the earth.

We are thus faced with a rather paradoxical situation. For Husserl, insofar as truth is still an adequation between the proposition and the thing, the problem of the relation of form to its content arises, the latter having priority over form. Consequently, mathematics – like geometry -, as a formal science, inevitably encounters an emptying of its meaning content, rooted in the life-world, which requires a reactivation, an ever-renewed intuitive fulfillment. On the contrary, precisely because for Heidegger truth is not primarily adequation, it coincides with the very manifestation of a form, with the delineation of a design thanks to an original trait

(*Riß*). One can even say that for Husserl writing is a requirement of μάθησις that, while ensuring the historical transmission of knowledge, is nevertheless destined to be overcome through the intuitive reactualization of the *plena*; on the contrary, for Heidegger, writing is instead something that belongs *ab origine* to the very essence of truth, to its intrinsically "geometric" nature. Thus, if, as Pradelle writes, phenomenology is a μάθησις insofar as it is a "nonformal eidetic science," (Pradelle 2023, 91) then for Heidegger it is a *formal* μάθησις, originally marked by the trait, what makes it, consequently, a hermeneutic. By which we mean that it is fundamentally a discipline which deals with writing.

Writing is an act that destines truth to others: it is the opening of history because it enables intergenerational and intertemporal transmission. In this way truth is "preserved," safeguarded, as Heidegger states, exploiting the homophony between *Wahrheit (*truth) and *bewahren* (to preserve, to safeguard). Truth cannot subsist without the preservers:

> If, however, a work does not – or does not immediately – find preservers who respond to the truth happening in the work, that does not mean that a work can be a work without preservers. If it is in other respects a work, it always remains tied to preservers […] Preservation of the work means: standing within the openness of beings that happens in the work. This urgent standing-withinness of preservation is, however, a knowing. Yet knowing does not consist in mere acquaintance with and ideas about something. (Heidegger 1977, 54-55; Heidegger 2002, 41)

Preservers, even when they lose the original sense of what is conveyed through them, are necessary to the truth of the work, because they are necessary, in general, to truth. As for Husserl, truth is not asubjective, but omnisubjective (Pradelle 2023, 57 ff.): it is always for someone, but not for anyone, which does not mean its relativization. It belongs to the structure of truth to be *open* for someone.

## V.

*The Origin of Geometry* and *The Origin of the Work of Art* are two texts that should, in my opinion, be read synoptically. Despite their many common themes, they

undoubtedly represent two different ways of understanding μάθησις, taken in its Greek meaning, that is, as the apprehension and transmission of the knowledge of an essence starting from its original givenness, which is the very moment when that essence first manifests itself. This μάθησις thus implies at the same time a punctual moment – an event – and a history, an immediate phenomenalization and a temporal constitution, the intervention of a first author (the protogeometer or the artist) and his heirs, who participate in the process of historical transmission of knowledge.

What in my view differentiates Husserl from Heidegger is that for Husserl the scientific community is such only insofar as its members – the various links in the chain – reproduce the original content of truth in its original evidence. On the other hand, for Heidegger the preservers preserve truth, not so much because they preserve its content, but because they remember the very fact of *being there* of the work of art, its "coming into form", which constitutes the formal – let us say transcendental – condition of truth. As a result, for Husserl a tradition of truth is possible only if in it the deductive model proper to a regional mathematical science, geometry, is reproduced at the level of historical transmission, as preserving of an identical sense-content. In contrast, for Heidegger such a tradition requires no permanence of sense at all: after all, the succession of concatenations proper to the history of being – its wanderings – is not only and simply an error. What is positively remembered and preserved in these wanderings is the sense of history, or the sense *as* history. For Husserl, it is fundamental to truth that it can be reactivated in its original content; for Heidegger, it is fundamental that it can be remembered in its original form, namely as an event, i.e. as the opening of a world, or a history, in its figurative, i.e. "geometrical" character. For Husserl, evidence is the presence of a being in an immediate intuition:

> Self-evidence means nothing more than grasping an entity with the consciousness of its original being-itself-there (*Selbst-da*). Successful realization of a project is, for the acting subject, self-evidence; in this self-evidence, what has been realized is there, *originaliter*, as itself. (Husserl 1954, 367; Husserl 1970, 356)

For Heidegger, on the other hand, evidence is the emergence of a being in its dynamic origin, as ἀ-λήθεια.[5] Thus, while for Husserl geometry serves as a model for μάθησις (which alone can guarantee the transmission of original evidence beyond the evidence limited to a single descriptive proposition) because of its *deductive* structure, we could say that for Heidegger it would do so because of its *figurative* structure (which represents nothing, but sets the conditions for a con-figuration of the world, for its order, as a mere *Riß*, rift or design – i.e. as writing[6]). This means that *only if there is a world, and not only the earth, can truth be possible*.[7]

In conclusion, I would like to suggest that all this leads back to a distinction that was the subject of Derrida's deconstructive critique in *La voix et le phénomène* (Derrida 1967): the distinction between expression (*Ausdruck*) and sign (*Zeichen*) that Husserl makes in the First Logical Investigation. For Husserl, mathematics, like every science, must retain an expressive character, insofar as its symbolism must always allow the originally evident content to shine through. For Heidegger, on the other hand, truth can only occur in the traced sign, in the rift. The outline sketch (*Aufriß*), Heidegger writes, "marks out (*zeichnet*) the fundamental features of the rising up of the clearing of beings." (Heidegger 1977, 51; Heidegger 2002, 38) In this case, instead of expression, one could speak of in-formation, in the sense of "production of a form", but also of "transmission of a sense", which has no expressive character insofar as it is necessarily mediated by signs. Whereas for Husserl emptiness is an obstacle to the transmission of sense, for Heidegger, on the contrary, it is a condition of its possibility: that there is emptiness – an absence – is the positive condition of the actual constitution of sense, a condition that takes the name of writing.

More precisely, I shall argue that Heidegger's understanding of the work of art gives it a diagrammatic status. A diagram does not represent a thing, but only changes of state: an electroencephalogram, for example, is not a representation of the brain but of its activity, or rather, it is the record of the differences that unfold in that activity. A diagram does not really reveal a "content"; in it, temporal events,

happenings, are recorded in their purely differential, i.e. relational structure. What is recorded is not a traditional and indifferent identity,[8] ensuring the supratemporal character of truth, for which mathematics is ultimately paradigmatic, but a pure recollected difference, as it appears in the tradition of art.

**NOTES**

[1] In that article I made a comparison between these two texts, which I take up here focusing rather on the question of μάθησις. I refer to it, however, for further insight on the subject.

[2] J. Derrida, in his Introduction to this text by Husserl, captures this aspect very well, by writing: "The possibility of translation, which is identical with that of tradition, is opened ad infinitum." (Derrida 1989, 72)

[3] On the importance of written incorporation for the meaning transmission in *The Origin of Geometry*, see Alloa 2014. Alloa highlights very well the importance of this text and its internal tensions, which in fact lead to a questioning of the principle of the principles of phenomenology, i.e. intuitionism (229 ff.), for the formation of French authors who could be considered on two different fronts of phenomenology, Merleau-Ponty and Derrida. In this theoretical debate, Trân Dúc Tháo also played a fundamental role, for whom writing, or more generally the necessity of mediation, represents for phenomenology both a constitutive condition of ideality and the source of the crisis of the sciences (Trân Dúc Tháo 1971).

[4] For a more extensive discussion of this relationship between Plato and Heidegger regarding truth in the work of art I would refer to G. Chiurazzi, 2022.

[5] F. Volpi speaks then of a "dynamic of truth", which anymore has an intuitive feature. See F. Volpi, "Avvertenza del Curatore all'edizione italiana" in Heidegger 1997, 16.

[6] This link between the *Riß* and the writing has been suggested by J. Derrida, who translated *Riß* as "trait" and highlights the graphical meaning of the words (*Aufriß, Umriß, Grundriß*) Heidegger uses in *The Origin of the Work of Art* to describe the "original" appearance of the work, that is, of a world. See Derrida 1978.

[7] Heidegger's sentence ""There is' truth only in so far as Dasein is and so long as Dasein is", contained in §44 of *Being and Time*, is another way to say that. It does not mean a relativization of the content of truth to the existence of human being, but expresses the idea that the formal condition of truth lies in the existence of human being. Without human being, in fact, there would be no possibility of "formalization", that is, of putting reality into a form (image, representation, sentence): truth does not coincide with reality, and just because it requires the "representation of reality", that is, the possibility that reality can appear in and as a world. In *The Origin of the Work of Art* this condition is not expressed by a painting, but by the temple, since – as we said

– it brings to the fore the mere emergence of the world, in which a painting is possible. For more about that I address to Chiurazzi 2017.

[8] "Pure factuality is the unrepeatable, the 'here and now' that, in its passing, stands in opposition to whatever could be said to not pass, thus to remain the 'same.' Because the ideal is indifferent to this opposition, thus to its own tension with pure factuality, it stands within the envelopment of its own sameness—it is in this way repeatable as the 'same' in every repetition. It is not the same manifest as remembered, or as a lasting image that somehow captured the likeness of something that had once happened 'here and now,' or 'there and then'; it is precisely as the same repeated both then and now, indifferent to the difference between the two, even indifferent to the fact or accomplishment of the repetition itself" (Dodd 2005, 112). ). ).

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# Orientation as the Source of Life's Meaning

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**Abstract**

In this article I explore an uncharted facet of the meaning of life: the constitution of meaning itself. The thesis posits that the meaning imbued in life is fundamentally connected to orientation in the world. The objective is to achieve a more comprehensive understanding of this phenomenon by analyzing how meaning-as-orientation arises within three overarching contexts: being-in-the-world, being-with-others, and being-with-oneself. To identify orienting meaning across these contexts, Heidegger's technical concept of "something-as-something" or as-structure from *Being and Time* is employed, particularly because it unfolds as openclosedness. Interestingly, the way it unfolds as openclosedness varies in each context. Since orientation also invariably carries an existential dimension, this unfolding and its impact are illustrated. Moreover, Heidegger's somewhat elusive yet pertinent differentiation between sense and significance is examined, with Levinas and Jean-Luc Nancy regarding them as two complementary and interacting sources of orientation.

**Keywords:** meaning in life, orientation, Heidegger, as-structure as openclosedness, sense and significance, Jean-Luc Nancy

## Introduction

In this article I examine the concept of "meaning" within the compound term "meaning of life," positing that meaning fundamentally provides orientation in the world. This perspective offers a complementary approach to prevailing philosophical views. Research on meaning in life typically focuses on the good life, responses to historical disenchantment, or analytical explorations of conceptual boundaries, conditions for meaningfulness, and evaluative criteria (Wolf 2010; Metz 2013; Calhoun 2018). The crucial orientating function of meaning, though, has been largely

overlooked. As an exception stands Charles Taylor (1989), articulating the connection between meaning and one's ability to situate oneself within a moral framework. Werner Stegmaier (2019) further illuminates this domain, though not explicitly aligning with meaning-in-life studies. Both Taylor and Stegmaier, grounded in phenomenology, offer detailed narratives on life's trajectory and meaning-finding within a world teeming with unsettling paradoxes. For Taylor (1989), moral decision-making stems from this orientation, while Stegmaier (2019, XI) views orientation as an ongoing process of rediscovery, integrating paradoxes to successfully finding paths. They conceptualize the world as offering clues for individuals to construct coherent patterns for orientation. Stegmaier posits that orientation precedes cognition and action, focusing on its structure, conditions, and processes, whereas Taylor delves into moral implications. I similarly conceive of orientation as foundational to meaning but diverges from the prevalent focus on daily decision-making. The central inquiry explores the constitution of this orienting meaning, emphasizing the reciprocal interaction between humans and their socio-natural environment.

Three contexts frame this study: being-in-the-world, being-with-others, and being-with-oneself. To unify the multiplicity of orienting meaning within and across these contexts, Heidegger's concept of *Auslegung* (interpretation) or "something-as-something structure" is crucial (Heidegger 1967). This concept is comprehensible through the lens of *Aufgeschlossenheit* (disclosedness) embodying a paradoxical simultaneity of openness and closedness (Heidegger 1967, 75).[1] This phenomenon is examined from an existential perspective, as open-and-closedness invariably affects us. For meaning to guide effectively, it must impact us by radiating discernible relevance.

An additional focus of this article is the distinction between significance and sense. While these terms are typically employed in linguistic-philosophical contexts, their meaning in this setting is notably different. Emmanuel Levinas (2006) and Jean-Luc Nancy (1997) Nancy, who implicitly emphasize the relationship between meaning in life

and orientation, elucidate how orientation should be understood as an inherent and dynamic interaction between sense and significance. Both explore the interplay from different scopes and perspectives. Roughly speaking the central focus for Levinas (1969) is on a rather specific instance; the gaze of 'Other'. This represents a sense that interrupts our perception of this person, even if only momentarily. The perception, based on our worldview, is considered to pertain to the domain of significance. This perception can be both implicit and explicit. Nancy's theme is broader and compasses the world, made up of both sense and significance and argues that sense is – albeit in an undefined way – always present alongside significance, while simultaneously and paradoxically asserting its priority (Nancy 1997).

Regrettably, since scholars rarely use orientation as their primary framework for studying meaning in life, and even among those who do, the insights of Levinas (1969, 2006) and Nancy (1997) have not been fully acknowledged or integrated into their work. My objective is not to introduce this theme into meaning-in-life studies, nor to discuss the mental and behavioral impact of *sense* as an interruption – both of which have been addressed elsewhere[2] – but rather to theoretically understand how to differentiate between sense and significance. Why does Levinas equate sense with interruption, and why does Nancy consider sense both an interruption and something that is always there as a background? As both scholars draw upon Heidegger, exploring his work may offer further clarification.

In this article, I aim to provide a theoretical response to two key questions by drawing on Heidegger's *Being and Time*. First, how does meaning-as-orientation come into being? Second, if orientation functions as an interaction of two distinct sources, how can one clearly delineate them? To address these questions, I identify three contexts in which Heidegger serves as an appropriate theoretical foundation. It is important to note that approaching Heidegger's *Being and Time* from an orientation perspective is less common, as most scholars engage with the text primarily for its discourse on being (Sheehan 2016). Following Sheehan's interpretation,

this study proposes that Heidegger's central concern is meaning as "the intelligent appearance of something to someone," which is intrinsically connected to orientation (Sheehan 2016, 270). The approach to the second question—delineating the two sources of orientation—is similarly less common within the field.

## 1. Theoretical delineations

The meaning of life emerges through the manifold contexts of our existence. These orienting contexts encompass broader environments that shape individual existence. Three such contexts are delineated, roughly following the structure of *Being and Time*. The first, "being-in-the-world," unfolds into three subcontexts: innerworldliness (the realm of everyday actions), interruption of daily practice (instances of disrupted routines), and objective presence (navigation of subjective beings within an objective world). The second context, "being-with-others," examines the dynamics of interpersonal relationships. The third, "being-with-oneself," explores the internal landscape of self-revelation.

Heidegger's concept of "*etwas als etwas*" (something-as-something) serves as a comprehensive framework for orienting meaning in this context (Heidegger 1967, 68). While Heidegger's work closely associates this concept with *Auslegung*, thereby constraining it to the selection of a particular given, this study extends its application to describe the orientation of meaning across all contexts. The justification for this broader application is as follows: The process of selecting a particular given occurs, for instance, when one identifies one's own child among a group of children at a school gate. Within this scenario, the group of children (*etwas*) is transformed into a specific entity (as *etwas)* – one's own child – shifting from a generality to a specificity. However, this identification process necessitates a prior ability to perceive 'the entities moving on the playground' (*etwas)* as 'children' (as *etwas*). It is from this broader interpretation that the analysis employs the "something-as-something" structure.

The description of orientating meaning encompasses an additional dimension: the consideration of orientating's impact on us, manifesting in how it influences what we perceive as relevant. Central to this is the fact that the orientating impact invariably unfolds through a paradoxical state of open-closedness, occurring both to us and through us. While taking place in multifarious ways, the orientating impact always emerges – whether implicit or explicit – when we simultaneously appropriate the orienting context, rendering it comprehensible (openness), yet struggle to grasp the orienting content within that context (closedness). This intricacy can be further elucidated through the notion of "sight." In Heidegger's philosophy, orientating's impact – understanding that a specific situation is relevant for us – is understood through *Sicht*, or "sight," a concept that transcends mere visual perception to encompass forms of intelligence beyond our conceptualizing faculty (Heidegger 1967, 148-49). Thus, its relevance can be perceived through sight, but remains, to a certain extent, always elusive to cognitive capacity.[3]

Heidegger's usage of "sight" varies contextually. I emphasize two specific types: *Umsicht* and *Durchsichtigkeit* (ibid., 75). In subcontexts such as innerworldliness and interruption of daily practice, the as-structure is comprehended as an existential openclosedness through *Umsicht*, while in the context of being-with-oneself, it is perceived through *Durchsichtigkeit*. *Umsicht* is often translated as "circumspection" and *Durchsichtigkeit* as 'transparency' (literally "seeing-through"). This investigation retains the German terms, emphasizing the concept of sight (*Sicht*), which is consistently underlined, as it is integral to a comprehensive understanding of the subject.[4]

In conjunction with the as-structure and its inherent openness and closedness in various manifestations, the insights of Levinas and Nancy suggest that a comprehensive understanding of orienting meaning must incorporate the dynamic interplay between significance and sense. Scholarship in Heideggerian studies address this distinction primarily from a philosophical-linguistic perspective. It is crucial to note here that these scholars differentiate between

"meaning" and sense, whereas this approach adopts Levinas's division into "significance" and "sense." This distinction serves to mitigate potential confusion: 'meaning' is employed as an overarching conceptual construct encompassing the entirety of orienting meaning, while 'significance' and 'sense' represent the two constituent sources that collectively form this whole.

From a philosophical-linguistic perspective, Heidegger's differentiation between meaning and sense primarily addresses the genesis of meaning – the meaning-generating process – without explicitly emphasizing the orienting aspect. Sense denotes an overarching background awareness, accentuating the indeterminate nature of it. Through the processes of articulation and jointedness – described as "the process of imposing order by developing and dividing up" (Inkpin 2021b) – we attain significance. Jointedness predominantly refers to a predicative process while articulation pertains to the thematic process of generating significance (Inkpin 2021a) Consequently, sense represents "what is articulable" (Inkpin 2021b, 479), whereas significance constitutes "the articulated of what is articulable" (Inkpin 2021b, 479). Inkpin underscores the relevance of the as-structure in this framework. Sense possesses a pre-structure that is pre-interpretative, functioning as "a pattern of differences (...) in which constituent parts are not yet picked out distinctly with an as-structure" (Inkpin 2021a). The as-structure becomes operational during interpretation, facilitating the isolation of individual elements. There is clearly a relationship between sense and significance: since significance emerges from sense, it invariably refers back to it. Alternatively, from the perspective of sense as a fundamental structure, a phenomenon can yield countless possible interpretations. Thus, they do not "contrast as distinct semantic properties but are closely linked aspects of an expression's meaningful constitution" (Inkpin 2021c).

Inkpin clarifies the additional, more existential connotations of sense, distinguishing them from the linguistic perspective. He invokes concepts such as "directedness"; "an everywhere sense of purpose" and "something making sense" (Inkpin 2021c). Furthermore, he references Heidegger's

association of sense with a path and highlights the etymological connection between *Sinn* (sense), *Besinnen* (contemplate), and the Old High German *sinnan*, which encompasses notions of traveling, striving for, taking a direction, or being guided in the right direction. Within this framework, sense is conceptualized as the "*Weg, der alles bewëgende Weg*," portraying the path that propels all movement (Inkpin 2021c, 673).

From the vantage point of orienting meaning, and through the demarcation of the three contexts, I will now address the two central questions: first, how orienting meaning arises by systematically exploring the *as-structure* and the influence of openness and closedness; and second, how the two sources of meaning – sense and significance – can be delineated, taking into consideration existing demarcations while refining the boundaries. I begin with an analysis of the first context, being-in-the-world.

## 2. The meaning-orienting context of Being-in-the-world

The being-in-the-world context is broadly conceived and includes three sub-contexts, innerworldliness, interruption of practical engagement and objective presence. The first two describe the coming about of physical-practical orienting meaning, the latter the mental appropriation of the world as a source of orientation. While staying close to Heidegger's insights, I believe that the perspective of meaning as having an orientational capacity offers some fresh observations.

### 2.1. Innerworldliness

The subcontext of innerworldliness encompasses the domain of ordinary human activities, wherein individuals are immersed in their daily routines. Here, there is no dichotomy between a subject independent of the world and a world independent of the mind – a tacit dichotomy that still underpins mainstream thinking. Meaning in this context emanates from a pre-predicative understanding of everyday actions. It is noteworthy that this context is not devoid of

language; rather, language is always implicitly assumed. Orientation is attained through practical engagement, specifically because both Dasein (human existence) and the world mutually shape and define the orientational framework of the world.

How can we discern the orienting meaning in this context? How can we identify the manifestation of the as-structure? And how does the openclosedness occur? As previously discussed, the as-structure facilitates the transformation of something indeterminate into something specific. Although Heidegger does not fully expatiate on this aspect, its manifestation is nevertheless evinced in several instances.

One of it is the practical utility of the door. At a rudimentary level, the configuration of planks in a wall, conjoined with a spherical metallic handle (representing something indeterminate), will likely be perceived as a door (something specific for usage intended for ingress and egress). Understanding of such structures is attained through *Umsicht* (circumspection) rather than detached observation, accentuating practical utility wherein the tool's purpose is discerned through engagement (Heidegger 1967).[5] Within this pragmatic milieu, an item in the world is invariably interpreted *as* a table for dining, a door for entry or closure, or a vehicle for transportation (ibid., 149).

The disclosure of orientating meaning is characterized by an openness and closedness. Heidegger articulates this phenomenon through various formulations, all of which emphasize the intrinsic entanglement between world and Dasein. In the context of the aforementioned example, this entanglement implies that when Dasein interacts with a door, a reciprocal movement invariably ensues: the door, from within itself, comes closer within the dealing with of Dasein (ibid., 67).[6] This observation suggests a certain autonomy of the world, implying an almost imperceptible non-appropriation by Dasein. Consequently, the intertwinement simultaneously encompasses both a complete appropriation of the act alongside a non-appropriation.

The as-structure of practical-spatial orienting meaning can be conceptualized in terms of something (X) being up, next to, or behind something (Y). The orienting meaning (up, next, behind) is similarly entangled in a dynamic of openness and closedness. Firstly, there is the world's self-presentation as the proximity of the surrounding environment; secondly, Dasein's facilitation of such encounters allow "what presents itself to us" to draw near, thus enabling the proximity to occur (Heidegger 1967, 97). Spatial orientation occurs through the reciprocal interaction of *Umsicht* enabling spatiality to manifest, and spatiality allowing *Umsicht* to de-distance it. This process is intrinsically mutual, with each aspect referencing and facilitating the other.

The dual usage of *Anweisen* epitomizes this dynamic, denoting both pointing to and reliance. By pointing to the world, Dasein internalizes it, ostensibly comprehending it entirely. In its passive form, *Angewiesen-sein*, Dasein relies on something beyond its complete control. What cannot be fully controlled cannot be wholly appropriated. In this fundamental interplay of openness and closedness, full appropriation and yet non-appropriation, Dasein finds and orients itself.[7]

An additional question that arises is: how does the transmission between the world and Dasein occur within the dynamic of openness and closedness? How is this communication facilitated? Heidegger subtly describes this transmission without explicitly emphasizing it, and its discernibility emerges only through meticulous examination of specific passages. An illustration of this can be found in his discussion of the interaction between a traffic sign and *Umsicht*. The observation is that the sign "*wendet sich an die Umsicht des besorgenden Umgangs, so zwar, daß die seiner Weisung folgende Umsicht in solchem Mitgehen das jeweilige Umhafte der Umwelt in eine ausdrückliche 'Übersicht' bringt.*" He adds, "*Ein Zeigen (…) ist ein zeug das ein Zeugganzes ausdrücklich in die Umsicht hebt.*" (Heidegger 1967, 79-80).

In analysis, it is noted that firstly, the sign turns itself towards *Umsicht* (*Es wendet sich an die Umsicht des besorgenden Umgangs*). Secondly, it accomplishes this by explicitly lifting (*heben*) the meaning of the of sign into

*Umsicht*. At this point *Umsicht*, that follows the sign's guidance, is enabled to bring the actual aroundness of the surrounding world into an explicit "overview."

What Heidegger wishes to convey here is what might be called the point of "synaptic transfer." There is a passing of signals, creating a conjunction (the Greek *synapsis* means conjunction) in which the offering of the meaning of the sign is received by the receptor, while modifying into orienting meaning, facilitating a comprehensive overview of the surrounding world (ibid., 74). Furthermore, this orienting meaning can be possessed and sustained as an intelligibility (*Verständlichkeit*), not through concepts but an intelligibility in which we reside, becoming a part of our lived experience. In other words, the conveyed information enables us to naturally find our place within that world.

For transmission to be orienting, it must evoke concern rather than indifference. It must exert an "impact" in the etymological sense of the term – "to press closely into something;"[8] – without this, it cannot orient us. How is this relevance communicated within such an intricate exchange? Heidegger once again emphasizes the intertwining relationship, noting that orientation emerges because humans possess the ability to attune to the world (note the direction from humans to the world) and, conversely, because the world can affect humans (observe the direction from the world to humans). The impact is formed through this reciprocal interaction: its relevance is imparted to me – it affects me by pressing into me – while, simultaneously, I acknowledge and emphasize its relevance by being open (attuned) to it. In this case, the "pressing" of the impression is subtle yet theoretically significant.

If the as-structure and its openclosedness are acknowledged as the underlying elements of orienting meaning, a consequential inquiry emerges: how can we theoretically differentiate between the two conceptualized sources of orientation, namely significance and sense? Building upon established distinctions wherein sense is construed as a background awareness – a foundational awareness of existence – and significance as the manifestation

of elements within that existence, this section elucidates with greater precision how sense functions as an orientating force, and provides a cogent argument for its consideration as a source of orienting meaning.[9]

2.2. Interruption of daily practice

Within the framework of innerworldliness, a secondary orienting context exists: the interruption of daily practice. This context, frequently revisited in Heidegger's work, warrants brief discussion due to its distinctive manifestation of orientating meaning. Rather than emerging from the intertwinement of Dasein and the world, it manifests through a disturbance of practical engagement. Notably, this manifestation is ephemeral in duration. This insight suggests that orientation does not invariably involve long-term activity; it can also be momentary, with its impact contingent on both duration and intensity, varying according to the specific context.

Heidegger expounds on this concept through the renowned example of hammering. When Dasein is engaged in the act of hammering, interruptions can occur due to various factors, such as the hammer breaking. This principle similarly applies to the previously mentioned sign; if it were to break, its function would be rendered invisible. According to Heidegger, Dasein then gains access to the concatenation to which the sign pertains: the sign, in its function of providing direction, also references other signs, streets, vehicles, and our navigation towards familiar destinations. It is within these interruptions that Dasein attains insight into the reference structure of the as-structure, ensconced within an expanding framework of the in-order-for. The sign, as an *"etwas-um-zu"* (something-in-order-to), creates a concatenation, which Heidegger slightly modifies into the reference *"von etwas auf etwas,"* from something *to* something (Heidegger 1967, 68).[10]

The as-structure unfolds in an open and closed manner. As Heidegger prompts us to consider: the concatenation is always present and has already been disclosed through *Umsicht* as it aligns with it. Surprisingly, *Umsicht* has no access to it whatsoever. Heidegger argues that it naturally

focuses on the sign in terms of its utility, noting that it simply is not interested in this underlying structure (ibid., 75). *Umsicht* perceives but does not feel concerned. Reframed, we could say that there is a moment of merely seeing the concatenation (having due access to it) and simultaneously a letting-go, closing off this access for itself. It is through openclosedness that the orientation information is transmitted. While Heidegger does not explicitly stipulate this action, one could argue that, in a subtle manner, the occasional emergence of this concatenation serves as a gentle reminder in terms of re-minding- reorienting the mind towards this fundamental orientation, only to subsequently recede.

Regarding the distinction between the two conceptualized sources of orientation, sense and significance, the question arises of how to comprehend the dynamics of interruption and the perception of concatenation. Indubitably, the apprehension of the concatenation through *Umsicht* is intrinsic to orienting as sense and corresponds to an understanding of its pre-structure. Concerning interruption: at that moment, the hammer/sign is illuminated as a tool, reminiscent of the process of breaking down the background sense into constituent elements, which would then pertain to significance. Given that even in this instance a hammer or a sign is perceived as an integral component of this coherent concatenation, it appears more apposite, at this stage, to conceptualize the entire moment (interruption plus "sight" of the concatenation) as part of orienting sense. A further argument corrobating this interpretation will be expounded below, while the conclusion will ultimately revisit and refine this distinction, providing a more nuanced understanding of the interplay between sense and significance in the context of orienting meaning.

### 2.3. Objective presence

The inquiry now proceeds to the third sub-context in which orienting meaning emerges: objective presence. This context presents yet another complex mode of establishing orientation, alongside an underlying structure that can be

discerned within this multiplicity. Most importantly, it allows us to articulate a more refined distinction between significance and sense. Objective presence, unlike the preceding contexts, marks a significant departure by transcending pre-linguistic and pre-predicative realms, shedding light on how an individual exists objectively within a mind-independent world. This shift necessitates a transformation of the "as-structure" of innerworldliness (Sub-context 1), a concept that Heidegger explores in detail and which I summarize here concisely.

In the act of using tools, individuals often engage in self-dialogue, exemplified by statements such as “the hammer is too heavy” (Heidegger 1967, 154). In such moments, *Umsicht* remains attuned to its practical utility while simultaneously signaling a shift towards an attitude of objective presence. Indeed, the assertion that a hammer is too heavy draws attention to its weight, establishing a linkage (*Glieder*) between a grammatical subject (hammer) and a grammatical predication (too heavy) (ibid., 157). This initial step fosters a fundamental opening towards definedness. Rather than engendering a broad conceptualization typical of definedness, this process initially directs attention specifically to the hammer. By momentarily constraining perception, definedness liberates the predicate from its inherent determinacy, paving the way for a free grasp. This transition marks a shift from utilizing a tool for a particular purpose to discussing or describing the tool in verbal terms (ibid., 156f). Words are articulated and retained, ultimately leading to the potential for substance and generality. In the absence of innerworldliness, objects are defined by their properties and viewed as isolated substances. The hammer is no longer simply “too heavy;” upon observation, it is perceived as comprising distinct properties such as wood and iron.

Delineating how orienting meaning arises, the “as-structure” manifests, wherein something (e.g., a self-evidently utilized tool) is apprehended as something else (an object possessing properties). While Heidegger does not extensively address the issue of open-closedness, subsequent philosophers have explored this theme. Philosophy of science, for instance,

has demonstrated that definitions, including those of the material universe, are invariably provisional, incomplete, and from certain perspectives, inaccurate (Van Brakel and Van Den Brink 1988). Nancy, adopting a philosophical stance, emphasizes the ongoing evolution of word meanings. He posits that upon reflection on a word – when we distance ourselves from it – its meaning is already in flux (Nancy 1997b). Badiou et al. (2016) offer a compelling illustration, demonstrating that the term "people"-seemingly unambiguous in one context – carries numerous, even contradictory, connotations when examined across diverse contexts. In such instances, the concept eludes precise definition. The orienting meaning we are provided (and simultaneously construct) is, therefore, far from unequivocal.

This section elucidates the theoretical intricacy of distinguishing between sense and significance as dual sources of orienting meaning. Clearly, objective presence aligns with a Heideggerian understanding of significance as a process of differentiation and linguistic expression, culminating in the development of directional and manageable concepts, organized into a comprehensive *Bedeutungsganze* (a whole of significance) – a "reality" that is substantial and objectively present (Heidegger 1967, 202). A delineation with sense is then evidenced in the differentiation between "discussing an object in verbal terms" (objective presence) and "using it as a tool" (innerworldliness). Perhaps most salient is the nuanced separation between an *original* something-as-something structure and a structure *derived* from it. For Heidegger, objective presence is a derived mode, being literally cut off from the something-as-something structure of innerworldliness (Heidegger 1967, 158).[11] He also terms it "*apophantical*" (ibid., 158). In contrast, the as-structure of innerworldliness is designated "existential-*hermeneutical*" (ibid., 158). Despite sparse mention, Heidegger clearly envisions two distinct structures. From our perspective, the distinction 'original appropriation versus derivative appropriation' can serve as a considerable benchmark and appears to underscore the delineation of sense as an original orienting sources in the previous in the subcontexts of

innerworldliness and interruption of daily practice. As the inquiry transitions now to the second context, Being-with-others, where complementary forms of orienting meaning are established, the challenge lies in assessing whether this distinction upholds as a reliable metric.

## 3. The meaning-orienting context of Being-with-others

In this meaning-orienting context of Being-with-others, particular emphasis is naturally placed on the human dimension. While this aspect of *Mitdasein* is well-documented in Heideggerian literature, exploring how orienting meaning manifests within a social milieu can offer fresh insights. Heidegger identifies three manifestations of orienting meaning in our inherent human interaction, albeit without explicitly naming them as such and without giving equal attention to each. Moreover, as he does not establish connections between them, I will aim to address this theme succinctly.

The first manifestation of orienting meaning, sparsely referenced, is an enhancement of the primary framework of innerworldliness. Whereas other people were not initially referenced, they now appear as *Mitdasein* within the realm of tool-use. This can be exemplified by a woman selling bread as a baker or a man tilling the land as a farmer (Heidegger 1967, 118). No further comment is provided on this matter. The second approach, by contrast, is extensively expounded upon and is described as everydayness or the average understanding of being-with-others. This setting is pivotal in constructing a pertinent world of *Mitdasein*, exemplified by phenomena like idle talk, curiosity, or ambiguity. Through it, individuals engage in a superficial understanding rather than earnestly seeking comprehension. As a result, discourse gradually takes on a different significance, with idle talk acquiring an authoritative character: information is accepted as true simply because it is said to be so (ibid., 169f).[12] This reality profoundly influences the existential dynamics of *Mitdasein*: individuals primarily perceive and engage with

each other based on the information they hear, convey, or know, shaping their responses and interactions accordingly.

Heidegger delicately introduces a third approach of being-with-others, termed the *Eigentliche Verbundenheit* (ibid., 122) or genuine connectedness. This concept represents a fundamental mode of being-with-others, occurring when individuals collectively commit to a shared cause. Due to its association with "*Das Volk,*" genuine connectedness often carries a negative connotation. For Heidegger, genuine connectedness is also evident in other contexts, which, phenomenologically speaking, are of greater interest here. He subtly alludes to this phenomenon in its intrinsic relation to average understanding; genuine connecting manifests audibly and is 'perceptible' through speech itself, through elements such as intonation, modulation, or the tempo of speech employed by the speaker (ibid., 162f). It can also manifest through the interlocutor, facilitated by engaged listening or maintaining silence, which Heidegger regards as the most elemental form of being-with. Furthermore, a dialogue can evoke genuine connectedness through in-depth conversations.

There are thus three orientational social settings which are not independent of each other. The first two can be understood as dynamically interwoven, with continual modifications in both directions: from being-with-others in the innerworldliness of tool use to a being-with-others characterized by average understanding, and vice versa. The third way, genuine connectedness, accompanies the second setting, average understanding of being-with-others. It seems clear that for Heidegger, the latter is not a peripheral form of connectedness, despite its inconspicuousness.

Turning now to an analysis; it is noteworthy that in all three settings of orienting meaning, a distinctive as-structure is present, where the other is perceived respectively "*as*" – *as* incorporated in tool use, *as* what others say of her or him, or *as t*he other to whom one is genuinely connected. Heidegger only illustrates how the as-structure typically affects both in an open and closed way in average understanding. In average understanding one feels at home and reassured, as it represents the familiar terrain one inhabits (openness).

However, this mode of being-together can also reveal unsettling dimensions, with Dasein intuiting an undertone that subtly alludes to the possibility of more genuine ways of being-with (closedness). It is imperative to acknowledge that both open and closed pathways function as orienting forces. When an entity is familiar, it exerts an attractive influence and we are drawn *toward* it, whereas the unsettling dimension orients us *away* from that familiarity.

One may wonder: with what faculty does Dasein apprehend the openclosedness? As established, perceptual acuity is requisite for revelation. Heidegger introduces two additional forms of sight, consideredness (*Rücksicht*) and forbearance (*Nachsicht*), yet refrains from providing extensive elaboration on these. *Umsicht* still plays an essential role, as Heidegger underscores, for it facilitates the transition from being-with-others in innerworldliness to average understanding (ibid., 169).

Heidegger's treatment of genuine connection with others – the third setting- is limited, but one can postulate how these moments affect us in a manner that is simultaneously open and closed. For instance, in in-depth dialogues, the active engagement of listeners coupled with the speaker's vivid elucidation of the subject matter engenders a shared experience that transcends individual egos. Indeed, Heidegger appears to suggest that these instances subtly reorient us by highlighting a mode of being together perceived as more authentic than the average understanding of one another. While the constitutional spirit of such encounters is comprehended in the experience, it is also sensed that it defies linguistic articulation of genuine connection with others – the third setting – is limited but we can imagine how these moments affect us in a manner that is both open and simultaneously closed. For instance, in in-depth conversations, the active engagement of the listeners together with the speaker's sparkling revelation of the subject matter creates a shared experience that transcends individual egos. Indeed, Heidegger seems to suggest that these instances subtly reorient us by highlighting a mode of being together that is perceived as more genuine than the average understanding of

one another. While the constitutional spirit of such encounters is understood in the experience, it is also sensed that it defies linguistic articulation. The way of understanding this orienting meaning is not through *Umsicht*, *Rücksicht*, or *Nachsicht*, but rather through *Durchsichtigkeit*, a seeing through.[13]

A final quandary can now again be addressed: the distinction between an orienting sense and orienting significance. How can the context of being-with-others be of help? Let us consider all three mentioned orientations. Innerworldliness, where practical interactions with individuals like bakers or farmers occur, can be seen as a manifestation of sense, resonating with the delineation of sense as a background. Of the third form, genuine connectedness, which emerges imperceptibly amidst foregrounded events (e.g., intonation, silence, in-depth conversation) Heidegger posits that these are original appropriations. I am inclined to also classify these phenomena as manifestations of sense as well. Due to their distinct nature, all require separate analysis. Focusing on intonation; the reason this can be identified as sense is that intonation can also be interpreted as a background, but here in relation to the words in the foreground, with the concept of background taking on a distinct meaning. Moreover, the background appears to convey a certain "meaning", albeit one that is difficult – or impossible – to clearly distinguish from the spoken word, as it accompanies the spoken word. If we take this into account, the orienting capacity of sense tends towards the additional interpretation mentioned above, sense as a path given to us.

As for the second orienting source, everydayness: speech and its resulting effect- where words take on an authoritarian character- align with the common interpretation of significance, as it constitutes an integral component of the *Bedeutungsganze*, embodying what is perceived as 'real' and thereby harboring meaningful substance. Here again, Heidegger identifies this phenomenon a derivative appropriation, underscoring orienting significance as derivative and sense as original.

Nonetheless, the relationship between the two orienting sources is more complex than it initially appears. Heidegger ambiguously contends that significance, despite its derivative manifestation, maintains its status as an original phenomenon inherent to Dasein's positive condition (Heidegger 1967, 129). This suggests an intrinsic primordiality for both sense and significance, despite of significance's derivative nature. I primarily understand this through their interplay. Significance's primordial status stems from its essential role in shaping the fabric of our existence, but it is also primordial as the medium through which orienting sense manifests itself. Nonetheless, in moments of sense-awareness (occurring almost imperceptibly in intonation), sense appears even more primordial, evoked in an unspoken "closed" manner. Thus, Heidegger can posit the primordiality of both significance and sense, given their mutual dependence. Sense manifests solely through orienting significance, whereas significance is invariably grounded in an orienting sense.

This inquiry now advances to the third and final context: the generation of orienting meaning in being-with-oneself. Following the previous analysis and the as-structure, this part explores yet another modality of orienting meaning generation. The context of Being-with-others further highlighted the distinction between significance and sense through its correlation with the derivative-original distinction. The question is whether this distinction will persist and how the interplay between orienting sense and orienting significance is to be understood from this perspective.

## 4. The meaning-orienting context of Being-with-oneself

This final section reveals significant parallels with Heidegger's established narrative on the authentic self. I reinterpret these insights from a different perspective, focusing on how the as-structure pertains to the self, how open-closedness is demonstrated in a markedly dramatic manner, and how the orienting impact is transmitted. In his discourse on the authentic self, Heidegger delineates two intersecting manifestations, explicitly highlighting their

dynamic interplay. Firstly, analogous to the dynamics of being-with-others, average understanding serves as the milieu that shapes one's self-conception Within this sphere, Dasein primarily perceives itself through the reflective echo of ideas transmitted via idle talk, perpetuated through imitation and dissemination. It conforms to the norms and values prevalent in this milieu, envisaging from life what is conventionally expected. Within this framework, one perceives oneself as a "oneself," where the collective 'one' inherently intertwines with the "self."

In contrast, Heidegger delineates a state of being that he posits as more genuine in nature, one that manifests when individuals are gripped by fundamental anxiety (Heidegger 1967, 140). These instances are notably extreme, characterized by profound intensity and significant impact, as they entail a complete transformation of the environment: from the familiar to a state of radical strangeness. Attempts to evade this sense of strangeness prove futile, as Umsicht, acting as an inherent spatial given, inevitably de-distances, thereby rendering the environment, in its ominous guise, very close (Heidegger 1967, 141). We might be inclined to think that such a menacing environment no longer orients; it does orient though, in instilling fear. Conventionally, orientation is perceived as directed toward the object of orientation. Here, the inverse holds true: we are oriented away from the object of orientation; the menacing environment directs itself away from itself. Interestingly, Nancy, who has also examined this movement in his exploration of meaning, therefore invokes not only the notion of à-venir (being directed toward what is to come) but also incorporates the idea of renvoie (re-send), signifying a redirection away (Nancy 2013b). Orientation can thus take two directions: pointing toward, and pointing away, from a given entity.

The existential disruption precipitated by anxiety engenders profound implications, catalyzing a transformation within Dasein. Transcending its previous state of being solely "in" this world, Dasein assumes a position of "in and out," evoking the conception of an altered self. The emergence of this self is a complex process, manifesting as a tacit internal

dialogue. Initially, this dialogue appears to unfold between Dasein (as “one”self) and an existentially transformed actual self (Heidegger 1967, 130). Yet, upon closer scrutiny, Dasein surpasses itself in a dual manner: the silent conversation transpires between a "caller" and the invoked actual self. The chasm between these entities is deliberately amplified. While the actual self-liberates itself from the “one” in Dasein by allowing itself to be pro-voked (in the sense of being summoned) by the call, the caller is characterized as displaced, alienated, and indeterminate – a mere “it,” a “nobody” (ibid., 278). Heidegger posits that the utter incomparability of the caller's singularity redirects focus onto the call itself, rather than the caller's identity. In contrast to idle talk, this call is described as noiseless, devoid of vocal sound and utterance, communicating exclusively in the mode of silence.

For many, this facet of Heidegger's work is interpreted as a spiritual outgrowth. In this context, it facilitates an understanding of an alternative interpretation of the as-structure in terms of someone ("one" self) as someone else (a self, detached from the "one"), and the openclosedness of the self: simultaneously familiar and elusive, both “in” and “out” (ibid., 15). The latter can be elucidated by revisiting Nancy's work, particularly his depiction of an interaction that, although occurring in a different context, appears equally pertinent to this intricate relationship. As Nancy asserts, “[there is] an interruption in communication. Not an interruption of communication, but an interruption communicated in the midst of the uninterrupted flux of communication” (Nancy 2013a). Hence, the condition of being “out” of everydayness (in moments of anxiety) is communicated amidst an uninterrupted flow of being “in” everydayness. Another interesting element is that Heidegger’s posits that the silent call – here considered the orienting meaning – emanates neither exclusively from the individual herself, (the actual self) nor solely from an external source (the call), but rather "both from me and from beyond and directed towards me" (Heidegger 1967, 274). While in a way referring to the “in and out”, it can also be interpreted as providing

information on how the orienting message is transmitted, from me and yet beyond me, but still directed towards me. There is on the one side a call (*Anruf*) and on the other understanding the appeal (*Anrufverstehen or Gewissen-haben-wollen*) (ibid., 288). While Heidegger elucidates this process in detail, the discussion will now turn to an intriguing statement by Nancy. His observation, more general in nature, describes this transmission with remarkable acuity while simultaneously adopting a rather abstract and technical approach. Nancy asserts that "(t)he appropriation of giving and the giving of the inappropriable configure the originary chiasmus of philosophy" (Nancy 1997, 52). Integrating Heideggers' point, this implies an inadvertent action of both the recipient (actual self) and giver (caller), though our focus here remains on the recipient. The initial facet of the paradox, encapsulated in the "appropriation of giving" underscores the clear recognition by the receiver of the act of giving (distinct from a gift), and the recipient' openness to this giving (letting itself be pro-voked). The subsequent aspect embodies the "giving of the inappropriable," denoting the actual self's awareness of the impossibility of appropriating the giving. A tacit understanding of the bestowal exists, albeit without a clear delineation of its content or origin.

Moreover, that the recipient is open to the given, implies its non-indifference; the orienting meaning has a relevance to us. Returning to Heidegger's line of thought, this assertion aligns with the contention that it affects us (Heidegger 1967, 274), affording a privileged position wherein-in existence, or "ek-sistence" (standing out) – "lässt sich das 'Wesen' des Daseins denken" (Heidegger 1965), the core of Dasein can be thought. The orienting meaning beckons Dasein to embody its utmost self, transcending the confines of the "one" self and embracing singularity (ibid., 278).

Becoming one's utmost self is not a straightforward task; the crux lies in recognizing its inherent unattainability. Dasein can never fully control this existential ground [in Nancy's terminology: it has been given the inappropriable]. Moreover, since Dasein is, it is destined to grapple with its existence as a fundamental being [in Nancy's formulation: as

an appropriation of the giving] (ibid., 284). Anxiety moments require us to discern that tension of openclosedness within, not through *Umsicht*, or the conceptual faculty of objective presence, but through extreme attention or *Durchsichtigkeit*.

We approach the conclusion of this complex analysis. Stepping back from the content (call-caller and orienting meaning), a final element to consider in our quest is: how can the above aid in distinguishing between sense and significance, which thus far was underscored by the distinction between original and derivative appropriation? In line with our reasoning, average understanding forms the foundation of significance, paralleling the context of being-with-others, as it constitutes the oneself and possesses a derivative nature. Extending this logic, sense must encompass the entirety of the moment during anxiety. Heidegger appears to suggest this when asserting that the ecstatic nature is sense (Heidegger 1965, 18). Sense, then, is interpreted as original – an authentic or actual self. Sense, moreover, is likewise a pathway, for in the moment of "in and out" a truth is experienced, yet a concealed one.

The context of being-with-oneself also provides insight regarding the interaction of these two sources, generating a dynamic distinct to that observed in being-with-others. In the latter context, sense exists alongside significance; in an in-depth dialogue, a shared experience (manifestation of sense) coexists with spoken words (manifestation of significance), necessitating a discerning eye to distinguish between them. In the context of being-with-oneself, sense emerges unvarnished, at the expense of significance, which undergoes a content shift at that moment. This allows its impact to be more consciously "perceptible" through *Durchsichtigkeit*. Still, the manifestation of significance in those moments is not diminished, as Heidegger alludes to a simultaneous being "in and out." In other words, there is a perpetual immersion in significance or the "one" of the oneself. Sense (the actual self), ever-present in the background, only becomes clearly perceptible for *Durchsichtigkeit* when the former breaks through that significance. While in Heidegger's case this situation is rather extreme, a similar phenomenological structure is employed by

authors such as Levinas, who meticulously describe how sense momentarily disrupts significance through the appeal of the other (Levinas 1961).

## 5. Conclusion

This paper explicitly investigated the conceptual understanding of meaning within the meaning-of-life discipline, in which meaning was considered to serve as an orienting dynamism. Three overarching contexts were delineated: being-in-the-world, being-with-others, and being-with-oneself. The structure of something-as-something and its existential openclosedness played pivotal roles as defining factors. In the three subcontext of being-in-the world this occurs respectively through the intertwining of world and Dasein (innerworldliness) the interruption of the activity (interruption of daily practice) and a change in perspective on the matter (objective presence). In the second context, being-with-others, orientation unfolds through an altered frame of reference – average understanding – and a deeper, more subtle orientation, accompanying the average understanding. In the third context of being-with-oneself, the everyday understanding becomes interrupted due to a state of anxiety, allowing for a deeper-sensed orientation to emerge.

Diverse variations elucidating how the phenomenon of orienting meaning impacts human beings and its modes of transmission were presented. The way information is transmitted inevitably also affect the impact on the human being. The degree of impact is perhaps mostly notably when comparing open-closedness as interruption. Notably, reference is made to instances of interruption on two occasions: during the disruption of everyday practice (sub-context two) and the meaning-orienting context of being-with-oneself. To recall, in the interruption of daily practice of hammering or driving, when a hammer or sing breaks, the informational input – a concatenation – is registered by *Umsicht* yet not retained as contextually relevant. In it, as it were, again forgotten by Dasein. This is not the case in the last context of being-with-oneself. There, in the interruption of the world of everydayness, the implications are unmistakably perceived

through the faculty of *Durchsichtigkeit*, bearing an impact in both an open and closed manner.

Next to as-structure as openclosedness, a point to consider was the intricate distinction between two sources of orienting meaning: sense and significance. I initially adopted the stance that orienting sense is originary and orienting significance derivative. However, through examining the final two contexts – being-with-others and being-with-oneself – the intricacy and nuance of the relationship between sense and significance became more apparent, due to added interpretations of sense. Sense is not only a background from where significance arises, it is also considered a pathway that impels all movement. This interpretation requires us to shift in how we consider sense: not as a background, but, as most clearly visible in the last context of being-with-oneself, as a short yet impactful happening through which something more fundamental comes across. In the context of being with others, this can be understood as an original way of being connected prior to all other forms (which are derivative, yet equally primordially).

Interestingly, both Nancy and Levinas can be interpreted as illuminating these orienting sources. Both appear to regard sense as an original appropriation and significance as derivative. Levinas, in particular, highlights the interrupting nature of sense in intersubjective relations – especially in encounters with the poor, the widow, the orphan, and the foreigner (Levinas, 1969: 50). To focus here on one single case – a beggar – in most cases, the orienting significance is strictly delineated by societal views and the negative associations almost automatically evoked when encountering a beggar. In moments of being affected by a beggar's gaze, sense disrupts significance and reveals what could be called the person's "dignity" as an original meaning. Dignity, like sense, is a concept that defies precise definition and operates primarily on an evocative level.

Nancy, conversely, engages with Heidegger's broader and more complex understanding of the relationship between sense and significance. His starting point aligns with the one outlined here, sense and significance coexisting and

interacting in various ways. At certain moments, they converge, making the distinction between them almost imperceptible; at other times, they diverge, creating a noticeable gap. Nancy also points to aspects not mentioned in this paper, but taken up by Heidegger: the concealing role of worldviews, as orienting significance, suppressing sense because of solidification of significance (Nancy 2014). Also, for Nancy, drawing a definitive boundary between sense and significance becomes increasingly untenable, given their intrinsic and dynamic interplay.

Further scholarly investigation is imperative to illuminate the intricacies of these and many other forms of interaction. As should now be evident, a primary challenge in this endeavor stems from the disparate contexts in which the orienting interactions occur. Consequently, it will be crucial to demonstrate their convergence within a shared yet unmapped horizon. Nevertheless, expectations of structural consistency should be preemptively eschewed, as various examples will inevitably exhibit contradictions – for instance, the paradoxical capacity of sense to both interrupt and reinforce significance. Despite the nascent state of phenomenological research into a more thorough understanding of the distinction between the two sources and interaction, this should not preclude the introduction of this topic's relevance into mainstream discourse on meaning in life.

**NOTES**

[1] *Aufschliessen -Aufgeschlossenheit* is literally composed of "open" (*auf*) and "to close" (*schliessen).*

[2] The Overlooked Role of Orientation in Meaning of Life; *Foundations of Science*: forthcoming. In collaboration with a colleague, we explore the interruptive impact of *sense within relationships*—reconceptualized as "a moment of genuine connecting"—and its potential to foster dignified forms of connectedness while transforming those that are undignified. Under review.

[3] This interpretation draws on the views of Levinas (1969, 2006) and Nancy (1997).

[4] In addition to *Verstehen*, *Befindlichkeit* (disposedness) and *Rede* (logos) play central roles in interpreting the something-as-something structure. While these three elements are inseparable, the focus here remains on understanding.

[5] Dealing with equipment is subject to the multiplicity of references of the "in order to". The vision of such compliance is circumspection.
[6] In German: "(…) *wie es von ihm selbst her im Besorgen für es begegnet.*"
[7] Levinas further explores this tension, examining the concurrent dependence and independence on the world across various modes of existence such as enjoyment, dwelling, and labour. (Note 2014)
[8] Etymonline: Online Etymology Dictionnaire. "Origin and history of impact". https://www.etymonline.com/word/impact
[9] It would be worthwhile to examine the role the distinction between jointedness and articulation plays in relation to the differentiation between sense and significance; however, this inquiry necessitates a separate study, which lies beyond the scope of the present context.
[10] In German: "*In der Struktur "Um-zu" hegt eine Verweisung von etwas aus etwas."*
[11] In German: "*Es ist bezüglich seiner Möglichkeiten der Artikulation von Verweisungsbezügen von der Bedeutsamkeit, als welche die Umweltlichkeit konstituiert**, abgeschnitten***."
[12] Note that *Rede* (logos) as a basis for understanding and disposedness can also be limited in its connotation to assertion or to idle talk.
[13] Notably, Levinas employs a similar notion, termed "extreme attention" (Levinas, 1969: 178). Both Heidegger and Levinas aim to convey that, while a situation may be comprehensible through this faculty, its impact or relevance cannot be articulated through our cognitive faculty of re-presentation.

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# Poetically Man Dwells: An Aesthetic Being of a Person

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**Abstract**

The article argues that, although scarce, Robert Spaemann's considerations of fiction, creativity and aesthetics disclose an inherently aesthetic character of the constitution of being a person. It also enables us to reconstruct the aesthetic grounding of morality which offers moral certainty instead of moral objectivity as a more suitable alternative for the criterion of moral truth. The article does that by reconstructing an aesthetic constitution of being a person from Spaemann's philosophy. It argues that the category of recognition, which is the grounding of all morality, has an intrinsic aesthetic structure that is similar to aesthetic Kantian concepts of sensus communis and the judgment of sublime. Spaemann's statement that "Poetically man dwells" is an ontological statement about the aesthetic constitution of a person and that it has an essential importance for our understanding of morality and moral truth.

**Keywords:** Robert Spaemann, aesthetics, morality, Immanuel Kant, moral certainty

## Introduction

"Poetically man dwells" (Spaemann 2017, 87), – claims German philosopher Robert Spaemann while borrowing a quote from Hölderlin and summarizing his own reflections on the part that fiction, art, and creativity play in being a person. Spaemann's considerations on aesthetic part of the ontology of a person are not extensive or exhaustive[1], but even more modest are the researchers' attention to those considerations[2]. It is much more common to interpret his conception of a person in

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the context of Aristotelian or Thomist traditions (Arthur Madigan, S.J. 2024, 210-294), to concentrate on his peculiar conception of nature (D. C. Schindler 2024, 86-99) or on his dynamic relationship with modernity (Zaborowski 2010), which, undoubtedly permeates his thought. However, in contrast to these more traditional approaches, I argue that, although scarce, his attention to aesthetic moments of being a person, are not accidental or merely decorative, but has a much more substantial role. To state it even stronger, it is the overlooked central arch in understanding who a person is, especially, who he is as a moral agent. In other words, I argue that the statement about the poetical, hence, aesthetic dwelling of a person is a metaphysical, ontological statement about the inherently aesthetic constitution of a person and that it has an essential importance for our understanding of morality and moral truth.

But what exactly does it mean? It might seem controversial to talk about poetical being of a person and poetical morality – that seems to lead into such problems as subjectivism or relativism that not only Spaemann, but many contemporary philosophers try to avoid. However, I intend to show that aesthetic structures of our personal being do not necessarily lead to subjectivism or relativism. On the contrary, they enable us to reconstruct and develop a conception of moral certainty that is a reasonable alternative to moral objectivity.

Such attempt stands mostly in contrast to dominating positions within philosophical discourse. Since Plato and his famous banishing of the poets from his Republic due to the corruption of the soul and inability to comprehend and represent truth, the opposition between morality and any kind of poetics or aesthetics is kind of a default position. And even if some of the modern authors accept the possibility of a more aesthetic nature of morality and discuss such concepts as moral feeling or, as Hume, even call those who inquire into moral questions moral painters (Hume 1960: 621), then the status of the possibility of any kind of moral truth becomes questionable. Aesthetisation of morality seems to lead to moral subjectivism or relativism. This is also reflected in contemporary discourse

where, for instance, pragmatist philosopher Richard Rorty acknowledges the important role that aesthetics plays within our moral values, but distances it from the idea of truth and renders them relative and subjective while relating them more with our social practices and contexts. I intend to go to different direction and while arguing for an aesthetic grounding for moral reality, maintain its connection to moral certainty as a kind of moral truth.

My aim is to show that (1) Spaemann's considerations of various emergences of fiction within our lives enable us to disclose an inherently aesthetic character of the constitution of personal being and (2) reconstruct the aesthetic grounding of morality which (3) offers moral certainty instead of moral objectivity as a more suitable alternative for the criterion of moral truth. It is done by reconstructing an aesthetic constitution of being a person from Spaemann's philosophy. And also by showing that the category of recognition, which is the grounding of all morality, has an intrinsic aesthetic structure that is similar to aesthetic Kantian concepts of *sensus communis* and the judgment of sublime.

## 1. Aesthetic constitution of being a person

Although Spaemann's considerations of aesthetic features of being a person are not elaborate or fully detailed, they enable us to reconstruct and demonstrate an essential part that aesthetics plays in the constitution of a person. The main ontological structures of being a person appear to be inherently aesthetic ones. Spaemann himself puts a lot of effort trying to stress that "a person must be someone who is what he is in a *different way* from that in which other things, "or other animals, are what they are." (Spaemann 2017, 7) In other words, a person is not a thing and not an object, hence, the being of a person cannot be captured or explained by any standard objectifying description or definition. A person cannot be defined by merely factual, material being that could be identified by empirical observation, because "a person is *someone*, not *something*, not a mere instance of a kind of being" (Spaemann 2017, 29) and *"[w]ho* we are is not simply interchangeable with *what* we are" (Spaemann 2017, 11).

Hence, any attempt – even the most elaborate one – to describe a person in an objectifying way reduces that person to something else – to merely his objectified appearances and features.

Spaemann attempts to explicate this peculiarity of personal being by stressing that this 'who' or 'someone' is better understood not by specifying *what* we are, but by specifying the *way* we are what we are. To state it even stronger, his position enables us to claim that *the way we are* is essentially *what* we are. In other words, in contrast to objects or things, the essence of being a person is better captured by a verb, not a noun. The being of a person is not a static existence of a certain thing, but an activity, "a specific mode of being" (Horubala 2024, 48) that is "inherently dynamic and so in a state of perpetual becoming" (Horubala 2024, 41). "The concept of person does not tell us what a thing is or what properties it has, but rather how it is what it is and how it has the properties that it does" (Horubala 2024, 47). Therefore, any attempt to elucidate the being of a person must take note of its active character and to ask not 'What a person is?' but rather 'What kind of activity he or she is?' or 'In what way specifically do persons exist?'. I argue that this certain way of being a person can be elaborated by showing it to pertain essentially aesthetic moments of representation and interpretative relation.

*Person and representation*

It is known that the original meaning of the concept 'person' pointed to the mask that actors on stage wore and through which they spoke. (Spaemann 2017, 21) "Later it was extended to mean a role in society, the social position one held" (Spaemann 2017, 21), but it still signified an external appearance, a collection of certain bodily or social features that allowed to recognize and describe the role someone had or was playing. We have already noted that when we speak of persons today, we try to capture something radically different – a 'who' or 'someone' that cannot be reduced to any objectifiable semblance, such as role, let alone to a collection of some externally noticeable features. A person is a certain mode of

activity that instead of masking something or pretending to be something, realizes and expresses that person. However, despite this seemingly radical contrariety, the ancient meaning of the concept 'person', understood as an aesthetic category of representation, can still be extremely constructive and informative in disclosing what it means essentially to be a person.

Although a person cannot be reduced to any external appearances – bodily features, social roles, character traits, actions they perform, beliefs they express – it doesn't mean that these have no part in the structure of personal being. "Persons do not belong to the sphere of 'ideal beings'" (Spaemann 2017, 68-69), they are not merely ideas or pure consciousnesses. On the contrary, "continuity of person is tied to the continuity of an organism in the world, which others can identify as that of one person in particular" (Spaemann 2017, 79) and my personal being cannot be "conceived apart from the external aspect of the person, mediated primarily through the body" (Spaemann 2017, 38). In other words, my external appearances, from the basic ones, concerning my body, to the more sophisticated ones, concerning all the social roles, are indispensable for both, constituting my personal identity and being recognized as a person by others. My outer aspect or my externality is essential for me being a person.

But what kind of structural role this externality play? We cannot define or describe a person through these external appearances, but we also cannot understand what a person is without them. "The *what* we can observe and comprehend; the *who* is accessible to us only as we recognize something ultimately inaccessible" (Spaemann 2017, 39). But how does this *what* help to constitute this *who*? How does it help a person to be a person? And how does it help us to access that person who is ultimately inaccessible in a standard way that objects are accessible?

According to Spaemann, this outer aspect or external appearances is a part of the process of self-externalizing (Spaemann 2017, 105) whose function is "to reveal my subjectivity" (Spaemann 2017, 103). Externality cannot define a person, because "a 'self' is more than is given" (Spaemann 2017,

76), hence, more than any externality can present, but it can *reveal* a person or *disclose* a person. For instance, my body language, facial expressions, tone of voice express what I feel or think. My appearance choices, my opinions, beliefs, even my acts also point to someone that is behind all of that but is expressing oneself though all these external guises. This externality or this "outside is not like other objects with no subjects, but is an *inside turned out,* an outward inwardness" (Spaemann 2017, 107) – it points to and reveals someone that is expressing his or her being through this externality.

In other words, the dynamics that is going on here and is constituting a person that is "essentially subject and object at once" (Spaemann 2017, 79) can be named representation. The external appearances *represent* that someone who is trying to express oneself through those external appearances. Spaemann himself uses the term 'representation' only a few times, but when he does, he clearly states the same: "other people's inwardness is accessible only through *symbolic representation* (*italics* – author) in the form of natural features. We do not know it as subjectivity. The only thing someone else can present to me is an exterior surface" (Spaemann 2017, 107). These exterior surfaces, on the one hand, conceal the person, because present 'something' instead of 'someone' that we are looking for, but cannot be captured by empirical observation or theoretical thought. On the other hand, they reveal that person, because that 'someone' is essentially present in those external surfaces: I am present in my choices, in my acts, in my thoughts, in the way I commit to my social roles, construct my appearance or express myself. I reveal myself, but I am not exhausted by this revelation (Spaemann 2017, 65), those external appearances only represent me, but do not replace me.

This means that the very structure of being a person is aesthetic one: representational aspect constitutes the activity that defines a person, the way that a person is. And the ancient meaning of the concept 'person' gains a new significance. As persons, we wear and must wear various masks as a way of expressing ourselves as persons, because this is the way our being is structured and the way it is revealed. We cannot be

reduced to merely those masks, but they are essential for our being. We are not masks, but mask-bearers. We are not roles, but role-players (Spaemann 2017, 84). We are the activity that employs those masks and roles and exist by and through this employment. Therefore, we are inherently aesthetic beings.

*Person means (interpretative) relation*

Representation is not the only aesthetic trait of the structure of personal being. It has been noted by many that person means relation[3]. In other words, the activity that constitutes a person is the activity of relating. According to Walsh, "[r]elation is not just an aspiration, but the reality of who persons are" (Walsh 2023, 14) because „through that relationship to others <...> they gain a sense of who they are as selves" (Walsh 2023, 13). In other words, we a capable of recognizing ourselves as something more than just a natural being, as 'someone', only through the recognition and relation to other 'someone'.[4] What is more, relation is constitutive of our being not only as relation to others, but also as relation to ourselves. The way we relate to our externality and all its variations is essentially the way we are. Therefore, "[t]he real is <…> not that which lacks all relations <…> The real is the relationship itself" (Spaemann 2015, 93). I argue that precisely this relationality, that is the core of being a person, is a creative, interpretative, hence, an aesthetic one.

Spaemann indicates that this intrinsic relationality of a person is constituted by the fact that our nature is not something that we merely 'are', but something that we 'have'. (Spaemann 2017, 31, 68) In other words, whatever external features, characteristics, relations can be seen as pertaining to us, they cannot be seen as simply what we are, but only as what we *relate to* in one way or another. This 'having one's nature' always anticipates a difference and a reflective inner distance between me, as an activity or active 'self', and all the objectified appearances or roles that I may have. And this inner distance is precisely what makes the relationality of a person an aesthetic one. That is because by relating to my nature through that reflective distance, I interpret that nature in one or other way. I am capable of placing a wholly different sign – positive or

negative – before everything that my nature simply is: I can take it on, carry it through or rebel against it and refuse it. (Spaemann 2017, 45, 72)

For instance, although eating is a purely natural need given to us just in order to keep our biological life, today we have re-interpreted it into something much more, a social event, where the company, the place, the aesthetics plays almost an equal part as food consumption itself.[5] We are also able to refuse eating, even if we are hungry, if we feel this helps to express a deeper message – for instance, go on a hunger strike for some moral or political ideal. In other words, we can choose a purely negative thing and interpret it as a positive one, or choose a positive thing and interpret it as a negative one. We are even capable to put a negative sign before our own life, if we see that as necessary – we can sacrifice our life for others, for our friends or family, or country. "Life only lives on the sacrifice of life" (Spaemann 2012, 25),- says Spaemann, having in mind that sometimes we are capable of saving our personal identity, our personal life, only by giving up our physical existence, hence, by sacrificing our life. Interpretation permeates every way we choose to externalize ourselves – the way we choose to look, the way we choose to present and express ourselves, the way we fulfil our social roles, even the way we construct our personal relations with others. For instance, although we might have many friends none of those friendships will be the same, all of them will have their own different dynamics, inner tensions and intimacies, goals and realizations. And that is because with every friend we relate a little bit differently, we interpret that relation a little bit differently.

In other words, as was noticed by Schindler, "a person cannot simply be its nature in a passive way but has to relate itself to its nature, or in other words *to take up a certain position* (*Italics* – author) with respect to his given nature" (Schindler 2024, 89-90), "to make something like a decision regarding who one is <…> the essence that constitutes personhood is a self-relating essence, which thus requires what we might call an active participation in its own reality" (Schindler 2024, 90). This means that, although a person is a

source of various relations that he has with himself and everything around him, these relations are not automatic, they include the moment of freedom. Persons relate to their nature freely, "they freely endorse the laws of their being, or alternatively they rebel against them and 'deviate'". (Spaemann 2017, 33) This creative freedom – a concrete way every one of us chooses to relate to our nature and the world around us – is actually what makes us more than just instances of a universal concept or a certain species (Spaemann 2017, 16, 19, 32), it makes us unique and incommensurable individuals.

This also means that relationality – an activity of relating that constitutes personal being – is an intrinsically aesthetic activity. "Poetically man dwells" means first and foremost that "we cannot make a clean break between the way we construct ourselves and the way we really are" (Spaemann 2017, 89). We are by constructing ourselves, by constantly interpreting and creatively relating to everything around us – to our own external guises, features and roles, as well as to others. Everything that is given to us, all of our nature, our bodily capabilities and appearances, our skills and talents, our character traits, psychological predispositions, social roles, biological and social relations determined by nature and society, even our needs and inclinations "contain no more than instructions for role play" (Spaemann 2017, 83). I choose the way I relate to my appearances, do I nurture or change it. I choose the way I fulfil my social roles and nurture my relationships with people, the way I am a daughter, a student, a friend. I chose even the way I relate to any kind of fortune or misfortune that might befall me – will I be a fighter, a victim, or an indifferent cynic. Poetically man dwells because the core of his being, the way he exists – his relationality – is aesthetic one.

## 2. Recognition as an aesthetic capacity

But as being a person automatically includes being a moral agent, it means that our moral capacity is also constituted by this aesthetic structure of being a person. In other words, moral or ethical relation to the world is at the same time an aesthetic relation. But what kind of aesthetic

relation can constitute us as moral agents and guarantee us at least some kind of moral certainty? Doesn't that automatically lead us to some kind of moral relativism or subjectivism? If morality is fundamentally constituted by aesthetic categories, how can we have any sort of moral truth?

This question can be answered considering the conception of recognition that is the way we relate to other persons and, hence, is a grounding of all our personal relations and a source of our moral capacity. According to Spaemann, first and foremost, recognition is our ability to recognize another person as real, as a centre-of-being that has its own inwardness and active subjectivity. (Spaemann 2015, 81-83) It is an instant perception that the other is not merely an object, but a subject with his needs, aims and tendencies. It is the transcendence of all the external appearances that are available for us as empirical phenomena and the grasping of that 'someone' that is behind all those external guises and is inaccessible for us as a phenomenon. In other words, it is the peculiar grasping of the reality of other's subjectivity, of that activity that constitutes the being of the person, of the way that other exists and the priority of this subjectivity over any of the objectified external guises the person might construe.

Spaemann emphasizes that recognition is an exceptional kind of relation, it is the very "entry into the sphere of the personal" (Spaemann 2017, 186) and "a step into a wholly new form of relation" (Spaemann 2017, 186) with other instead of that other's objectified cognition. According to him, "duties to persons are derived from the duty to notice them as persons" (Spaemann 2017, 184), hence, from recognition, which means that recognition enables our capacity for morality. Even our own self-understanding as persons is dependent on recognition – it is the source of personhood as such. However, Spaemann does not go into details how such a relation is possible, how precisely does it happen, how does it work and what is its inner structure.

I intend to show that, recognition, as stemming from aesthetic constitution of personal being, is also an aesthetic capacity. Its aesthetic features are disclosed with the help of Kant's considerations of aesthetic categories of sensus

communis and the sublime. The analysis of these Kantian ideas enables us to reveal that the intrinsic structure and the working of recognition is very similar to the aesthetic Kantian categories of sensus communis and the judgment of the sublime. And although it enables us to disclose the intrinsically aesthetic nature of recognition, it does not lead us to any kind of moral subjectivism or relativism. Just as Kant's aesthetics discloses the possibility of a different kind of truth than the one that is found within objective or scientific knowledge, the same is true of recognition and the personal moral sphere that it opens up. Instead of moral objectivity, which is based on scientific worldview, we discover the possibility of a different kind of moral truth – practical moral certainty.

It should be noted that Spaemann himself does not develop such parallel between his conception of recognition and Kant's aesthetic ideas. Overall, his relationship with Kant is complicated and, in some ways, conflicting. Zaborowski noted that "Spaemann maintains, for instance, that the Kantian dualism of the noumenal and the phenomenal worlds indicates a path for preserving human subjectivity and freedom against the reductionistic claim of scientism" (Zaborowski 2010: 248). However, at the same time, Spaemann believed that "Kant did not articulate an adequate notion of the free recognition of the reality of the other as similar to oneself" (Zaborowski 2010: 248). "Contrary to the Kantian narrowing of ethics, it must be said that it is not the demand for impartiality which is the basis of all moral decisions, but rather that it is the perception of the reality of the other and even of one's own self" (Spaemann 2000: 99) In other words, since Spaemann develops an ontological conception of a person as a grounding for all reality, including our moral life, Kants transcendental position and conception of a purely rational subject remain too rationalistic and 'thin' for him to account for such personal reality. "Personhood is not the same as being governed by reason" (Spaemann 2012: 23). Instead of prioritising pure reason over life, Spaemann seeks to resolve their opposition by proposing their synthesis where rationality becomes a way of being alive. According to him he seeks to develop a position where "reason stops standing abstractly over against life, and becomes concrete and fills itself

with living power" (Spaemann 2000: 103). This also becomes a ground for further opposition between Spaemann and Kant. For instance, love and happiness (taken as a certain interpretation of eudaimonia) are the expression of this synthesis of reason and life and constitutive elements within Spaemann's understanding of morality and moral subject. Kant, on the other hand, at least within the "Critique of Practical Reason" sees them as merely pathological determination that must be left outside of moral domain – only purely rational determination constitutes moral worth.

However, such Spaemann's opposition to Kant is mostly based on Spaemann's view towards the first two Kant's Critiques. Spaemann doesn't explicitly interpret the third Critique and Kant's aesthetic ideas within the context of morality. I intend to argue that at least two of those aesthetic ideas – the idea of sensus communis and the experience of the sublime – enable us to interpret Spaemann's conception of recognition as an aesthetic category and discloses a close connection between aesthetics and morality.

*A moment of sublime*

First of all, although Kant himself links sublimity with the experience of nature objects (such as stormy sea or mountains, or earthquake) (Kant 2007, 76, 93), the same aesthetic structure can be found at work within our capacity of recognition. In other words, recognition of another person can be seen as a little moment of sublime.

According to Kant, the judgment of sublime, which is one of the aesthetic judgments, is a reflective judgment. Within this judgment a boundless or immense object (for instance, a stormy sea) is just a precondition and a pretext for our mind to reflectively turn onto itself. While encountering the immense or infinitely potent external object, our imagination is trying to encompass it within our judgment but remains unable to do so. Despite that, we discover that we are able to have an idea of this immenseness or totality. In other words, the imagination's inability to fully capture that immenseness by our senses turns our mind reflectively onto itself and onto an understanding that we are able to have a

different kind of grasp of certain things that are too immense or too absolute for our imagination to capture them by senses. We are able to have supersensible ideas. Hence, the judgment of sublime enables us to regard "the infinite of supersensible intuition <…> as given (in its intelligible substrate), [although it] transcends every standard of sensibility" (Kant 2007, 85). In other words, immense or infinitely potent experiences which are too vast or total for our imagination and senses, enables us to reflectively detect a capacity within our own nature for absolute and infinite, hence, supersensible ideas. We are able to contemplate them, to be guided by them, to rely on them in our thought and action. Such discovery, according to Kant, is a reflective discovery that there is something in our own nature that transcends pure nature and is supersensible. "Sublimity, therefore, does not reside in any of the things of nature, but only in our own mind, in so far as we may become conscious of our superiority over nature within, and thus also over nature without us" (Kant 2007, 94). For instance, even if a violent and raging storm might take our life, it cannot subjugate our freedom or destroy our capacity to do good – a person that lost his life in a storm but helped other 100 persons to survive remains the one that became superior over nature, despite the fact that the price of such superiority was his own life.

However, such superiority over nature and our sublime capacity for the supersensible can be captured not only by encountering nature itself and its immenseness and totality. The same or very similar aesthetic structure of realizing our own sublimity is found as an intrinsic feature of recognition. Through recognition we gain a relation to something that is purely supersensible and cannot be reduced to any kind of object or phenomenon – another person, his or her subjectivity, his or her active 'self'. "This presumes, of course, a measure of passive availability to knowledge first: the other must be an object of sense-perception, construed as 'human being' in the way that other living creatures are construed as what they are. But the personal existence of the other is not construed like that, but 'noticed' by an act of free recognition." (Spaemann 2017, 183) In other words, just like in the judgment of sublime,

we first encounter some external phenomena, which is vast or even endless – we can describe a person through many of his bodily or psychological features or social roles, we can distinguish him as a blond, tall, friendly, helpful, a friend, a brother, a student and so on. However, at the same time, the endlessness of those features discloses that there is still something more to that person that cannot be captured by any amount of those descriptions. "[A] centre of being is, by definition, not something available to knowledge as a phenomenon." (Spaemann 2017, 182) Senses and experience on their own cannot capture what a person as a unity of life, an activity of a 'self', a being that thinks, acts and lives, is.

Therefore, through the encounter of the externality of a person we are directed toward that 'someone' that exists beyond this externality. In other words, "other people's inwardness is accessible only through symbolic representation in the form of natural features. We do not know it as subjectivity. The only thing someone else can present to me is an exterior surface" (Spaemann 2017, 107). However, just like in the Kantian judgment of the sublime, the exterior surface, or that which is susceptible through senses, a nature, services as symbolic representation and a pretext to conceive that which is supersensible. The same aesthetic structure that was visible within the judgment of sublime is at work within recognition. The experience of outer aspects of a person leads us to conceive the insufficiency of them for the understanding of a person and directs us towards acknowledgement that a person is something more than any kind of external semblance can present.

Recognition also keeps the reflective moment found within the judgment of sublime. Only through recognizing the reality of another person I do recognize myself as a person, hence, as someone that is more than an organic center that can subjugate everything for one's own purposes. Only by encountering the other as the other, as a free subjectivity, we detect a certain moral boundary – we cannot treat the other as a mere object, because he or she is precisely not an object, but a subject, a person, a center of being. In other words, "[t]o recognize a person means pre-eminently to restrain my own

potentially unlimited urge for self-expansion. It means to resist the inclination to see the other only as a factor in my own life-project" (Spaemann 2017, 186). So, through recognition we not only encounter the other as real, but also myself as real – as a person, a moral being, that can and must restrict oneself in relation to others.

According to Kant, within the judgment of sublime, "[t]he feeling of our incapacity to attain to an idea that is a law for us, is respect" (Kant 2007, 87). Such respect is also just another word for recognition. By recognizing the other as a centre of being and his inviolability because of that, we are recognizing the incomparable uniqueness and incommensurability of persons (Spaemann 2017, 185) that provokes our moral self-restraint. "That is 'respect': respect for one who can never be made an object, never a means subservient to my own universe of significance" (Spaemann 2017, 186) because he or she is something more than an object or a function for me. He or she is autonomous subject that we cannot attain or subjugate as a mere object. Here Kant's idea of the sublime acquires a similar role as in Christian Nae's analysis of it where it is regarded "as the 'presentation of the absence of the other'" (Nae 2010: 379) and the Other – "as a specific limit of our representation, due to the inadequacy of our imagination in face of the Other regarded as a mere rational Idea" (Nae 2010: 379). However, in Nae's analysis this inability to experience a direct and full relation with the Other is later explicated as our existential identification with Other due to our mutual finitude and mortality, hence, through the certain experience of negativity. Spaemann, on the other hand, depicts the recognition of the Other as a certain ability to grasp something positive about the Other that cannot be known directly through empirical experience – namely the active, constructive subjectivity of the other, his or her way of realizing personal being.

In other words, recognition is an aesthetic category because its intrinsic structure works just as an aesthetic judgment of the sublime. It stumbles upon the external appearances of the person and is directed to someone that those external appearances cannot capture but represent as existing

behind them. Just as within the judgment of the sublime, recognition reveals our superiority over nature, a transcendence of oneself and other as merely self-interested organic centre and provokes normatively binding respect. Breaking through the symbolic representation of the other, recognition enables to perceive the other and oneself as someone that is supersensible and unattainable as a phenomenon, but at the same time ontologically real.

*A kind of sensus communis*

The judgment of the sublime is not the only Kantian aesthetic structure that can be found at work within recognition. The ability of recognition to remain purely personal, but at the same time not to drift toward pure subjectivism or relativism and to guarantee moral certainty, even if it is not based on objective knowledge, is also constituted by aesthetic structure which is similar to Kantian sensus communis. Both of them – sensus communis and recognition – try to develop an alternative conception of truth in contrast to objective knowledge and they do that by relying on an imaginative capacity of including the perspectives of the others within the judgment.

First of all, recognition, just as sensus communis, is essentially constituted by and through a sympathetic connection with others. According to Kant, "by the name sensus communis is to be understood the idea of a public sense, <…>, a faculty of judging which in its reflective act takes account <…> of the mode of representation of everyone else, in order <…> to weigh its judgement with the collective reason of mankind" (Kant 2007, 123). In other words, it is an ability, provided by imagination, to perceive that others have their own subjective perspectives and even an ability to try these perspectives on. Sensus communis broadens our own judgment by including these other perspectives in this judgment as its normative qualification. The reality of others (even if they are just possible others) as the ones that have their own judgment, their own view and attitude, is intrinsically constitutive for the judgment of taste when we try to decide if something is beautiful or ugly.

It is an attempt to integrate the plurality of those possible judgments within mine.

The same is to be said about recognition. Recognition as such is constituted precisely by realizing the reality of others – their subjectivity, their ability to judge and act for themselves. It is the realization that the other is not merely an object or a phenomenon, but a centre of being, a self, the other (me), and "I am part of her world, as she is part of mine. I exist for her as she exists for me." (Spaemann 2017, 78) We are aware not only of the subjectivity of one particular other that we happen meet, but "of the gaze of all others, the gaze of all possible others" (Spaemann 2017, 15). The reality of these possible others, that is grasped with the help of imagination, enables our self-transcendence: it creates "a point of view from outside one's own organic centre." (Spaemann 2017, 15) It is not the view from nowhere, pictured by Thomas Nagel (Nagel 1986). Rather it is the view from everyone or at least from those others that are relative to the situation. It is the point of view that presupposes and starts from the plurality of persons and their coexistence, not my own individual existence.

What is more, precisely because of such presupposition of plurality of others, both, sensus communis and recognition, are able to restrict pure self-centredness and provide us with impartiality, although none of them involve objectivity. According to Kant, sensus communis "is accomplished <…> by putting ourselves in the position of everyone else" (Kant 2007, 123) and this aesthetic procedure of broadening our own judgment with the possibility of wholly different perspectives enables us to avoid self-centred partiality.

Personal recognition avoids self-centredness and achieves moral certainty in the same way – by recognizing the reality of others, putting ourselves in the position of others and qualifying our moral judgment according to that. Of course, I still approach the situation as a particular person, from my subjectivity, from my first-person perspective, but I approach it with the presupposition that I am only one among many others. So, "there is a self-restraint required, on the basis of a shift in perspective. <…> To recognize a person means pre-eminently to restrain my own potentially unlimited urge for self-expansion.

It means to resist the inclination to see the other only as a factor in my own life-project" (Spaemann 2017, 186). This restraint emerges from the very recognition that the other is not an object, but a center of being requiring different kind relation than objects. At the very least, it "demands the pure "letting-be" of the other in its irreducible otherness" (Spaemann 2000, 96), hence, the inviolability of the other's subjectivity.

However, in addition to this moment of self-restraint, recognition has a deeper level of connecting with others that enables impartiality. Recognition is the grasping of the being of the other person that lies beyond all his or her external appearances. That being is not a phenomenon or an object, it is an activity and activities or acts "are available to the extent that we engage in them, whether actively or by reflective imagination" (Spaemann 2017, 183) – it "requires a certain sympathetic engagement" (Spaemann 2017, 183). In other words, I can truly capture the being of other person only by sympathetically engaging into that being, by in one way or another "tending in the same direction, <…> being-out-toward the same" (Spaemann 2000, 97) as the other. This "being-out-toward the same" at the bare minimum can be interpreted as merely tolerating the other's existence, his aims, acts, tendencies, but at the same time it can also be much more intense – it can be an active support of other's dreams and plans or an actual help in realizing them. In any way, it is not only the restriction of my self-centeredness, but also an active engagement in the being of others. By taking note of their interests (Spaemann 2017, 183) recognition qualifies our moral judgment in a normative way and provides impartiality and some guidance in treating the other in accordance with that person's perspective. And all these aspects within the structure of recognition correspond to the structure of Kant's aesthetic judgment, at least as interpreted by such thinkers as Tamar Japaridze, who, while analysing Kant's conceptions of sensus communis and the sublime, argues that "the repression of self-interest liberates the senses and affirms the encounter with the other (being)" (Japaridze 2000: 21).

Finally, because of being constituted by the inclusion of the perspectives of others, recognition just as sensus communis,

provides a different kind of certainty than objective or factual knowledge. The aesthetic structure of these judgments enables to disclose a different conception of truth. According to Kant, we can define taste or sensus communis "as the faculty of judging that makes our feeling in a given representation universally communicable without the mediation of a concept" (Kant 2007, 125). In other words, it is not an objective knowledge of a phenomena (that is the prerogative of the faculty of Understanding), but it still provides us with judgments that are universally communicable. For instance, when we judge something to be beautiful it doesn't mean that it is beautiful only for me, I judge it to be beautiful in general and expect others to endorse such judgment, although I cannot give any evidence or arguments that it is beautiful. According to Kant, such peculiar appeal to universal validity arises precisely because the judgment of taste is an aesthetic judgment based on reflective inclusion of other perspectives. It does not refer to our subjective tastes, pleasure or displeasure provided by senses, but is constituted by the free play of the faculties of understanding and imagination. Therefore, although it does not provide us with objective knowledge, it still has some kind of certainty and universality.

The same can be said about the personal recognition – it is not knowledge, we cannot 'know' a person because "being a person is not an objective occurrence" (Spaemann 2017, 181). But we can and do recognize a person as someone that is ontologically real. This recognition provides us with such kind of certainty that objective knowledge never could. It enables us to notice the very being of another person, not merely his objectified appearances. According to Spaemann, through recognition "[t]ruth itself appears not as the universal that is greater than any individual, but as the unique countenance of another individual person." (Spaemann 2017, 21) In other words, the truth that we encounter within our practical moral lives is not empirical or theoretical one that can be subsumed under some generalizations or abstract concepts. Rather it is ontological – it reveals the truth of other's reality, the reality of a person that transcends all empirical observations and

theoretical generalizations and can only be grasped as a free activity of that other's self.

What is more, recognition of the reality of a person becomes the source of any further moral certainty. It provides not only the restriction of my own self-expansion and treating other as merely an object, but, through the sympathetic engagement in other person's reality, in his aims, dreams, wishes and needs, it also provides us with guidance of how we should act and treat that particular person in various moral situations. According to Zaborowski, "[t]he epistemological status of this kind of simple, elementary, and immediate knowledge differs significantly from philosophical, scientific, and technological knowledge. It is a 'certainty we all sense" (Zaborowski 2010, 69). On the one hand, this certainty is concrete, it stems from personal recognition, hence, from the relationship of two or more persons in a concrete moral situation. On the other hand, it is absolute and unconditional, dictated through the engagement in other's reality and acceptance of his or her inherent dynamicity – needs, aims and tendencies. Hence, "[i]t is not the most impersonal, but the most personal observation that reveals most of what reality is in itself. It is one of those persistent prejudices of modern thought to think that the less subjective something is the more objective." (Spaemann 2017, 89) And although the inherent structure of recognition is aesthetic, it does not dismiss moral truth, but offers a different conception of it than objectivity – a moral certainty that is constituted by a relation with the other as a real person.

## 3. Conclusions

Although Spaemann mentions aesthetic moments of being a person sparsely, they appear to be essential for understanding what a person inherently is. Spaemann himself emphasizes that the being of a person is better captured not as an object, but as an activity. This activity turns out to be an aesthetic one that is constituted by the categories of representation and interpretative relation. A person cannot be conceived without his or her external aspects – his bodily appearance, character features, social roles – however, those

external aspects do not exhaust that person, but merely represent him or her. This externality represents 'someone', a 'self', that exists behind it and only express oneself through it. Also, as person is essentially constituted by his or her relationality, this relationality proves to be inherently interpretative one. Persons exists by interpretatively relating to everything around them – their own external appearances and others.

What is more, recognition of another person, which is essentially an entry into the sphere of various other personal relations and the grounding of morality, also appears to be an aesthetic category. Its inherent structure is the same as or at least extremely similar to Kant's conceptions of *sensus communis* and the judgment of the sublime. Just as the Kantian judgment of sublime is constituted by reflective transcendence of our inability to have a sensory intuition of an immense phenomena towards our capacity to have a supersensible idea of it, recognition is the transcendence of an endless external features of a person that cannot exhaust that person towards the grasp of 'someone' behind those features. Recognition is a moment of sublime while encountering the supersensible or ontological reality of the person. And just as Kantian *sensus communis* and its universality is grounded in aesthetic capacity of including the perspectives of others within our own judgment, recognition is also constituted in the exact same way.

Consequently, the aesthetic constitution of recognition enables us to reconstruct an alternative understanding of moral truth provided by it. Instead of moral objectivity it enables talk about a different kind of moral certainty which stems from the recognition of the reality of other persons and becomes both, the restriction of self-centered partiality and the normative guidance for treating others.

**NOTES**

[1] Most of these reflections can be found within a brief section called „Fiction" in his book *Persons. The Difference between 'Someone' and 'Something'* (2017).

[2] For instance, in his review of Spaemann's *Persons. The Difference between 'Someone' and 'Something'* Madigan mentions the section about fiction but calls it merely an 'illustration' of the fact that persons are not simply identical with their natures (Madigan 2010, 379). This paper, however, argues that persons' ability to create fictions and their aesthetic creativity in general plays a structural role within the very being of a person.

[3] It is the core idea of David Walsh in his lecture "Person Means Relation" (2023) given at University of Dallas, and his other works, including his book *Politics of the Person* as the *Politics of Being* (2016). Also, this idea is developed in John McNerney's book *Myself as Another. A Journey to the Heart of Who We Are* (2024), where he analyses the idea through the thought and lives of many different thinkers, such as Hannah Arendt, Paul Ricoeur, Jacque Derrida and others.

[4] Spaemann develops this idea through his observation that „persons exist only in plural" (2017: 2, 77, 232, 134). The plurality of persons and the mutuality of recognition is one the core ideas in his conception of a person.

[5] Spaemann himself analysis this example in his *Happiness and Benevolence* (2000, 166). Also, introduces various other examples in his other texsts.

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# Situating Skills: Emergent Dynamic Reconfigurations of Activities in the Transition from a Learning Environment to Another

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## Abstract

The paper aims to provide a broad construct for understanding skills, what they are, and the ways in which they are situated, i.e., dependent on the conditions for their exercise. Adding to Hinchliffe's approach, we made skills' transferability not only a key aspect of their conceptualization but also a way of exploring their deeply embodied nature and their intricate relation with complex situations. While there is a growing body of research regarding concrete aspects of embodied cognition in learning environments, little attention is given to skilful performances while transferring them into different (mediatized and non-mediatized) learning environments. Our theoretical and empirical investigation offers a preliminary picture of how skills are reconfigured and redeployed in transitioning from one learning environment to another. Regarding the structure of skill, we enlarged Hinchliffe's approach, integrating the perspective of conversational analysis. The structure of skills can be made explicit if we follow their build-up from simple abilities and their integration into larger structures. According to our view, being skilful means that one can cope with scripted and unscripted interactions and move easily between them.

**Keywords:** phenomenology of education, skills, embodied cognition, learning environment, COVID-19 pandemic, conversational analysis, operational resource

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## Introduction

While there is a growing body of research regarding concrete aspects of embodied cognition in learning environment, (Castro Alonso et al. 2024; Frith, Miller & Loprinzi 2019; Linkola et al. 2022; Malinin 2016; Newcombe and Weisberg 2017; Petsilas et al. 2019), there is little attention given to skillful performances while transferring them into different (mediatized and non-mediatized) learning environments.

Already Dreyfus (1980, 2014), relying on Merleau-Ponty, pointed out three different meanings of embodiment, which are corresponding in fact to three levels on which embodied processes are taken place: the physical embodiment of a human subject; the set of bodily skills and situational responses that we have developed; and the cultural abilities and understandings that we responsively gain from the cultural world in which we are embedded. The adequate description of their articulation, as the key of understanding skilful performance, requires extended empirical research regarding the transition from a learning environment to another, as well as theoretical investigation regarding the concept of skill as precisely situated at the interface of the learning process and the environment.

The literature on skills in education is vast and with many ramifications. Therefore, even in well circumscribed area of interest the term might be vague and leading to misunderstandings. Although it gained centrality in the discourses on higher education, some are considering it already to be overused and under-theorized (Spencer 2024).

The term "skill" is also controversial. This cannot be surprising if we take a look to current situation in the philosophical debates. Stanley & Williamson (2001) challenged Ryle'(1946, 1949)'s distinction between knowledge-that (propositional knowledge) and knowledge-how (practical knowledge), sparking off a fierce debate between intellectualism and anti-intellectualism about practical knowledge. Stanley & Williamson (2017) defended a form of intellectualism based on the idea that that skillful actions manifest propositional knowledge. Pavese proposed a radical intellectualist position which states that "it is because know-how involves propositional knowledge that has a special explanatory link to success."

(Pavese 2018, 24) Robertson and Hutto (2023), placing themselves in the opposite camp, claimed that Pavese's identification of "practical modes of presentation with motor representations […] is problematic on empirical and theoretical grounds." (142) Following another argumentative line, Cappuccio (2023, 84) affirms emphatically that "Dreyfus is right", because "habitual action control […] is the true hallmark of skill and the only veridical criterion to evaluate expertise."

Placed at the crossroads of epistemology and theory of action, the concept of skill still needs an adequate theoretical and philosophical treatment which will presumably offer it a proper locus. In education, skill's transferability became a major issue once achieving practical knowledge and professional experience were legitimated aims of the teaching process. This can be acquired by moving it away from the mere instrumental reason (Hinchliffe 2002, 189), connecting it to the embodied (agent) and the cultural environment and describing the way in which abilities and knowledge are configurated and re-configurated up to the point where they are becoming a coordinated ensemble.

Practitioners in the field of education, as well as philosophers of education asked themselves if the concept of skill is adequate for describing the challenges and the performance of teachers and students. (Court 1990; Spencer 2004; Hinchliffe 2002) Sometimes their inquiry amounts to more general outcomes concerning the definition of skill and to a deep problematisation of their connection with the situation that they have to handle.

Our approach takes into account the skills of students in overcoming difficult learning situations, how they make sense and adjust to challenges raised by "critical incidents in their own practice". (Lundgren, Morrison and Sung 2023) Students (and instructors) respond to unscripted moments in the learning process and their engagement with the novel situation show "how co-emergence plays out in intra- and interpersonal interactions with the surrounding ecosystem." (ibid.) Although the youth was the least affected in terms of physical health (Broner et al. 2022; Preetz et al. 2021), the introduction of restrictions, such as social distancing and the lockdown, respectively the transition of higher education in the online

learning environment, resulted in many changes in the lives of the students (De Bruyn & Van Eekert 2023; Halliburton et al. 2021; Preetz et al. 2021). Studies report among students an increase in mental health problems (e.g. depression and anxiety), respectively a decrease in life satisfaction and an increased prevalence of stress and feelings of loneliness (Broner et al. 2022; Halliburton et al. 2021; Huang & Zhang 2022; Preetz et al. 2021; Reyes-Portillo et al. 2022; Vaterlaus et al. 2021), as well as career concerns and financial instability (Broner et al. 2022; Nuckols et al. 2023; Prattley et al. 2023).

The first Section of the paper will discuss the articulation of skill and situation. For that we go back to the concepts of "situational understanding" and "situational transfer", (Hinchliffe 2002; 2006; see also Elliott 1993) and we will confront them with recent theoretical developments which are emphasizing the situational (embodied, collaborative) aspects of the exercise of skills: the "interactive situation" (Varga & Gallagher 2022) and the "ecologies of skill". (Sutton & Bicknell 2022) The second Section analyses the emergent dynamic configurations of skills as they came into sight in an exploratory study investigating students' adjustment to the transition from face-to-face learning to online learning and back. In order to understand the skills and the environmental factors required for coping with the new learning environments during and after the COVID-19 pandemic, we used a qualitative method: the focus group. We gained a first-person view about the required skills to adapt to the major educational challenges. The third Section will evaluate the theoretical implications of the proposed conceptualization of skills and will offer a new conceptualization of skills and their structure.

## 1. Transferring skills from one learning environment to another

The discussion about embodied skills in learning (O'Loughlin 1995; Barsalou 2003; Black 2010; Briedis 2019; Macrine 2021) opened up a field of investigation which contributed to our understanding of learning as practice and suggested ways for the conceptualisation and design of learning environments. Based on previous theories, many of

the difficulties encountered by the students and teachers were studied they were immediately observable (anxiety, changes in levels of productivity, concentration, motivation, etc.). In the transitioning back from the online learning environment to the in-presence setting another series of difficulties have arisen. For a significant number of students, the re-integration of classrooms was difficult and they took into account to make a break in their studies, which would be in fact a form of abandonment. The difficulties are manifested now mostly as communicational and inter-relational.

There is a certain need for extended research, both conceptual and empirical, regarding the skills required for coping with the transitions. One can presume that, on this occasion, it will be unveiled a set of skills that have been usually taken for granted, like those related to communicating with peers and teachers, of synchronizing yourself with the others to create a learning group. From a theoretical point of view, one can identify the need to problematize the concept of (embodied) skill in close connection with the transitioning between different learning settings. A series of interrogations is arising: what was lost and/or gained in going there and back? are transitioning skills regular skills or could we speak of meta-skills? how can we make use of this new acquired know-how to improve learning and teaching? Most importantly: are there universal transferable skills, independent from context, or skills are what they are only in interaction with the specific contexts in which they are deployed?

In a time when there are significant changes in what is to be educated and divergent views on how to educate the others (and yourself), our proposal is to start the discussion about skills from a theory which takes fully in account the situation in which skills are deployed.

### 1.1. Situational understanding and situational transfer

Drawing from John Elliot's model of situational understanding (Elliot 1993), Hinchliffe (2002, 194) drafts an approach deemed to "cover any situation that requires an interpretative understanding allied to a series of actions—a

performance—orientated to producing a publicly defined outcome or process."

His exposition of the concept of skill involves the following aspects:

i) "The exercise of a skill is dependent on the interpretation of context by the practitioner."

ii) "In any complex situation it is likely that a range of possible skilled performances will meet criteria of adequacy: there can be no simple checklist approach to assessment."

iii) In the course of exercising a skilled activity, the theory emerges as interpretation.

iv) "A skilful performance is not (necessarily) a seamless execution of technique."

v) "Whilst a novice may need to learn a set of techniques, a practitioner will have certain capacities whereby those techniques can be deployed. It is these capacities which ultimately need developing". (Hinchliffe 2002, 194-5)

Hinchliffe's view has uncontested virtues in describing situated skills of a practitioner/performer: the focus on how they are effectively deployed and exercised, the taking into account of complex situations, the differentiation of skilled performance from mere execution or technique. However, the fact that he is seeking the clarification of a particular set of skills, i.e. those which are dependent of the interpretation of the context, induces a limitation regarding the possible generalisation of the concept of skill and possibly obfuscate some of its essential aspects. Pursuing this interpretation, we arrive not only to integrate theory into skill – which might be problematic, but not necessarily wrong – but also to acknowledge a kind of primacy of knowledge and to eventually make skills dependent of it. We may have been led, on this path, to accept the idea of meta-skills or metacompetencies, which cannot be otherwise than intellectual.

Hinchliffe prevents, in fact, such an over-intellectualistic interpretation by re-interpreting Bridges (1993) account of metacompetencies as an idea of a skill as just containing many different patterns of activity, which "range from IT skills (many of which are by definition transferable across contexts) to those skills that are more

context-dependent. (Hinchliffe 2002, 195) He even suggests that we might "think [- skills] in terms of arts (viz. the art of communication, the art of problem solving and negotiation, even the art of team-building)." Pursuing this line of thinking, he is led to see the deployment of skill as "a contrivance, a performance that is constructed […]. A skill may also be seen as 'artful' insofar as the accomplishment is a purposive endeavour […]. And finally, a skill may be seen as an art in the sense that it is the harnessing of a series of techniques and knowledge in order to achieve some demonstrable accomplishment." (195-196)

Since skills are evaluated primarily from the point of view of their context-dependence, the issue of skills' transfer has to be clarified. Hinchliffe distinguishes two kinds of transfer:

(i) the direct transfer, "where a technique is used in different contexts in the same way" (199-200), but having nonetheless a limited applicability for understanding skills, and

(ii) the situational transfer, where it is done using situational understanding. (200)

While very promising, this second type of transfer shows nevertheless some important limitations, namely, as Hinchliffe himself put it, it "presupposes an agent undertaking some intentional activity against a background that is understood in a certain way. In particular, the background is understood in terms of its similarity or dissimilarity to situations already encountered." (201, we underline)

Hinchliffe's strongly affirms that the learning of skills is situated within a context, since it depends structurally of the "situational understanding". Therefore, there are no "all-purpose generic skills". (Hinchliffe 2002, 188) This position has strong implications regarding skills seen in the context of their exercise, or, to put it shortly, skills in action. Taking up Ryle's distinction between habitual practice and intelligent practice, he underlines that practice is not "simply the mindless application of procedures. (194) On the contrary, the practitioner has "to be able to create and improvise, [we

underline – IC et al] and this depends on a contextual understanding allied with a willingness to experiment using a repertoire of understandings and techniques in order to find the best 'fit' for the problem to hand." (ibid.)

### 1.2. Skills, socio-cultural environment and learning context

The exercise of skills usually involves complex situations, in which social interaction usually plays an important role. As Gallagher, Sparaci & Varga (2022) noticed, "social interaction can be viewed as a form of embodied-situated performance." For that, cognitive and embodied motoric processes have to be fully integrated. The model of a meshed architecture, first introduced by Christensen et al. (2016) aimed to describe a vertical-hierarchical integration of higher-order (cognitive) and lower-order (automatic motoric) processes. Nevertheless, a horizontal integration of social-cultural components is strongly required in order to explain the skilled performance. Gallagher (2021, 357) elaborated a more complex, enhanced model of the meshed architecture, in which he gave a significant place to "a horizontal integration of environmental, social, and cultural-normative factors, consistent with 4E (embodied, embedded, extended, and enactive) approaches in cognitive science."

Socio-cultural environment and the learning context have to be acknowledged as integral parts of the process of education. Education is, from this standpoint, "a process of embodied cognitive assemblage of guided perception and action.". (Videla, Aguayo, and Veloz 2021)

A greater number of authors are expressing the need for "a broad enactive approach as a theory of embodied mind, a dynamic co-emergence theory, and a method of examining human experience" (Zorn, D) Recent research on human behaviour found way of taking into account the variety of ways in which individuals are individuals that are acting and thinking while tackling particular issues in unique settings. Sutton & Bicknell (2022, 4), for example, describe the skilled performance by taking into account its embodied nature, the forms of collaboration that are involved in it, the cognitive

aspects and is 'ecological' dimension. In sum, we may speak of "cognitive ecologies of skill" (ibid., 4). The framework is encompassing and allows the coalescing of a series of dimensions of the performance setting: cognitive, emotional, social, cultural, technological, and technical. (ibid.) Although it encompasses a vast and uneven domain of resources for the skilled performer, the concept brings forward the mutual dependence among the elements of an ecosystem (see Hutchins 2010, 706) The skilled performance can be seen ultimately as a form of flexible, embodied and collaborative intelligence. The series of activities and abilities that the agent condenses in a skill are in fact driven by external factors (physical, environmental, technological and social) and finally can be envisioned as "operations in interactive systems." (ibid. 5) The success of the skilled action is highly depended on the attention that is given to changes, the capacity of seeing new action opportunities and to rapidly shift the course of action. All these aspects form a coherent and dynamic ensemble of components able to describe the action of a skilled performer in a real-world context.

Under pressure, performers of all kind often expand their repertoires and bring about creative responses to facilitate the emergence of a new order or to repair the trouble. (ibid., 6) Changes of the habitual course of action are susceptible to bring out the structure of a skill. Therefore, a study of the ways in which skills are effectively used and eventually re-configured during dramatic changes of the learning environment would certainly has the potential to unveil their nature and structure.

## 2. Adapting to a changing learning environment: a qualitative study

The restrictions associated with the pandemic and the transition of higher education to the online environment were associated with a number of changes in the students' social life. On the one hand, the majority of students were forced to leave college campuses and return to the 'family nest', which meant a loss in independence and lower levels of life satisfaction (Dotson et al. 2022; Prattley et al. 2023; Preetz et

al. 2021; Reyes-Portillo et al. 2022). Online learning and social distancing, on the other hand, also accounted for this group's decrease, or even loss, of contact with peers (Farris et al. 2021; Halliburton et al. 2021) and contributed to increased levels of loneliness (Farris et al. 2021; Halliburton et al. 2021; Huang & Zhang 2022; Reyes-Portillo et al. 2022; Song et al. 2022). In terms of the academic life, the existing research highlights a number of stressors among students: lack of routine (Halliburton et al. 2021; Vuletić et al. 2021), unfavorable learning environment (Farris et al. 2021; Vuletić et al. 2021), worries about academic and professional future (Nuckols et al. 2023; Reyes-Portillo et al. 2022; Vuletić et al. 2021); but also reduced or even missing social contact with peers and teachers (Baltà-Salvador et al. 2021; Besser et al. 2022; Farris et al. 2021; Hopwood, 2023; Reyes-Portillo et al. 2022; Vuletić et al. 2021), and consequently decreased academic engagement (Farris et al. 2021; Hews et al. 2022; Ştefenel et al. 2022).

Since a clearer understanding of the tensions and opportunities in the transition from an environment to another is needed, we designed an exploratory study which had a twofold aim: collecting data regarding ways in which students adapted to a changing learning environment during the recent pandemic and investigating which abilities were helpful. The outcomes of the research point to some changes of the configurations of students' abilities and to allows us thematize regarding skills and their structure as they appear in their unfolding.

In order to understand the skills and the environmental factors required for coping with the new old normality during and after the COVID-19 pandemic, we used a qualitative method: the focus group (see Miles, Huberman, and Saldana 2013). Specifically, we aimed to have a first-person view about the required skills to cope with the major challenges of the pandemics: moving abruptly to online schooling, and then moving back to face-to-face schooling almost as abruptly.

Based on the analysis of the research on the students' perceptions of online education and the transitions from the COVID-19 pandemic, we extracted several main themes, which

were the basis for elaborating guideline questions for the focus group (see the Annex I). Following the development of the questions, participants were recruited for two focus groups, with the intention of having a maximum of 10 participants per focus group. The participants were recruited from the master studies of two faculties: the Faculty of History and Philosophy and the Faculty of Psychology and Educational Sciences. As inclusion criteria, the participants had to be part of the 2019-2022 undergraduate promotion, i.e. to have been students in the second semester of the first year of study in March 2020, so that they were at the university level for both transitions. It was also required to be Romanian speakers.

In total we had 18 participants, 10 in one group, 8 in the other, of which 12 were female.[1] Each participant was rewarded with a voucher to a bookstore. They all gave their informed consent for participation. The two focus groups lasted approximately 90 minutes each and the conversations were audio recorded. The first part of the discussion concerned the experiences of the participants in the transition from face-to-face to online education, and the second part the return from the online learning environment to the face-to-face one (see Annex II).‡

After transcribing the recordings from the focus groups, we reached the first step of the content analysis, the thematic analysis of the focus groups. In the first phase, we used the descriptive coding, which were then checked and recoded if needed.

In what it follows, the analysis of the content will be directed towards the outcomes corresponding to the category "abilities" from the focus group guide, namely to the question "what abilities were helpful in adapting to the change?" (see Annex 1 Focus group guide). The moderator asked this question separately from the transition from face-to-face to online learning and from online to a hybrid form of learning.

‡ We publish only the research results. For the consultation of research materials, please contact the authors (see emails at the end of this article). They are required to show the materials for a year, no longer. [The editors of *Meta: Research*].

Synthetically, we can say that a variety of skills helped students to cope and readjust during the two transitions. Organisational skills such as planning, time management and information seeking were indicated as being very useful in this context as well. Likewise, self-efficacy, achievement and determination (the desire to finish university), helped students, again in this situation, to be more ambitious and engage in school and extracurricular activities for self-development. Social skills also played an important role, namely "the ability to make friends" (FG2, P1)[2] as one participant stated. At the same time, resilience was also noted as a skill that helped students to readjust, the idea of "taking the situation as it is" (FG2, P6).

Regarding skills, the enhanced thematic analysis of the transcripts shows the following:

- there is large variety of resources that the participants are accessing. The most frequent resources that are mentioned by the participants in the two focus groups are emotions and feelings. Obviously, at least a taxonomy is needed, if not a more elaborate theory of the ways in which they are deployed and re-deployed.

- many participants reported negative emotions or psychological states, like "depression" (P2, FG2), "I can't take it anymore", "I needed to have control over something" (P7, FG2), "I was sitting in the house like a vegetable" (P5, FG2), "I was still insecure", "it was much harder for me to do anything" (P2, FG2), "awful experience" (P3, FG2).

- these expressions have a descriptive value, giving us a valuable insight about the psychological impact of the isolation and other imposed norms on the participants. Nevertheless, surprisingly they have been seen as "abilities", but as affordances as well. One of the participants even asked, jokingly, "is depression an ability?". Anyway, it is evident that emotional responses played a major role in addressing the new situation. More generally, an active concern with the self and its affective states comes into discussion very rapidly and is collectively identified (by agreement to other participants to focus group) as an outstanding factor in dealing with the stressful situation. One of the participants even used the

expression "focus on myself" (FG2, P6), another declared that "I have to have control over the situation" (FG1, P2), while another one declares that "I already knew how to take care of myself" (FG1, P1). Therefore, we may say that, besides the fact that they "coloured" the situation in which the individual suddenly found itself, emotional resources had been operative, i. e. have been, directly or indirectly, the primer of a specific (and adapted) type of engagement with itself, which eventually mediated the engagement with the entire environment.

- while the majority participants have been inclined to put in forefront the emotional response, one of the participants mentioned the "abilities of planning" (P2, FG2). Two participants in FG1 mentioned the felt need at a certain moment of "being organised" (FG1, P5) and of not wanting "to waste your time there" (FG1, P8)

However, these "abilities" had as consequence the increasing of social activities: "I started planning outings in Cluj with several people". (FG2, P2,) This is, in our view, a case when a particular type of ability (in this case, technical) had been used to stimulate socialization. That is another major strategy, that can be dubbed as "focus on social relationships".

- the "focus on yourself" was part of the overall response that the actant put in act in this period, but it was not the only one. It seems rather to be the first response, a kind of rapid adaptation. More elaborate responses followed, as the participants accessed or "discovered" (FG2, P2) other type of resources, like those mentioned earlier. Cognitive abilities are also mentioned by many participants. One participant declared that she or he "noticed logical thinking in some colleagues, very well applied" (FG1, P9), while another one made reference to "how to argue some answers" (FG1, P6). These abilities have been used at the personal level.

- there is an active dimension, a doing, in uses of emotional and cognitive resources, as we showed. This dimension is even more distinguishable when the participants are discussing the role of bodily resources. Interestingly, a reference to its own body comes in connexion with normative aspects, like the restrict the use of public space: "as much as

my body wanted me to vegetate in bed" (FG2, P7). Another participant indicates, as response to the new normative environment, the gardening (and doing sport "again" (FG2, P5), while another one just "tried to do sport" and deplored the fact that "when the pandemic started, we went to the gym, but after that I couldn't do anything at home" (P2, FG2).

- another form of doing was related to accessing and deploying cultural resources. "Novelty seeking and inclination to do or pursue creative things" (P7, FG2) was the first answer given in FG2. Painting came twice in discussion (P7 and P2 in FG2) and it was associated more with a practical activity, with the need of doing something. Therefore, we may say that creative activities received an intense emotional aspect and they were a component of the reaction to restrictions. The sustained involvement in practical and cultural activities seemed to be a form of resistance, like getting the driver licence (FG2, P3).

- later on, when students were in the second year and get to be more familiar with the colleagues, the social abilities have been activated, like getting out in the city with the colleagues (FG2, P2).

## 3. Skills in action

Based on our analysis, we can draw the outlines of a conceptualisation of skills:

1. Skills are heavily depending on the environmental factors, such as physical space, interactions, bodily and psychological states. For example, the transition to online was dominated by the reaction to the new situation, characterized by restriction of the use of public space and the confinement to a limited physical space

2. There are certain necessary stages of the adaptation. The primary reaction was of the type "focus on myself", followed or doubled by the rediscovery the others.

3. Deploying a variety of resources was pivotal for the shift of the type of engagement (moving from negative emotions and lack of activity to engaging the others and performing valuable activities). Throughout the social

activities the environment has been re-designed, made more favorable (open) to actions.

4. Non-educational aspects seemed to prevail. The learning environment was depending on other environments, which have been adjusted in order to make room for learning activities.

5. The transitions required different abilities and competencies. Also, they were distinct, although that people thought that it will be a coming back to normality.

6. Skills are related to the character of the situation, which are primarily assed affectively (emotionally). Therefore, the situation might be interpreted by the agents in divergent ways. That was particularly noticeable in the transition from online to face to face.

7. Skills are differently mobilized by the affective „colorization"

8. The dimensions in which the skills are emerging and are configurated are the following: (a) operative resource's: emotional (with positive or negative valence), social, cultural, technological (involving the use of equipment), technical (a kind of dexterity); (b) the background or the setting on which they are operating: normative (again, with positive or negative valence), physical, and social; c) an movement of scaling between personal (self- care in our case) and inter-personal (intersubjective).

9. Skills are requiring a sense of agency (or doing), authorship (or control and responsibility), and the feeling of real presence (being here: "Now I am really here")

Based on the data and the conclusions drawn from the exploratory study (see supra), we can say that contexts in which skills are deployed are as vital in their deployment as mastering the skills. In other words, we can assume that skills are constructed dynamically and also that adaptation is always dependent on context. In our data, transitioning form offline to online and back impacted skill enactment because of three aspects/types of contexts: physical, social, and academic.

Regarding the physical context, one can see in the responses of both focus groups that moving from face to face to online education changed the way they worked in group, paid

attention to the courses and seminars, and even learned the new contents. At first, all these skills were diminishing, and it is only working in groups that in some cases got better with prolonged online education. In this latter case, the optimization of working online in groups also depended on individual characteristics. Coming back to offline education all these changed back to better performance as the physical situation of being together in school influenced the way skills were enacted (e.g., one is more prone to pay attention if the teacher in present that when you can be just a "square" in an online meeting).

With regard to the social context, the huge changes brought by the interdiction to go out in the first months of the pandemics challenged the need for interactions of the students and left social skills unused. Coming back to offline education sparked social connections and the used of social skills both for academic purposes and for personal life.

Lastly, the academic or the learning context, which can be envisaged to rest upon the previous ones, left the subjects feeling that they were losing precious content while online, but regaining it when offline. In other words, even if it was the same participants with the same skills, going back home did not help them deploy learning skills, while coming back to school made them learn better again. In this learning context, teachers behaved differently as well, and as one participant has put it, we can say that even persons are situated: "the professor is another person while offline"! Student themselves felt as different persons in the two contexts, online and offline, and this has impacted their skills.

Emotions during the transitions also altered skills. The surprising fact in most of the responses was that of going from joy to sadness when adjusting from face to face to online, and from sadness to joy when adjusting back! These emotional dynamics might have affected the employment of skills: while at first happy so that they were prone for action, in a few weeks they became less prone to act which ultimately led to the idea that they were left broke (e.g., their attention and memory not working like before anymore). This sadness also contributed to their feeling of not wanting to come back to face

to face and after that to how awkward everything felt in the beginning when back in physical contact. However, these impressions vanished as they realized how different in a good way face to face learning was in the end, they have the feeling they are ready to face new potential crises in their lives.

## 4. Conclusions

### 4.1. Regarding what skills are

Hinchliffe is right when he insists that skills are deployed through action and "we are obliged to investigate the dynamics of agency in situations of change […]" (201). However, taken seriously, this task has in our view greater implications that that of opposing "to the mere mechanical transfer of procedures and practices" (Ibid.). We have now the conceptual (and practical) means to address much more complex and opaquer that those taken into account by Hinchliffe. Adding to his views an approach based on social interaction of embodied agents is, in our view, susceptible to bring even more light in the structure and dynamic of skill(s) as deployed in certain situations.

From the standpoint of their exercise, a skill is connected and has to be understood through the agent's capacity "to create and recreate performance in the light of one's understanding and to test that understanding itself in the light of response to a performance." (194)

Nevertheless, Hinchliffe's approach does not take into account the situations when the skill is strongly put to test and reveals its internal structure.

Also, Hinchliffe's approach is designed "to cover any situation that requires an interpretative understanding allied to a series of actions—a performance—orientated to producing a publicly defined outcome or process." (194) The fact that the performance is seen as a series of multiple actions helps us to understand that skills too are complex structures. Moreover, stating that the goal of the performance is a publicly define outcome opens the approach towards the possibility of joint actions, of collective contributions. We cannot speak now only of an individual agent, but of a plurality of agents, operating

sometimes individually, sometimes collectively. The outcome of their performance is offered to public evaluation, use and reuse and simultaneously takes advantage of these public resources.

So, one side, the understanding of skills has to be broadened in a way that, on one side takes into account the social and cultural dynamics in which skills are operating and, on the other side, it will include an internal dynamic of skills. These internal dynamics is not only detectable at the level of the individual agent, but also at the level of collective action. From this standpoint, skills are enacting a world, more precisely a world for each one and for virtually all of us. They belong to a system of actions which do not take the existing environment as such; they are complexifying the environment of the agents and transform it in a plurality of interpenetrated worlds, which are deployed on several levels (physical, cultural, social, normative).

In the light of recent literature on skills (enactivist and 'ecological') and of the insights gained in the exploratory study, we may adjust Hinchliffe's understanding of skills in the sense that the iinterpretation of context by the practitioner is indeed of highest importance and it cannot be separated from the performance as such. Nevertheless, it should not be placed in a prevalent role, as that unique factor of which the exercise of skill is dependent; it is rather one of many resources of the agent. Also, the interpretation is still a very general term. The exploratory study showed that the already available and newly created resources, taken individually, but also collectively at a certain moment, are enriching themselves gradually and reciprocally. Affective resources are entering the scene in the beginning, but they are re- interpretated and are leaving place for a wide palette of assets, plans and schemes. All the resources are developing throughout the exchange with the others and the ad-hoc experimentation and the feedback from the environing world.

### 4.2. Regarding what skills are

As David Bridges (1993, 51) remarked (and Hinchliffe seems to agree), an approach which includes an ability to

evaluate the settings and an ability to modify one's repertoire of competencies "takes us some way beyond what many have understood as skills." (Hinchliffe 2002, 195). It is not only that the understanding of skills does not require some "metacompetencies", but that they are part (an essential part, in fact) of a much larger and structured "conversation". The term is used occasionally and metaphorically, when Hinchliffe insists that "a skilful performance […] involves knowing-in-action, a 'reflective conversation with a unique and uncertain situation'" (195).[3] While deploying some skills in addressing a certain problem in a particular situation, the agent engages herself in a larger multi-modal conversation with her fellows.[4] Therefore, the perspective of conversational analysis is susceptible to unveil the internal articulations of the skill.

The Goodwinian approach to social interaction abandoned the idea of a generic "action" in favour of understanding action in its entire complexity and fullness. It took into account "affective and epistemic stance, semiotic and material properties, management of attention, embodied behaviour and participation (Deppermann 2018; *cf*. Goodwin 2000). Related to local actions, they are "objects" that can be described as relatively autonomous, i.e. not as the implementation of abstract types of actions or as the particularisation of some abstract knowledge. Therefore, skills are belonging the that class of actions which includes responsive uptake and variation as structural moments. Skills' analytic should be then grounded on "sequential actions" (Heritage 1984) and will be both "context-shaped" and "context-renewing" (see Deppermann 2018, 68). Their structure seems to be similar to that of the objects and process studied by conversational analysis (CA)

While "sentences emerge with conversation […] as the products of a process of interaction between speaker and hearer and that they mutually construct the turn at talk," (Goodwin 1979, 97-98) we may say that skills are emerging in interaction, more precisely in the interaction of the agent[5] simultaneously with materials, meanings, normativity and other agents' expectations and contributions.

The structure of skills can be made explicit if we follow their build up from simple abilities and their integration into larger structures. Calculating could be considerate an ability, while solving a problem of arithmetic is a skill. Several abilities are involved and they are intervening in a certain order. Moreover, in order to be a skill, they have to fuse into a single continuous action and form a distinct capacity. Fluency is a key trait of a skill, as well as the fact that they presuppose and incorporate a segment of learning. Calculating the dimensions of a wall and erecting it is an intelligent performance. Here you have to cooperate with others, observe and evaluate the terrain, etc. The skill of calculating is the core, but it is surrounded by other activities. However, their succession is not strict and the order is looser.

To build a house is a cooperative intelligent action; many skills are involved in there, but also many other activities, such as planning, negotiating with the constructor, getting authorization from the mayor's office, etc. In this build up, the agent relates to what you have already acquired as material, psychological, cognitive, cultural, and normative resources. One is skilful when she can easily cope both with scripted and unscripted interactions and move with ease between them. This aspect is the key for a skilled performance, not necessarily the repetition of learned sequences of behaviour. If one repeats an action, as much as it is loaded with theory and elaborated in the beginning, she is trained, but she is unable to fully take into account the context and adapt to the environment.

**NOTES**

[1] The Scientific Council of the Babeş-Bolyai University of Cluj Napoca granted research ethics approval for the project "Embodied learning in shifting mediatized academic environments: transitioning and interactive skills in education" under the reference number: 360/04.04.2024.

[2] FG indicates the focus group (1 or 2), while P means participant. We allocated randomly a number to each participant.

[3] Citing Schön (1983. 130).

[4] In some cases, also with no-human animals.

[5] There are also group skills, but for the sake of intelligibility we let this topic aside.

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# Towards a Postcritical Hermeneutics: Reconsidering Tradition and Critique in Gadamer

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**Abstract**

Contemporary scholarship in the humanities increasingly adopts a hermeneutics of suspicion to uncover and criticize coercive ideologies in the European cultural tradition. However, there is a growing recognition that the pervasiveness of such a critical spirit overshadows alternative attitudes that humanities scholars can, and do, adopt towards their objects of study. In this article, I leverage these developments to reconsider the relationship between tradition and critique in Gadamer and post-Gadamerian scholarship. Specifically, I argue that Gadamer's hermeneutic assessment of tradition should be understood not as uncritical, nor as critical by default, but as "postcritical." This postcritical stance allows for the exposure and dissolution of dogmatic forces in the process of understanding, while remaining cautious of the absolutization of such a suspicious gesture. I conclude by outlining some of the basic elements of a postcritical hermeneutics, which includes ideology critique as a possibility without excluding other, more affirmative possibilities.

**Keywords:** hermeneutics, critique, tradition, Gadamer, postcritique, suspicion

## Introduction

Among the vital tasks of the human sciences is the study of tradition in its various forms, including philosophical, literary, and poetic texts, works of art, and other cultural heritages. However, the precise nature of the encounter between human scientists and traditionary artifacts remains a subject of debate. Should this relationship be conceptualized in terms of participation and appropriation, acknowledging the power and enduring significance of tradition, as Hans-Georg Gadamer famously argued? Or should it be defined by a critical

and suspicious stance aimed at liberating oneself from coercive ideologies, as Jürgen Habermas contended? Habermas's critique of the Gadamerian assessment of tradition seems to leave the human scientist little choice: one is either a critical scholar or an uncritical, naïve one. But is it not possible to envision a third way of relating to tradition, one where ideology critique may in some cases be a component of the human scientist's interpretive work, but not necessarily in all cases? It is against this backdrop that the argument of this article unfolds.

At first glance, it might seem unhelpful or uninspired to revive the classical debate between hermeneutics and ideology critique, as sparked by Habermas and Gadamer in the late 1960s. However, the concerns raised by both philosophers have lost none of their relevance today. On the one hand, there is a clear need to critically examine the Western cultural tradition, especially as its entanglement with sexist, racist, and colonialist ideologies becomes increasingly evident. Examples include misogynistic remarks, gendered language, and assertions of European racial superiority and imperial dominance in the works of canonical thinkers such as Aristotle, Kant, and Hegel (for concrete examples, see, e.g., Said 1994; Spivak 1999; Bernasconi 2003). On the other hand, there is a growing recognition that the pervasiveness of a critical spirit obscures various viable alternative attitudes that humanities scholars can, and do, adopt regarding their objects of study. Notably, this latter movement—often referred to as "postcritique"—is not only articulated with terms derived from hermeneutic philosophy but also presents Gadamer's hermeneutics as an important counterweight to suspicion and critique. Yet, this suggestion remains underdeveloped. This is regrettable, as I will argue, because postcritical scholarship offers a fresh perspective from which the contemporary relevance of (aspects of) Gadamer's hermeneutics can be reappreciated.

In this article, I leverage these developments to reconsider the relationship between tradition and critique in Gadamer and post-Gadamerian scholarship. I do so along the following lines of inquiry. First, I revisit one of the key

accusations made by Habermas in his intellectual exchange with Gadamer and highlight its reiteration in the context of feminist engagements with Gadamer's hermeneutics. This accusation, put briefly, is that Gadamer absolutizes the power of tradition, leaving no room for the use of reason to criticize dogmatic forces operative within that tradition. Second, I describe the rise of critical or suspicious ways of interpretation in the human sciences and how they have come under siege since the turn of the century, creating momentum for reconsidering Gadamer's position on tradition and critique. This position is examined in the third section, where I argue that Gadamer's hermeneutics should be understood not as uncritical, nor as critical by default, but as postcritical. Gadamer's project, I submit, amounts neither to the revival of a premodern obedience to tradition, nor to a critical emancipation from it, but can be seen as an attempt to steer a course between the Scylla of absolutized tradition and the Charybdis of absolutized suspicion. In my concluding remarks, I draw on this fresh reading of Gadamer to outline some of the basic elements of a postcritical hermeneutics, which includes ideology critique as a possibility without excluding other, more affirmative possibilities.

## 1. The Scylla of absolutized tradition: ideology critique against hermeneutics

To recall what is at stake in the encounter between Gadamer's hermeneutics and Habermas's ideology critique, we might juxtapose for a moment the concepts of 'tradition' and 'reason'. In *Truth and Method,* Gadamer famously takes issue with the distinctively modern project of subjecting all prejudices inherited from authority and tradition to the methodological and critical use of reason. The 'discrediting of prejudices' by Descartes' radical doubt and Kant's enlightenment thought, Gadamer argued, must be corrected by a 'rehabilitation of authority and tradition', not only because authority and tradition may convey legitimate prejudices worth acknowledging and appropriating, but also because they shape the ideological background from which the hermeneutical use of reason (i.e. understanding) necessarily operates (Gadamer

2013, 284-96). To underscore the latter point, Gadamer revives the Romantic insight that "the authority of what has been handed down to us —and not just what is clearly grounded— always has power over our attitudes and behavior" (Gadamer 2013, 292). Gadamer's hermeneutics thus asserts the power of tradition over and against the power of reflection to attain complete awareness of itself and, ultimately, discard all inherited prejudices.

This provisional sketch of Gadamer's assessment of tradition allows us to understand one of Habermas's central accusations at the address of Gadamer's hermeneutics. Stated succinctly, Habermas's concern is that Gadamer absolutizes the power of tradition, thereby precluding the use of reason to criticize coercive economic and political forces entrenched within that tradition. In his 1967 review of *Truth and Method*, Habermas puts his objection as follows:

Gadamer's prejudice for the rights of prejudices certified by tradition denies the power of reflection. The latter proves itself, however, in being able to reject the claim of tradition. Reflection dissolves substantiality because it not only confirms, but also breaks up, dogmatic forces. (Habermas 1990a, 237).

According to Habermas, reflection can and should transcend tradition in order to contest the social and economic power relations legitimated by it. It is in this respect, Habermas contends, that hermeneutics falls short: "The right of reflection demands that the hermeneutic approach restricts itself. It calls for a reference system that goes beyond the framework of tradition as such; only then can tradition also be criticized" (Habermas 1990a, 238). As long as hermeneutics fails to provide such a reference system and thus the emancipatory potential to liberate individuals from dogmatic constraints, Habermas suggests, it needs to be supplemented by the critique of ideology.

A brief look at Ricoeur's seminal reconstruction of the Habermas-Gadamer debate provides a fruitful lens to elucidate and refine Habermas's concern. Ricoeur's essay, published in 1973, is significant for several reasons—notably as the first attempt the reconcile hermeneutics and ideology critique (or at least draw them closer together) in the form of a "critical

hermeneutics."[1] However, for the present discussion, Ricoeur's terminological innovation is most important. Similar to this article's approach, Ricoeur adopts "the assessment of tradition" as the vantage point from which to understand the conflict between the philosophies of Gadamer and Habermas. While hermeneutics offers us a "positive assessment" of tradition, Ricoeur posits that the critique of ideology adopts a "suspicious approach" (Ricoeur 1990, 298-9). Ricoeur's use of the term 'suspicion' in this context is noteworthy, as it suggests that the critique of ideology can be redefined within his influential notion of a "hermeneutics of suspicion." To recall, in his 1965 essay on Freud, Ricoeur distinguished between two interpretive styles or "schools": interpretation as recollection of meaning, sometimes associated with Gadamer (though Ricoeur is concerned with the phenomenology of religion), and interpretation as exercise of suspicion (Ricoeur 1970, 32). Notably, Ricoeur presented Marx, Nietzsche, and Freud as representatives of the latter school, aiming to uncover hidden forces behind the reality presented by consciousness. By invoking this notion of suspicious interpretation in his later reflections on the Habermas-Gadamer debate, Ricoeur appears to suggest that Habermas should be seen as a contemporary proponent of the school of suspicion, given his critical stance towards tradition. In this light, one could redescribe Habermas's concern by asserting that Gadamer's purported hermeneutics of gullibility needs to turn into a hermeneutics of suspicion—or "depth hermeneutics" (Habermas 1990b, 270)[2]—to unearth the traces of hidden ideologies within authoritative discourses and traditionary texts.

The idea that Gadamer's hermeneutics fails to provide a basis for ideology critique has had a particularly productive 'history of effect', or *Wirkungsgeschichte*. In the remainder of this section, I will explore the—often implicit—reiteration of Habermas's accusation in the context of feminist engagements with Gadamer's hermeneutics. It is unsurprising that the problem of critical impotence resurfaces precisely here, given that a primary objective of feminist scholarship is to uncover and challenge coercive gender ideologies and biases present in the works of canonical philosophers (Witt 2006), including

Gadamer himself. While feminists have identified many productive resources in the hermeneutic philosophy of Gadamer, his assessment of tradition remains a notorious stumbling block (Code 2003; Homan 2022). A key concern regarding Gadamer's account is, once again or still, that the alleged absolutization of tradition's power renders a more critical or suspicious approach impossible. Yet while Habermas's critique can be understood as a critical response to Gadamer's rehabilitation of prejudices, the feminist critique gains significance when viewed in light of Gadamer's subsequent discussion of the concept of the classical.

In *Truth and Method*, Gadamer's reevaluation of authority and tradition is illustrated through his discussion of 'the example of the classical,' where he contests historicism by asserting that the notion of the classical (as in the canon of classical authors and texts) has not only a descriptive, but also a normative sense. Gadamer describes this normative dimension in terms of "preservation" (*Bewahrung*) and "proving itself (to be true)" (*Bewährung*): the classical does not merely represent the cultural highlights of a particular period, for instance; it is rather that which maintains its relevance for contemporary concerns and questions. It is in this sense that Gadamer speaks of the "continuing validity of the classical" and "the binding power of the validity that is preserved and handed down" (Gadamer 2013, 296-302). Feminist critics, however, have often interpreted such passages as an old fashioned defense of the so called 'great texts' of the Western canon, corroborating the conservatism of Gadamer's account of tradition. Against such a view, feminists emphasize the formative role of power—theorized by figures like Habermas and Foucault but allegedly neglected by Gadamer—in determining what constitutes validity or truth in the first place. Like Habermas, feminist critics argue that reflection must transcend tradition, particularly in the form of the classical canon, to investigate the gendered power dynamics that have shaped it into a collection of predominantly of white, European, heterosexual males (Jantzen 2003, 291; Vasterling 2003, 168).

When one acknowledges that tradition persists not only due to its intellectual or aesthetic merit but also because of

gender-biased social power dynamics, a different attitude towards tradition becomes imperative. While a patriarchal tradition may very well be understood or appropriated in a Gadamerian framework, feminists conclude, it must also be challenged and ultimately transformed. Once again, the right of reflection is invoked to demand that the hermeneutic approach restricts itself, as "Gadamerian hermeneutics alone cannot perform the critique of ideology that feminist theory rightly demands" (Pappas and Cowling 2003, 218).[3] For such an ideology-critical project, Gadamer's "hermeneutic of generosity" proves inadequate and requires supplementation by a "hermeneutic of suspicion" in the Ricoeurian sense (Jantzen 2003, 289-90; Gjesdal 2017, 351). This suspicious hermeneutics is tasked with the regulative ideal of liberating oneself and others from coercive ideologies such as patriarchy, by criticizing rather than affirming the privileged status of tradition's classical texts. Needless to say, the feminist project and its allied movements extend well beyond the critique of gender ideologies; over the past decades, a hermeneutic of suspicion has been applied to uncover and criticize a wide array of dogmatic forces pervasive within the European cultural canon, from sexist and racist to colonial and imperialist ideologies (see, e.g., Said 1994; Bernasconi 2003; Spivak 1999). From this perspective, Gadamer's emphasis on the power and validity of what has been handed down to us appears as an assessment of tradition that is naïve, overly trusting, or at the very least, insufficiently critical. Schuback (2021, 166) captures this sentiment well in a recent article: "hermeneutics is considered a reactionary way of thinking because it misses the *critical* force of thought, its capacity to break with tradition, to interrupt a heritage and a legacy." Yet as important as "a *critical thinking attention* to the today" may be, it is equally important to interrogate the limits of today's critical thinking attention—which is what I aim to do in the next section.[4]

## 2. The Charybdis of absolutized suspicion: postcritique against ideology critique

Already in 1967, Gadamer published a response addressing Habermas's accusation that hermeneutics fails to

provide a foundation for ideology critique due to its alleged absolutization of the power of tradition. In this rejoinder—to which I return in the third section—Gadamer, in turn, cautions against absolutizing the critical power of reason. Admittedly, Gadamer remarks, there may be a need for hermeneutic consciousness to "see through prejudices or unmask pretenses which disguise the truth," but, he rhetorically adds, "does that mean that we understand only when we see through some subterfuge and expose false presumption?" (Gadamer 2002, 284-5).[5] Indeed, would the universalization of an ethos of suspicion in the human sciences not eclipse the viability of alternative and equally essential attitudes one can adopt vis-a-vis tradition? Against the backdrop of the current reevaluation of critique as the default attitude or method in the humanities—which I will elaborate upon in this section—Gadamer's apprehension regarding the conflation of hermeneutical reflection with ideological critique emerges as prescient.

A few years before Gadamer's rejoinder appeared, Susan Sontag had already subjected the hermeneutics of suspicion itself to critical scrutiny. In one her renowned essays on the philosophy of art, Sontag describes what she perceives as the dominant theory of interpretation and understanding of her time. "Directed to art," she writes, "interpretation means plucking a set of elements […] from the whole work. The task of interpretation is virtually one of translation. The interpreter says, Look, don't you see that X is really—or really means—A?" (Sontag 1966, 5).[6] This description evokes Ricoeur's masters of suspicion, who posit that the reality presented by consciousness is 'really' a product of unconscious drives (Freud), the will to power (Nietzsche), or relations of production (Marx). Yet it also resonates with the critical theorist who sees tradition as a vehicle for oppressive ideologies and social power. Sontag notes that this form of interpretation still preserves and transmits tradition, but only by unearthing a "latent content" beneath its "manifest content": "The modern style of interpretation excavates," she asserts, "and as it excavates, destroys; it digs "behind" the text, to find a sub-text which is the true one" (Sontag 1966, 6).[7] As we will see, Sontag may be one of the first,

but is definitely not the last to express concerns about the hegemony of such a suspicious hermeneutics.

In the decades following Sontag's essay, the hegemony of a hermeneutics centered on suspicion and exposure appears to have endured largely unchanged. Literary scholar Eve K. Sedgwick, writing in the 1990s, observes that suspicious theories and practices of interpretation have become ubiquitous, overshadowing many alternatives, which are now dismissed as "naïve, pious, or complaisant" (Sedgwick 2003, 125-6). Similarly, according to Bruno Latour, writing in the early 2000s, the humanities have been engulfed by a "critical spirit" that is characterized by an "excessive *distrust*" of all forms of authority. Latour (2004) provocatively suggests that such a suspicious attitude may not only have "run out of steam" in the face of present-day intellectual and societal challenges but also bears unsettling resemblance to the thought patterns of conspiracy theorists. The absolutization of suspicion against which Gadamer had cautioned thus seems to have materialized, with understanding increasingly reduced to the unmasking of hidden ideologies, thereby marginalizing or altogether discarding alternative ways of relating to authority and tradition.

However, according to these scholars, the problem with ideology critique extends beyond its tendency to overshadow or devalue alternative modes of engagement. A suspicious hermeneutics is also inherently problematic, they argue, as it relies on a form of epistemic inequality between the critic and their audience. Once again, this problem was already signaled by Gadamer, though in passing, in his response to Habermas. Despite the merits of the critique of ideology, Gadamer remarks, it must be careful of the peril of "claiming for oneself the correct insight on the basis of the delusion of the other" (Gadamer 1990, 293). The suspicious interpreter, purporting to possess a unique ability to 'see through prejudices' and 'unmask pretenses which disguise the truth', tends to portray those who affirm the validity of tradition as gullible, complicit, or even 'delusional'. However, according to Sedgwick, this suspicious gesture is itself delusion or paranoia in optima forma. "The paranoid trust in exposure seemingly depends," she remarks,

"on an infinite reservoir of naïveté in those who make up the audience for these unveilings" (Sedgwick 2003, 141). This point is endorsed by Latour, who denounces what he terms the "critical trick" of reducing objects of belief to invisible but omnipotent forces (such as social domination, gender, or race) that purportedly shape them. Latour argues that this trick rests on a fundamental epistemic inequality, with the critic assuming the role of the one who exposes and explains, while discrediting and humiliating the "naïve believer" who fail to recognize that their cherished object is, in Sontag's words, 'really' something else (Latour 2004, 237ff). Against the backdrop of these critical assessments of ideology critique, there emerges a call for a different and more respectful way of relating to one's objects of study.

Today, these initial efforts to reassess critique are further developed under the broader banner of "postcritique." Coined by literary scholar Rita Felski—though already employed by Ricoeur—"postcritique" denotes the endeavor to decentralize the hermeneutics of suspicion, opening up avenues for exploring alternative theories and practices of interpretation (Felski 2015; Anker and Felski 2017).[8] Felski elucidates this concept in a recent article reflecting on the reception of her postcritical intervention:

Rather than negating or rebutting critique, I sought to decenter it, presenting it as one option among others rather than the sine qua non of rigorous or radical thought. And here "postcritique" sought to break the hold of a coercive binary by offering an alternative to the pseudo-choice of being critical or uncritical (who would ever want to be the latter?). (Felski 2023, 330)

Interestingly, within this context of decentralizing critique, Gadamer's hermeneutics emerges as a prime example of an alternative, postcritical theory of interpretation, although this suggestion is never developed in any detail. For instance, in her book *The Limits of Critique*, Felski includes Gadamer's hermeneutics among the readily available alternatives for an ethos of critique. "Should we resuscitate the notion of a hermeneutics of trust associated with Ricoeur and Gadamer?" she ponders (Felski 2015, 173).[9] However, Felski opts to

maintain a broader focus under the rubric of "postcritical reading," leaving this question largely rhetorical.

In her reflective article, Felski offers a more affirmative assessment of Gadamer's hermeneutics, expressing her indebtedness to both German critical theory and philosophical hermeneutics. She acknowledges that "even though Habermas remains firmly committed to critique, he kickstarted a process of questioning its elitist and paternalistic dimensions" in line with the concerns raised by Sedwick and Latour. Regarding philosophical hermeneutics, Felski notes that "Gadamer's work offers a vital counterweight to critique in its emphasis on understanding and receptivity: insisting on the importance of allowing oneself to be challenged and changed by the words of others" (Felski 2023, 331).[10] This perspective stands in stark contrast to the evaluation of Gadamer's hermeneutics by the critical theorists discussed earlier. Rather than being perceived as *uncritical*, Gadamer's position is viewed as *postcritical*, challenging the hegemony of suspicion and critique. However, while Felski's observation is significant, it remains underdeveloped. This is unfortunate because, as I will argue in the remainder of this article, the exploration and articulation of a postcritical reading of Gadamer's hermeneutics offers a fresh perspective from which the contemporary relevance of (aspects of) Gadamer's hermeneutics can be reappreciated.

## 3. Steering between Scylla and Charybdis: hermeneutics as postcritique

When considered together, the preceding sections may seem to lead to an impasse: while critical theorists rightly voice concerns about limiting the power of reason to the interpretive appropriation of tradition, postcritical scholars rightly worry about conflating interpretation and understanding with a critique of ideology. Yet, is there not a path between the Scylla of absolutized tradition and the Charybdis of absolutized suspicion? In this section, I will leverage the current reevaluation of critique to reconsider Gadamer's hermeneutics and its relationship to critique. In what follows, I aim to demonstrate that Gadamer's hermeneutics should neither be seen as uncritical nor as critical by default, but rather as

postcritical, in that it allows for the exposure and dissolution of dogmatic forces in the process of understanding, while remaining cautious of the absolutization of such a suspicious gesture.

To recall, Habermas contended that Gadamer's stance on tradition and authority limited the power of reflection to merely affirming prejudices derived from these sources. Although the rejection of tradition's validity claims is obviously not Gadamer's primary focus in *Truth and Method*, neither is it their uncritical acceptance. From Gadamer's viewpoint, Habermas's accusation merely underscores what Gadamer saw as the distorted view of authority in Enlightenment thought. Gadamer argues that when 'authority' is equated with "blind obedience," it becomes indeed difficult to reconcile with the exercise of one's reflective powers. Yet, according to Gadamer, 'authority' does not entail unconditional acceptance of purported truths. Rather, authority is that which can "be discovered to be true," and thus involves a self-conscious process of evaluation and validation. Affirmation of another person's claims about a subject matter can occur when one willingly recognizes the other party's knowledge or expertise, but even this acknowledgment arises from an independent choice (Gadamer 2013, 291-2). In fact, in later essays such as "The Limitations of the Expert" (1992a) and "Culture and Media" (1992b), Gadamer explicitly underscores the importance of individual and independent judgment as a counter to, respectively, the uncritical acceptance of expert knowledge and conformism to social and economic structures.[11] Similarly, Gadamer posits that thinking for oneself should guide one's approach to the authority of tradition. Tradition can and should be preserved and transmitted, but this necessitates a conscious, affirmative choice by the interpreter or interpretive community. As Gadamer famously states: "Tradition is not simply a permanent precondition; rather, we produce it ourselves inasmuch as we understand, participate in the evolution of tradition, and hence further determine it ourselves" (Gadamer 2013, 305).

While Gadamer thus emphasizes that the validity of tradition depends on its conscious acknowledgement, he does

not explore the possibility of the absence of such acknowledgement at this point. It is not until the end of his discussion of 'the hermeneutic significance of temporal distance' that Gadamer confronts the "the question of critique in hermeneutics," which he phrases as: "how to distinguish the true prejudices, by which we *understand*, from the *false* ones, by which we *misunderstand*" (Gadamer 2013, 309)? Indeed, how does one determine whether the prejudices inherited from authority and tradition are valid or in need of rejection? Gadamer's response is well-known: hermeneutic reflection necessitates bringing prejudices to the forefront for critical assessment. "Foregrounding (*abheben*) a prejudice clearly requires suspending its validity for us," Gadamer notes; prejudices and judgements must be suspended and "put at risk," which means exposing them to potential confirmation or rejection. While reason is thus, for Gadamer, inevitably situated—and hence prejudiced—it can and should still exercise its reflexive and evaluative capacities. In this sense, (self-)critique, understood as the challenge of a "critique of prejudices" (Gadamer 1981, 82), lies at the core of philosophical hermeneutics (Schmidt 2010). Still, there are compelling arguments for extending Gadamer's account of the critical function of *temporal* distance (where a traditionary text may provoke one's prejudices) to include the critical potential of *cultural* distance as well (Xie 2014; Wright 2022).

Habermas's claim that hermeneutics confines the power of reason to the uncritical appropriation of tradition thus seems unfounded—an assessment generally shared by critical theorists and feminists alike (see, e.g., Homan 2022, 488; Kögler 2022, 292ff). For Gadamer, understanding inherently involves the critical evaluation of prejudices inherited from tradition. But what about the critique of ideology? How does hermeneutics address the need to expose and 'break up' dogmatic forces stemming from coercive ideologies of gender, race, or class? Although the relationship between hermeneutics and ideology critique is not explicitly addressed in *Truth and Method*, it becomes a focal point in Gadamer's later engagements with Habermas's position. In the seminal 1967 essay "Rhetoric, Hermeneutics, and the Critique of Ideology,"

Gadamer directly links the hermeneutic imperative to make prejudices conscious with the critical imperative to challenge economic and social power structures. Reflecting on the aims and limits of his magnum opus—the essay's subtitle reads "Metacritical Comments on *Truth and Method*"—, Gadamer contends that "it seems altogether absurd that the concrete factors of work and dominance should be seen as lying outside the scope of hermeneutics. What else are the prejudices with which hermeneutical reflection concerns itself?" (Gadamer 2002, 284; cf. Gadamer 1990, 283). Here, Gadamer answers a question he left open a couple of years earlier: which prejudices would one would want to discard rather than affirm? Apparently, these are the prejudices originating from ideology. Indeed, Gadamer later adds, "ideological ossification" can only be avoided by "constantly striving towards self-conscious awareness." By persistently putting prejudices at risk, "to the extent, indeed, of their abandonment, which of course can always mean mere rehabilitation as well," one frees oneself from dogmatic beliefs and achieves the openness that Gadamer (2013, 355) had already defined as "the essence of the hermeneutic experience" (Gadamer 2002, 288). As Gadamer (2013, 364) explains in *Truth and Method*, "the experienced person" is not one who possesses "definitive knowledge," but one who has become "radically undogmatic" and fundamentally open to new experiences—experiences through which the transformation of our prejudices becomes possible.

In fact, a hermeneutical, rather than ideology-critical, understanding of emancipation can be derived from Gadamer's reflections on authority and experience. This alternative notion of emancipation aligns well with the Latourian concept of emancipation, which serves as key source of inspiration for postcritical scholars like Felski. "As to emancipation," Latour writes, "it does not mean 'freed from bonds' but *well*-attached" (Latour 2007, 218; cf. Felski 2015, 146; Felski 2020). Similarly, Gadamer posits that fully liberating oneself from the bonds of tradition is neither possible nor desirable. From a hermeneutic perspective, the critical attempt to transcend tradition and, by extension, one's historical situatedness, is a denial of human finitude. "Anyone who takes the finiteness of human existence

seriously," Gadamer remarks with respect to Habermas's critique, "will not be able to avoid the question of how his own thinking, as transcendental, is empirically possible" (Gadamer 2002, 287; cf. Gadamer 2013, 293ff). In Gadamer's hermeneutics, the recognition that reflection is always situated within tradition is what enables the assessment of one's prejudices. Emancipation, therefore, is not about freeing oneself from all prejudices inherited from tradition, but about self-consciously adopting true prejudices (the essence of authority) and rejecting false ones (the essence of experience), thereby becoming "well-attached" to tradition. While this hermeneutic understanding of emancipation contrasts with the ideology-critical emphasis on detachment and exteriority, it aligns well with the postcritical focus on attachment and relationality.

Where does this reconsideration of the relationship between hermeneutics and ideology critique leave us? According to Gadamer, critique is central to hermeneutics in that understanding necessitates subjecting prejudices inherited from authority and tradition to critical scrutiny. In this reflective moment, prejudices may be consciously affirmed if one acknowledges the superior knowledge or judgement of another, but they may also be abandoned if found to originate in coercive ideologies. "He who will understand," Gadamer would later emphasize, can but "does not need to endorse what he understands" (Gadamer 1990, 291-2). However, that hermeneutics allows for the possibility of ideology critique does not mean that it adopts a critical or suspicious attitude by default. "Clearly," Gadamer writes, "reflection on a prevailing preconception brings something before me which otherwise happens behind my back. Something—not everything" (Gadamer 2002, 288). Assuming that tradition and one's prejudices are fully determined by invisible forces operating behind one's back—or behind the backs of those who affirm their validity—would mean reverting to the paranoia of an absolutized hermeneutics of suspicion. While "unconscious motives lie well within the scope of hermeneutical theory," Gadamer explains, their explication should not be considered the pinnacle of understanding (Gadamer 2002, 290; cf. Gadamer 1990, 291). Instead, hermeneutics begins with the

experience of being addressed by tradition, and it is only later that what a traditionary text says can be discovered to be true or false. The hermeneutic approach underscores that understanding is not about constant suspicion but about engaging with tradition in a manner that remains open to critique without being wholly defined by it.

Since Gadamer's position is thus neither uncritical nor critical by default, I believe it can best be understood as postcritical. Indeed, Gadamer's hermeneutics amounts neither to a revival of the premodern project of coming into accord with the truth of tradition, nor to an acceptance of the Enlightenment project of critically emancipating oneself from tradition. Instead, it seeks to limit or decenter ideology critique by allowing dogmatic forces to be exposed and dissolved in understanding while being wary of absolutizing such a suspicious gesture. To see how hermeneutics steers a course between the Scylla of absolutized tradition and the Charybdis of absolutized suspicion, it is worth quoting at some length from Gadamer's first rejoinder to Habermas. Reconsidering the hermeneutic understanding of the relationship between authority and reflection, Gadamer writes:

Tradition itself is no proof of validity, at any rate not in instances where reflection demands proof. But that is the point: where does reflection demand proof? Everywhere? The finiteness of human existence and the intrinsic particularity of reflection seem to me to make that impossible. Ultimately, it is a question of whether the function of reflection is defined in terms of a conscious awareness which confronts current practice and prevailing opinion with other possibilities—so that one can discard something established in favor of other possibilities but can also consciously adopt that which tradition presents him with de facto—or whether reflection and conscious awareness always dissolve the status quo. (Gadamer 2002, 286)

This passage resolves the power struggle between tradition and reason: tradition exercises its power over our attitudes and beliefs, but so does reflection, which critically scrutinizes these attitudes and beliefs so that they can either be self-consciously affirmed or rejected and replaced with new insights. The relationship between hermeneutic reflection and

the authority of tradition should thus neither be equated with blind obedience, leading to dogmatism, nor with excessive distrust, leading to paranoia. Rather, as Felski has remarked, it should be understood in terms of openness to the other; what defines hermeneutic reflection is neither dogmatism nor paranoia, but "receptivity: insisting on the importance of allowing oneself to be challenged and changed by the words of others." As Gadamer himself famously said: "By hermeneutics I understand the ability to listen to the other in the belief that he could be right" (cited in Grondin 2003, 250). Note the nuance in Gadamer's wording: hermeneutics does not assume that the other is always right (which would be uncritical) or that the other is always wrong (i.e., a naïve believer, as in the Latourian 'critical trick'), but keeps both options open in a spirit of generosity, which may, or may not, turn into suspicion at a later stages.

## 4. Concluding remarks: towards a postcritical hermeneutics

In this article, I have leveraged the pervasiveness of ideology-critical assessments of tradition on the one hand, and the postcritical reevaluation of such critical assessments on the other, as the momentum for reconsidering the relationship between tradition and critique in Gadamer and post-Gadamerian scholarship. Specifically, I have argued that Gadamer already offers a postcritical rather than uncritical assessment of tradition, even though this insight has thus far been relatively unacknowledged. By way of conclusion, let me briefly indicate some of the basics elements of such a postcritical assessment of tradition, which may take its starting point in Gadamer's account of validity and truth while broadening its scope to include both familiar and foreign cultural heritages.

"Understanding begins," Gadamer remarks, "when something addresses us. This is the first condition of hermeneutics" (Gadamer 2013, 310). Keeping in reserve the historicist's and critical theorist's gesture of locating texts, artworks, or other cultural artifacts in their historical and political context, the postcritical scholar starts by

acknowledging their power to address present-day audiences (Felski 2015, Ch.5; Chaouli 2024). This is also how Gadamer's account of truth must be understood: the validity of what is handed down to us consists not in its factual veracity or moral rightness, but rather in its ability to speak anew to contemporary questions and concerns. Even if one pursues historical or ideology-critical research, Gadamer emphasizes, the validity or "significance of what is examined […] exists at the beginning of any such research as well as at the end: in choosing the theme to be investigated, awakening the desire to investigate, gaining a new problematic" (Gadamer 2013, 294).[12] Whatever the individual inquirer's personal or professional motivations, the hermeneutic endeavor begins with an experience of meaningfulness. Although this experience may take many forms—as postcritical scholars have recently documented in detail (see e.g. Felski 2008)—it can be adequately accounted for only by cultivating a Gadamerian attitude of openness or receptivity to the truth claims of cultural heritages. Indeed, such a comportment of undogmatic openness is increasingly recognized as a distinctively Gadamerian hermeneutic virtue (Dostal 2022, 82; Burke 2022; Crist 2024).

It is only after being addressed by a cultural artifact that human scientists will subject the particular content of their object of study to critical scrutiny. If the first moment of understanding consists in being somehow affected by one's object of inquiry, the second moment involves the temporary suspension of its validity claim and, by extension, one's judgement, to assess what, for instance, a philosophical, literary, or poetic text says. As we have seen, the outcome of this assessment might be the (partial) rejection of what is said, such as when the text expresses sexist, racist, or colonial ideologies originating from its historical context, but this need not always be the case. A text's subject matter may also be consciously affirmed, for example, when one acknowledges the superiority of the knowledge or judgement expressed by the text. The point is that one cannot determine in advance what the outcome of this hermeneutic phase will or should be. Adopting an attitude of unconditional affirmation amounts to

blind obedience or dogmatism, while starting from an ethos of methodological suspicion risks turning into delusion or paranoia. As Crist (2023b) has convincingly argued in the context of the COVID-19 pandemic, both positions are ultimately "anti-hermeneutical."[13] Instead, the hermeneutical qua postcritical scholar seeks to make receptivity the guiding attitude for their encounter with both familiar and foreign traditions: receptivity not just for the tradition's affective power, but also for experience, which means acknowledging that what the tradition says can, but need not, be right. While a critique of ideology may thus very well be part of a human scientist's encounter with cultural heritages, it does not need to be and is, in fact, neither at the beginning nor at the end of research in the humanities.

**NOTES**

[1] The desire to somehow reconcile both philosophies is still very much alive today, see e.g. Simpson (2021) and Mertel and Dunaj (2022). Since these authors primarily focus on utilizing the resources of hermeneutics for the purposes of critique, I will set their theories aside in this article.

[2] Habermas's notion of a depth hermeneutics is developed in line with the psychoanalytic model of the analytical relationship. It is against this analogy between the psychoanalytic and hermeneutic situation that Gadamer's (1990) "Reply" is directed. See also Gadamer (1981, 78–9).

[3] It should be noted that many proposals for a 'critical hermeneutics,' whether by feminists or critical theorists (cf. note 1) include a critical assessment of Gadamer's account of situatedness, which is generally appreciated, but also criticized for neglecting factors such as materiality and embodiment. Discussing this important reevaluation, however, is beyond the aims and scope of this article.

[4] In this sense, my article can be understood both as a deepening of and a response to Schuback's seminal diagnosis. For a more concrete, case-based response in the context of epistemic injustice, see Crist (2023a).

[5] Gadamer adds: "Habermas appears to assume so." The influential critical theorist Hans-Herbert Kögler already hits at a postcritical reading of this particular passage in his review of the Gadamer-Habermas debate (see Kögler, 2022, 292ff).

[6] According to Sontag, this particular understanding of interpretation as translation can be traced back as far as the decline of "the power and credibility of myth" in late classical antiquity.

[7] Interestingly, Sontag lists Marx and Freud as prime examples of this distinctively modern style of interpretation. See also Ricoeur (1970 33–4): "For Marx, Nietzsche, and Freud, the fundamental category of consciousness

is the relation hidden-shown or, if you prefer, simulated-manifested." For a more elaborate account such "symptomatic reading," see Best and Marcus (2009).

[8] Ricoeur (1970, 28ff) uses the adjective "postcritical" to describe the attitude associated with the hermeneutics of faith as "faith that has undergone criticism" and contrasts it with the hermeneutics of suspicion.

[9] For explorations of Gadamer's purported "hermeneutics of trust," see Dostal (1987) and Crist (2022). For an analysis of the relationship between Ricoeur and postcritique, see Van der Heiden (2023).

[10] Interestingly, a similar formulation can be found in Günter Figal's work, who writes that "[Die Hermeneutik] kann […] ein Gegengewicht zur Verabsolutiering von Aufklärung und Kritik sein" (Figal 2008, 211).

[11] While Gadamer (1992a, 188) emphasizes the importance of "knowing and deciding for oneself" rather than uncritically accepting "the knowledge of another," Gadamer (1992b, 185) claims that "we have to strengthen the powers of independent thinking and our individual judgement" to oppose anonymity, bureaucracy, and conformism in an age of mass media. According to Dostal (2022, 43), Gadamer's simultaneous rehabilitation of authority and affirmation of the Kantian imperative to "think for oneself" reflects his ambivalence toward the Enlightenment project.

[12] Cf. Felski (2020, 128): "What we choose to decipher, how we decipher it, and to what end—these decisions are driven by what we feel affinity for, what resonates. Interpreting is far from being a purely cognitive exercise."

[13] Notably, Crist (2023b, 36) concludes that "[w]hile it would be anti-hermeneutical to completely avoid, distrust, or assume nefarious intentions behind public health institutions, the state, and the media, the concept of anti-hermeneutics is likewise a reminder to be wary of the pitfalls of conformism and the ease with which individuals may outsource their critical capacities for the sake of pseudo-solidarity."

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# Todestrieb, Lebensursprünglichkeit und Deutungsanspruch. Eine psychoanalytische und phänomenologisch-dekonstruktive Diskussion

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**Abstract**
**Death Drive, Originality of Life and Claim to Interpretation: A Psychoanalytical and Phenomenological-Deconstructive Discussion**

In addition to the inner-psychoanalytical critique of the basic metapsychological concept of the death drive, the radical phenomenological and deconstructivist perspective according to Jacques Derrida is also included. The interpretation of the lethal designification of all meanings comes up against the limits of an irrevocable originality of life before all representation, on the one hand, and Freud's reference to repetition/interpretation as a claim to power to be able to adequately explain it alone, on the other. At the same time, this implies a fundamental question about the future of culture, how the connection between drive/life is to be methodically determined.

**Keywords:** affectivity, aggressiveness, interpretation, origin of life, death drive, transference

Wir möchten in diesem Beitrag die Problematik des Todestriebes und dessen Diskussion in der jüngeren Psychoanalyse, Phänomenologie sowie im Dekonstruktivismus bei Jacques Derrida kritisch aufgreifen. Im strikten Sinne würde der metapsychologische Begriff eines Todestriebes, der für die Kulturbeschreibung als Aggressions- und Destruktionstrieb bei Sigmund Freud grundlegend zu berücksichtigen ist (Freud 2009, 191–250; Lerchner 2019, 3–29), im Vergleich mit einem originär phänomenologischen

Leben keinen Sinn ergeben. Freud bekannte selbst ausdrücklich in einem Brief an Oskar Pfister vom 7. Februar 1930, dass "der Todestrieb [ihm] kein Herzensanliegen ist", sondern eine "unvermeidliche Annahme aus biologischen wie aus psychologischen Gründen" (Freud und Pfister 1963, 272). Denn dadurch konnte geklärt werden, warum das Phänomen des Hasses sich nicht problemlos in seine anfängliche Triebtheorie einschreiben ließ, welche zunächst nur den Rahmen von Sexual- und Ichtrieben abgab. Zusammen mit der ergänzenden psychischen wie universalen Eroswirklichkeit als Prinzip für intersubjektive Bindungen und individuelle Selbsterhaltung wurde es dann möglich, die frühe Triebtheorie weiterzuentwickeln. Innerhalb der psychoanalytischen Lehrentfaltung gab es daher später zwei ganz unterschiedliche Tendenzen, nämlich entweder den Todestrieb als zu "spekulativ" überhaupt abzulehnen oder ihn in einem allgemeineren Sinne nur als "Aggressivität" gelten zu lassen, womit sich das genannte Hassphänomen erhellen ließ. Historisch relevant ist hierfür beispielsweise die Kontroverse zwischen Freud und Wilhelm Reich (Reich 1933; Fromm 1974; De Marchi 1988), der zwar den unbewussten Wunsch nach "Selbstzerstörung" anerkannte, aber aus ideologisch marxistischen Gründen keinen politisch-gesellschaftlich oder kulturell wirksamen Todestrieb.

Um diese danach weiter gegebene sterile Gegenüberstellung von theoretischer Ablehnung und Zustimmung zu überwinden, schlug Jean Laplanche (Laplanche 1981; 1994) etwa vor, den "Todestrieb" als einen "Trieb zu sterben" zu verstehen, beziehungsweise als ein "Sich-Sterben-Lassen". Eine solche Lösung mildert zwar die ursprünglichen Freudschen Implikationen dieses Begriffs ab, wie beispielsweise die rein biologisch gedachte Rückkehr des Individuums in einen anorganischen Zustand, aber dadurch ist die von uns eingangs angesprochene Wirklichkeit des Lebens in einem radikal originären Sinne ebenfalls nicht beantwortet. Der "Trieb zu sterben" enthält in seiner weniger spekulativen Fassung als Freuds eigene metapsychologische Konzeption die Einsicht, dass der "Todestrieb" klinisch nicht wirklich erweisbar ist. Daher traten für die weitere

Diskussion vor allem folgende Aspekte hinsichtlich der analytisch-therapeutischen Praxis nach und nach in den Vordergrund der Diskussion: die verschiedenen Formen des Narzissmus, der Trieb-Objekt-Bezug, die schon erwähnte Aggressivität insbesondere als Masochismus sowie das Verhältnis von Gegenübertragung und Tod.

## 1. Narzissmus und Objektbezug

Der Narzissmus ist zweifellos in libidinöser Hinsicht eine Weise der "Selbsterhaltung" (Freud 2009, 49–78), aber da er sich zwischen Ichbezug und Objektbezug bewegt, kann gerade der letztere selbstzerstörerische Elemente enthalten. Nämlich in dem Fall, wo sich entweder Objektidentifikationen mit Aggressivität verbinden, wie Jacques Lacan (Lacan 1948, 367–404; Thiberge 2018, 177–90) schon 1948 festhielt, oder in jenem anderen Fall, wo durch diesen Objektbezug ein Verhältnis zum Außen der Realität eintritt, das eine Loslösung des Subjekts von sich selbst enthält. Damit wäre aber die objektale Liebe etwas anderes als bloß "verschobener Narzissmus", so dass eine vorherige Individuierung gefordert würde, welche den Grund des subjektaufhebenden Objekt-Narzissmus erst abgäbe. Es existiert hierbei eine gewisse Nähe zur lebensphänomenologischen Ipseisierung gemäß Michel Henry, die ebenfalls jedem Narzissmus vorausliegt, insofern der Ichbezug als "Selbstliebe" nämlich in dem vorgängigen "Sich-Selbst-Lieben" oder "Sich-Selbst-Affizieren" des Lebens originär gegeben ist (Henry 2005, 19–21). Aber da auch die Psychoanalyse nach Freud im Dualismus der primären Erscheinensbedingungen von Realität/Trieb verharrt, enthält der Begriff eines primären "Anti-Narzissmus" zugleich das permanente Zerrissensein des Subjekts, nämlich zwischen solcher Individuierung und objektalen Bezügen, was gerade dem Wirken von Eros und Thanatos auf derselben Ebene entspräche, auch wenn ihre Ausrichtung je unterschiedlich ist (Pasche 1969, 101–22).

Ähnlich sah es André Green (Green 1986, 134–49; Kirchhoff 2009, 105–07), der einen "negativen Narzissmus" als "dunklen Schatten" der Vereinigungstendenz von Eros ins Spiel bringt, um die psychische Aktivität der Objektlibido im Sinne

einer "negativen halluzinatorischen Verwirklichung des Begehrens" (*désir*) aufzufassen. Diese bedeutet weder Lust noch Unlust, sondern eine "indifferente Wirklichkeit" gegenüber den Bewegungen der menschlichen Triebe. Die Metamorphose der Rückkehr zur unbelebten Materie durch den Todestrieb nach Freud wird mithin bei Green die Trägheitstendenz in einem psychischen Sterben, wo der Narzissmus des Lebens und der Narzissmus des Todes als ergänzende Konzeption des "Lustprinzips" einen Lebensbegriff voraussetzen, dessen Vollzüge stets fraktal bleiben, das heißt keine originär selbstaffektive Einheit im Sinne des rein phänomenologischen Lebens kennen. Dies wird zusätzlich von jener Auffassung unterstrichen, welche die Kräfte des sogenannten Todestriebes im "Nicht-Gestalthaften" (*non-figuratif*) des unbewussten Repräsentanten erblickt, nämlich als eine undenkbar negative Einheit, wie sie für den phallischen Referenten konstitutiv ist. Im Unterschied zu Lacan erblickt Serge Leclaire hierin aber nicht nur eine Problematik unmöglicher Signifikanten für den ursprünglichen Mangel als "Fehlen-an-Sein" (*manque d'être*) des Subjekts, sondern des Phantasmas des Mordes am "idealen Kind" in uns. Dieses zu tötende oder zu verherrlichende "allmächtige Kind" als unserem innerpsychischen Existenz-beginn ist jener unbewusste Repräsentant des primären Narzissmus, wie ihn auch Freud (Freud 2012, 93ff.) stets als infantile "Allmachtsphantasie" hervorgehoben hatte.

Aber bei Serge Leclaire[1] (Leclaire 1975. Husserl 1973, 605ff. Kühn und Stachura 2005, 101ff.) ist dieses "ermordete Kind" der "verfemte Teil", welcher als ebenso notwendiger wie unmöglicher "Mord" bei jedem objektalen Bezug verwirklicht werde. Für Analyse wie Therapie bedeutet dies praktisch, alle sekundären Vorstellungsbildungen im biographisch-gesellschaftlichen Leben zu dekonstruieren, welche die Notwendigkeit dieses "Mordes am Kind" als absolutem Wunschphantasma verhindert haben. Ohne die angezeigte Durcharbeitung entsprechender Vorstellungen in Frage zu stellen, wird aber erneut für uns sichtbar, dass das "Leben" hier psychoanalytisch nur als potentielle Vorstellungserscheinung gefasst wird. Somit kann sich eine ursprünglich lebendige

Selbstgegebenheit ("Kind") nur als "Tod" manifestieren (Enders 2018), wodurch ein ursprünglicher Dualismus ins Leben eingeschrieben bleibt, der radikal phänomenologisch mehr als problematisch in methodischer Hinsicht ist. Dieser Dualismus impliziert in der Tat, dass der Narzissmus mit tiefer Destruktivität gegenüber das eigene Selbst korreliert ist. Damit gleichzeitig angenommene archaische und prä-objektale Tendenzen, welche die Unterscheidung von Innen/Außen noch ignorieren, erweitern zwar das theoretische Feld des psychoanalytischen Todesbegriffs und erkennen dergestalt gleichfalls besser die "Masken des Narzissmus"[2] (Ricœur 1965, 69ff.) – um den dabei verwandten Lebensbegriff jedoch weiterhin unaufgeklärt zu lassen.

In gewisser Weise verstehen mithin die jüngeren psychoanalytischen Interpretationen des Todestriebes denselben hauptsächlich als einen Tod des Individuums selbst, bevor sie ihn als einen Tod auffassen, der dem Anderen aggressiv oder sadistisch zugefügt wird. Wenn nun der Sexualtrieb ursprünglich den einzig wahren Trieb nach Freud (Freud 2009, 79–102) darstellte, dann liegt es nahe, den Todestrieb weniger als jenen "schweigenden Trieb" zu sehen, der allem Streben vorausliegt, als vielmehr im Sinne einer vereinheitlichenden sexuellen Energie, wo sich die sexuellen Lebenstriebe und die sexuellen Todestriebe in Bezug auf ihre energetische Funktion, ihr Ziel sowie hinsichtlich des Ichs und ihrer Objektquelle unterscheiden. Als sexueller Lebenstrieb ist hier – wie bei Freud – das Konstanzprinzip am Werk, das heißt die Einheitsbildung von Beziehungen, deren Objektquelle nach Laplanche ein umfassendes "regulierendes Objekt" bildet. Die sexuellen Todestriebe vollzögen sich hingegen nach dem Prinzip der "freien Energie" (Breuer), wobei sich durch solch "entmischte Energie" (Freud) in vernichtender Weise für das Objekt eine totale Triebentladung realisiert, wodurch das Ich selbst destabilisiert würde.

Zwar ist in beiden Fällen eine gemeinsame libidinöse Energie gegeben, aber der Todestrieb verfolgt dennoch letztlich die Auflösung des Lebenstriebes selbst – und nicht nur dessen Aufspaltung (Laplanche 1986, 82–119). Damit nähert sich der sexuelle Todestrieb am meisten dem an, was psychoanalytisch

als der Primärprozess des Es angenommen wird. Dadurch ergebe sich des Weiteren eine unendliche Verlagerung der sexuellen Strebungen, und zwar entlang jener Assoziationsketten der Objekte, die auf ihren bloßen Bedeutungsaspekt reduziert würden, so dass eine Triebentladung auf kürzestem Weg eintritt – mithin ohne Rücksicht auf die Existenz des Objekts als solchem. Auf diese Weise wird der sexuelle Todestrieb zu einem reinen Vorstellungstrieb, insofern die signitiven Hinweise, denen er als "Indiz" folgt, kein Triebobjekt als Ganzes mehr zulassen. Dies hat insoweit einen vergleichbaren Bezug zur rein phänomenologischen Lebenswirklichkeit, als diese sich ebenfalls von der bloßen Vorstellung abhebt, die als Transzendenz dem Erscheinensraum der Irrealisierung der Dinge in ihrer nicht unmittelbar impressionalen Selbstgegebenheit angehört (Henry 2005, 13ff; Kühn 2019 [2], 75–122), um in der leiblich-affektiven Phänomenalisierung deren anfängliche Gänze des Erscheinens gelten zu lassen. Für ein solch immanentes Verständnis reicht allerdings die Duplizität Leben/Intentionalität in methodischer Hinsicht aus, ohne irgendeine todesähnliche Komponente in Anspruch nehmen zu müssen.

Die zuvor genannte Position von André Green verstärkt nur die letale Sichtweise, denn nach ihm tritt der Todestrieb nicht nur als Zerstörung des Objektbezuges auf, sondern der Objektbesetzung schlechthin, welche zurückgenommen wird – und zwar als Trauer, die einen negativen Narzissmus im Sinne eines Strebens zum Punkt Null von Libido und Objekt hin ausdrückt (Freud 2009, 171–90; Press 2017, 67–94). Mit anderen Worten wird in diesem Fall die objektale Funktion der Symbolisierung mittels der Libido als Lebenstrieb beziehungsweise Eros aufgehoben. Die bis an diesen Punkt von uns nachgezeichnete psychoanalytische Diskussion schwankt dergestalt zwischen zwei Polen; einerseits gibt es den Todestrieb als Trieb an sich und andererseits als Prinzip eines negativen Gegentriebes, der bis zu einem totalen objektalen Verlust gehen kann. Das libidinöse Objekt bleibt zwar noch gegeben, aber nur als "Hinweis" für eine Lust, die sich selbst sucht, ohne das Objekt als solches zu bewahren, so wie schon

für Freud der Sexualtrieb als Ziel allein die Lust allein kennt, sein Objekt hingegen als sekundär angesehen wird (Quindeau 2008). Klinisch erweitert betrachtet, kann das Trauma eines solch umfassenden Objektverlustes zu einer "wesenhaften Depression" mit starker Somatisierung führen, weil die Lebensbewegung geschwächt wurde und dadurch die Personstruktur selbst fragilisiert auftritt (Marty 1976). Der Todestrieb mündet dergestalt in die Selbstzerstörung ein, indem er sich sozusagen als Energie im triebhaften Sinne selbst angreift und nicht mehr für die "Aggression" gegenüber der Außenwelt im intentionalen Sinne der Freudschen "Bemächtigung" zur Verfügung steht. Bei all diesen metapsychologischen Konstruktionen bleibt phänomenologisch gesehen undeutlich, woher letztlich die Kraft des Todestriebes als solchem kommt, denn auch er muss sich noch im Leben und durch das Leben vollziehen, denn sonst bliebe er ein bloßer Begriff ohne jede affektiv-leibliche Wirkung (Grohmann 2019, 27–51).[3] In gegenreduktiv phänomenologischer Konsequenz muss zudem gesehen werden, dass in der Tat jede "Selbstzerstörung" aus dem Leben selbst kommt, wenn es nämlich so scheint, als vermöchte es sich nicht mehr selbst "zu ertragen". Die "Selbstzerstörung des Lebens" ist daher eine äußerste transzendentale Frage, wie sich die Subjektivität als solche überhaupt verneinen kann – und zwar paradoxerweise innerhalb der Kraft des Lebens selbst, welche sie in solcher Verneinung gerade noch in Anspruch nimmt (Henry 1994, 295ff; Kühn und Stachura 2005, 68–81; Billmeier 2015, 99–132).

## 2. Masochismus und Aggressivität

Die Aggressivität als aktiver Aspekt jeder intentional ausgerichteten Handlung, die es dem Organismus ermöglicht, ein Gleichgewicht in Bezug auf einen Reiz durch die von außen erwachsene Spannung zu erreichen, kann im Sinne des Freudschen "Lustprinzips", welches stets ein "Bedürfnis" befriedigt, als spontaner Ausdruck des biologischen Lebens betrachtet werden. Diese frühe Position Freuds bis zur theoretischen Wende in den 1920er Jahren, die dann den Todestrieb spekulativ einführte, wäre als immanente Gegebenheit eines jeden Triebes aufzufassen. Aufgrund der

Unterscheidung von einer sadistischen Komponente der Libido und dem Todestrieb an sich bildeten sich hierzu weitere Differenzierungen für die Diskussion des Aggressionstriebes heraus. So wurde zum Beispiel Aggression und Aggressivität unterschieden, wobei nur letztere dem Todestrieb selbst entstammen soll, während die Aggression der Funktion des intentionalen Tuns als "Bemächtigung" zugeordnet wurde (Lebovici und Diatkine 1972, 34–51; Rath 2021). Die Frage hierbei ist, woher jedoch die fundamentale Gewalt rührt, die in beiden Formen am Werk ist? Hierfür wird die Differenz zwischen Ich/Anderem in Anspruch genommen, da sich im Alteritätserleben die Alternative auftue: "Überleben oder Sterben" (Waldenfels und Därmann 1998). Dies muss keinen direkten Tötungswillen des Anderen implizieren, sondern folge imaginären Phantasmen, die sich bereits zuvor zwischen Eltern und Kind herausgebildet hätten. Die Gegenseitigkeit von phantasierter Kindes- und Elterntötung als "Mutter" und "Vater" bildet die Urszene einer prä-symbolischen Einschreibung, welche zugleich das ödipale Phantasma strukturiert, um dann diese – auch genital mitbedingte – Erstgewalt libidiös und objektal einzusetzen. Geschieht dies nicht, dann würden die zerstreuten Fragmente der Libido im Gegenzug zu imaginären Entwürfen von Aggressivität, Sadismus und Masochismus. Hierbei interessiere nur die Selbsterhaltung des Subjekts, während die Bestimmung des Objekts wiederum sekundär bleibt, was in gewisser Weise auch einer Prä-Ambivalenz entspricht, die weder durch Hass noch durch Liebe konstituiert sei, um als dynamisches Element innerhalb der Sexualität überhaupt benutzt zu werden (Bergeret 1984, 65–79; Pazzini 2020).

Übergehen wir diesbezüglich die weitere psychopathologische Differenzierung dieser Anfangsgewalt hinsichtlich einer sado-masochistischen Organisation der Psyche seit Wilhelm Reich, so ergibt sich grundsätzlich die Frage, ob Destruktions- und Todestrieb nicht fundamentaler zu unterscheiden blieben. Denn der letztere kann niemals direkt erfasst werden, sondern erscheint stets nur "vermischt" mit Zerstörungsprozessen, die sich gegen Objekte oder das Ich wenden (M'Uzan 1977). Klinisch kennen wir zwanghafte

Wiederholung, traumatische Neurose und negative therapeutische Reaktion (Bergmann 1999, 87–111), die ebenfalls schon nach Freud alle eine letale Tendenz in sich bergen und auf der psychischen Ebene der Spannungen und Konflikte zu totalen Reizentladungen mit entsprechender Somatisierung führen, was das Ich von seinen narzisstischen Besetzungen leert (Kristeva 1987).[4] Hierbei handelt es sich um eine Variation des Todestriebs, so dass das Subjekt im Weiteren weder eine gewisse Erregung noch deren Entladungen selbst hervorbringen kann, vielmehr Zeichen von brutaler Zerstörung erkennen lässt, beziehungsweise eine unendlich zwingende, das heißt perverse Lustsuche. Diese offenbart sich in einem massiven Übergang zum *acting out*, dessen Gewalt jene affektiven Quantitäten ins Spiel bringt, die dieser Gewalt proportional sind. Allerdings lässt sich in solchem Zusammenhang auf eine gewisse Ambiguität des Freudschen Begriffs des schon erwähnten "Bemächtigungstriebes" hinweisen (Freud 2009, 303–04; Lamparter et al. 2021), der sowohl der intentionalen Handlung wie dem Todestrieb solche "Bemächtigung" als "Aggression" im Sinne von "Aktivität" zuerkennt. Dies würde heißen, dass derselbe Begriff die Tendenz der triebhaften Vereinigung des Lebens umfasst wie auch die zerstörerischen Strebungen des Todestriebes. Sowohl gegen einen entsprechenden Triebmonismus wie -dualismus wäre allerdings in Erinnerung zu rufen, dass die "Bemächtigung" weder sexuell noch selbsterhaltend ist, sondern die anfänglich intentionale Bezüglichkeit jeglicher Alteritätserfahrung überhaupt bildet (Ricœur 1965, 391ff. Gillibert 1982, 45–62), was eine gewisse Parallele zum klassischen Intentionalitätsbegriff in der Phänomenologie darstellt (Husserl 1976).

Nun lässt sich nicht leugnen, dass es in der Praxis analytisch-therapeutische Misserfolge gibt, indem selbstzerstörerische Kräfte zu existieren scheinen, die mächtiger als der Lebenstrieb selbst auftreten. Hier wird deshalb als manifeste Aggressivität ein nicht weiter auflösbarer Masochismus angenommen, wo sich ein "organischer Todesinstinkt" für diese Selbstzerstörung als unaufhebbar seitens der klinischen Beobachtung aufdränge. Der von Freud

bereits angenommene "primäre Masochismus" wird auf diese Weise zu einer korrelativen Gegebenheit des Todestriebes. Andererseits war jedoch der originäre Masochismus stets auch erogener Herkunft und somit mit dem Leben primär verbunden. Letztere Auffassung würde dann bedeuten, dass die libidinös bedingte Verbindung zwischen Todestrieb und Eros einen spezifischen Widerstand im Inneren des Subjekts darstellt. Trotz seiner Verbindung mit dem Todestrieb würde dann ein solch primärer Masochismus eine Schranke gegenüber letzterem bilden. Und dies schlösse wiederum ein, dass sich dann in solchem Masochismus ein "Selbst" im Sinne eines archaischen "Ichs" herausbilden würde, welches das Subjekt selbst erst begründet und gleichzeitig die objektale Wirklichkeit mit konstituiert (Rosenberg 1982, 41–96).

Was wäre dann aber der zuvor erwähnte sich kasteiende Masochismus? Wie schon angedeutet, fände hier eine Abriegelung des Lebenstriebes selbst statt, indem dieser in jeder objektalen Befriedigung abseits geleitet wird. Die in der "primären Hilflosigkeit" des Kindes (Freud) enthaltene Erregung wird auf masochistische Weise überbesetzt, was eine beinahe unendliche Wirkung auf die halluzinatorische Befriedigung des Begehrens ausübt und somit die Bildung des inneren Objekts erschwert. Gegenüber den Möglichkeiten der Außenprojektion mit ihren Objekten ergibt sich vielmehr ein Verzicht auf andere Widerstandsweisen, so dass sich ein solcher Masochismus in der Tat abtötend auswirke. Theoretisch weitergeführt, kann man dann zu der Auffassung gelangen, dass sich primärer Masochismus und Todesinstinkt bis hin zur psychischen Dissoziation und subjektiver Zerstückelung verbinden, aber auch im Verbund mit Eros einen Verzicht auf die "eigene Person" in der Liebe zum Anderen hervorrufen. Daraus ergäbe sich dann schließlich eine zweifache Masochismusform; zum einen primär als Verzicht auf Eigenes und zum anderen ein sadistischer Außenbezug, wenn Leid und Gefahr das Überleben in Frage stellen. Mit anderen Worten ist der primäre Masochismus eine Form narzisstischer Liebe, wenn er im Subjekt verharrt, um erst im Außer-Sich der Alterität oder Realität zum Sadismus zu werden. Dann wäre der Masochismus nicht nur negativ zu sehen, sondern er

verbände sich im jeweiligen Tun mit dem Leben als solchem, was voraussetzt, dass der Todestrieb einerseits Zerstörung impliziert, aber auf der anderen Seite besäße er als Trennung, Unterscheidung oder Individuierung ebenfalls eine neutrale beziehungsweise sogar vitale Konnotation (Thiberge 2018, 289ff. und 330–31; Winnicott 1991, 1116–26; Klein 1992).[5] Gleicherweise bedeutet auch Eros demzufolge nicht nur vereinheitlichenden Lebenstrieb, sondern durchaus monströse Zusammenfügungen oder anarchische Verklammerungen von undifferenzierten Einheiten, die wie in der Katatonie einer todesähnlichen Verdinglichung gleichkommen. Es muss also zugestanden werden, dass es auch unvollständige Verknüpfungen durch Eros gibt, die den Tendenzen des Todestriebes ähneln können.

In kritischer Rückwendung auf Freud wird dann gleichfalls der Wiederholungszwang nicht allein dem Todestrieb mehr zugeordnet, sondern auch dem Lebenstrieb, denn er sei eine Art "demiurgisches Gedächtnis" als "Instinkt des Instinktes". Damit wird der Wiederholungszwang zur triebhaften Funktion schlechthin und zeichnet nicht weiterhin den Todestrieb als solchen aus. Bei anderen Autoren wird der Todestrieb sogar ganz aufgehoben, denn wenn es eine "rohe Erregung" gibt, die sich daraufhin in sexuelle Erregung verwandle, dann sei dies nicht länger durch einen primären Masochismus einzufangen, wie Freud ihn beschrieben hatte. Damit fällt ebenfalls eine primäre Verbindung zwischen Libido und Todestrieb fort, welche die biologische Konstitutions-bedingung für den primären Masochismus wäre. Man kann sich zudem fragen, ob der Masochismus nicht über den ökonomischen Aspekt des Triebhaften hinaus ist, denn als erogener Masochismus kommt er dann in seine deskriptive Wahrheit, wenn er sich insgesamt nicht mehr in einen "moralischen Masochismus" (Freud) verwandle und jede Macht verliert, um das individuelle Leben in seinem Tod festzuhalten (Gillibert 1984, 153–72). All diese thematischen Weiterentwicklungen haben eines gemeinsam, indem sie in der Tat den "schweigenden Todestrieb" mit jenen Verbindungen konfrontiert sein lassen, die den Lebenstrieb und Todestrieb zusammen auftreten sehen. Die Frage bleibt deshalb

schließlich, welche ökonomischen Aspekte dem Todestrieb im Geschehen der Analyse/Therapie selbst zukommen.

## 3. Übertragung und Todestrieb

Versteht man die "Arbeit" des Todestriebes im Lacanschen Sinne prinzipiell als "Suche nach dem Phallus" (Lacan 1966, 111–208; 1971, 151–92; 1991, 105–204; Rouzel 2016),[6] der stets eine Heterogenität gegenüber den imaginären Einheitstendenzen des libidinösen Lebens bleibt, dann handelt es sich in der jüngeren psychoanalytischen Diskussion um unbewusste Repräsentanten, welche das "Nicht-Gestalthafte" einer undenkbaren Einheit bilden. Nichts könnte mithin gesagt oder vorgestellt werden, wenn der Todestrieb nicht ständig die phallische Referenz gegenwärtig sein ließe, weshalb Analyse/Therapie auf weiten Strecken um die Demaskierung und den "Tod" von Lebensgestaltungen kreist, die dem phallischen Referenten (Gesetz, Norm, Wiederholung et cetera) ihren letalen Tribut zu zahlen haben. Bei Freud entspricht dies der Einschreibung des Unbekannten in das Es als "negative Arbeit". Auf diese Weise wird der Tod als solcher verinnerlicht, nämlich als Sterben der Idealisierungen, die sich das Undenkbare als Last aufbürden wollen. Gewiss löst eine solch letale Verinnerlichung als Todestrieb in der äußeren Objektverwerfung die Identifikation auf. Aber dies nur, um den zuvor untersuchten Narzissmus in seiner Emergenz auf mythische Weise wieder einzuholen, welche das Sterben des Todes im Todestrieb selbst zu einem Undenkbaren macht (Ricœur 1965, 297ff.), um allein die tödliche Ökonomie des Lustprinzips bestehen zu lassen.

In der Analyse/Therapie wird die Verbindung von Unbekanntheit des Todes und gesuchter Finalität (Einheit) zu einem subjektiven Feld des "Intensiven", welches im singulären Sprechen (*parole*) metaphorisiert und in gewissen Grenzen verwirklicht werden kann, wenn es sich von der gesellschaftlichen Sprache (*langue*) freisetzt (Rosolato 1977, 28–43; Thiberge 2018, 273ff.). Dass bei dieser Ablösung die heftigsten Todesängste auftreten können, liegt auf der Hand, denn das Undenkbare des Todestriebes als innerer Prozess entspricht seiner ebenso schweigenden wie unablässigen

Spurenaufhebung des Subjekts, das heißt seiner Auflösung der Objektbesetzungen, welche eine undenkbare Vernichtung hervorbrechen lassen kann. Die Repräsentanten, welche diese Bewegung begleiten, müssen daher innerhalb der seelischen Aktivität der Triebökonomie symbolisch metabolisiert werden, um den Todestrieb nicht nur abstrakt aufscheinen zu lassen, sondern als verbunden mit der unmittelbaren analytisch-therapeutischen Praxis (Zaltzman 1986, 46–63).

Für die Aktualität der Theorie des Todestriebs ergibt sich daraus insgesamt eine Vielfalt an Todestrieben, so dass sich beispielsweise die Komplexität der sexuellen Impulse in ein und demselben subjektiven Leben manifestiert und vermischt. Das Geschick dieser Todestriebe substituiert sich diesen Sexualtrieben, wenn letztere in eine Konfliktsituation ohne Antwort gelangen, während andere Formen des Todestriebes keinerlei Überkreuzung mit der Sexualität eingehen. Denn in ihrer ursprünglichen Gegebenheit bedeuten diese Todestriebe eine Ekstase der Vernichtung, die auf keine der habituellen lebensweltlichen Orientierungsperspektiven reduziert zu werden vermag. Somit kann Thanatos als die Darstellung aller Formen der Vernichtung, Zurückweisung, des Hasses und negativer Loslösungen betrachtet werden, wodurch das innere wie äußere Konstanzprinzip Freuds erschüttert wird, und zwar auf allen Ebenen triebhafter oder sexueller Spannungen, um dem Subjekt seine hinfälligen Gleichgewichte – oder deren imaginäre Suche – zu dokumentieren. Damit situiert sich der Todestrieb im Bereich der anfänglichen Gewalt, der archaischen Aggressivität und Selbstzerstörung, wobei dieser Ursprungsbereich – zusammen mit dem antagonistischen Eros – nur der Raum eines hypothetisch postulierten "Ursprünglichen" sein kann, insofern die originäre Lebenswirklichkeit als solche nicht in ihrer rein phänomenologischen Originarität weiter befragt wird. Aber die psychoanalytische Annahme einer solchen Ursprungsgewalt, die etwa auch bei Emmanuel Levinas als Anfangstrauma im phänomenologisch ethischen Sinne gegeben ist, hat ihre relativ vergleichbare Analogie in der "Gewalt des Lebens" vor jeglicher existentiellen Form von Selbstzerstörung. Denn die rein immanente Passibilität ist es, die uns ohne jede vorhergehende

Freiheit in der Faktizität eines solchen Lebens transzendental geboren sein lässt, ohne dies irgendwie im Sinne einer Psychose mit halluzinatorischem Wahnsystem verstehen zu müssen (Levinas [3]1992, 316ff; Hase und Schlimme 2017, 143–63; Kühn 2017, 11–32).

Nimmt man insbesondere den Hass als Maske des Todestriebes, dann gibt es im Zusammenhang mit den vorherigen Analysen einen radikalen Hass, welcher im skizzierten Ursprungsbereich anfänglicher Gewalt die prinzipielle Unlust gegenüber der objektalen Erregung hervorruft, das heißt eine Lust der Selbstzerstörung, die in Verbindung mit der subjektiven Leiblichkeit die Auslöschung des Bedürfens selbst beinhaltet. Auf diese prä-objektale Weise greift die archaische Aggressivität als radikaler Hass die leibliche Räumlichkeit im Sinne eines "Außer-Sich" an, mithin als ein "Jenseits des Lustprinzips" in der Terminologie Freuds. Dieses Außer-Sich des eigenen Selbst entspräche gewachsenen Bildungen der mütterlichen Psyche mit einem Übermaß an zu zahlreichen oder zu rätselhaften Signifikanten, die das Kind in seinem Empfinden und Verstehen übersteigen, falls eine weitere mütterliche Intervention diese psychische Gefahr nicht bannte (Klein 1983; Klein 1992; Fuchs 2000). Schon oben genannte Autoren sprechen hier von einer "perversen Verführung", die innerhalb der Beziehung von Analyse/Therapie im Hass der Gegenübertragung wiederkehren kann (Laplanche 1988; 1999; 2006; 2011; Laplanche und Pontalis 1961; Dies. 1992; Dejours und Votadoro 2016). Diese Verstrickung von Verführung/Hass durch die anfängliche Situation des Kindes mit der Mutter tritt oft als eine ständige Prägung auf, die als "psychischer Tod" eine Reihe von Effekten der Gegenübertragung zeitigt. "Wie vom Tod berührt zu werden" ist ebenso einer dieser Effekte wie "im Lebendigsten getroffen zu sein", wobei Jean-Bertrand Pontalis (Pontalis 1977, 15–38 und 135–42) allerdings nicht von "magischen Signifikanten" des Todestriebes sprechen möchte, insofern dadurch nur die Abwesenheit der seelischen Realität verdeckt würde, die es gerade wieder herzustellen oder neu zu erfinden gilt.

Sind für die klinische Annäherung an das physische Sterben letztlich die Referenzen auf einen spekulativen Begriff des Todestriebes besser aufzugeben, um nicht den Kontakt mit der Wirklichkeit dieser letzten Phase der Existenz zu verlieren (M'Uzan 1977, 120ff.), so scheint sich für die psychoanalytische Auseinandersetzung mit den Formen des Todestriebes als unbewusster Geschichte der "Triebschicksale" Freuds Darstellung aus seinem Text "Das Motiv der Kästchenwahl" anzubieten (Freud 1948, 64–82). Die Mutter in ihrer dritten Gestalt nach Geburt und Ödipuskomplex wird hierin im Verlauf des Lebens die "schweigende Göttin des Todes", die jeden Menschen am Ende seines Lebens in ihre Arme nimmt. Hängt dies möglicherweise mit Freuds Wunsch eines Inzeststrebens zusammen, womit sich das unbewusste Überdauern des Inzesttabus innerhalb der Erstellung des Begriffs des Todestriebes bei ihm zeigen würde? Oder handelt es sich um eine neurotische Kompromissgestalt der verbotenen Mutter, die nun im Tod selbst wiederkehrt (Barande 1968, 15–31)? Wenn Freud sich diesen Zusammenhang offensichtlich selbst nicht bewusst gemacht hat, dann läge in der Verknüpfung von Inzest/Tod eine für seine Psychoanalyse eigene "Unsterblichkeit" – nämlich ein "unendlicher Exzess des Lebens" nach Slavoj Žižek: "Die eigentliche Lehre der Psychoanalyse ist, dass das menschliche Leben nie einfach 'nur Leben' ist. Menschen sind nicht einfach lebendig, sie sind besessen von dem seltsamen Trieb, das Leben exzessiv zu genießen, und hängen leidenschaftlich an einem Überschuss, der hervorsticht und den normalen Gang der Dinge zum Scheitern bringt." (Žižek 2006, 61)

Wie aufgezeigt, spricht besonders die jüngere Psychoanalyse demzufolge überall vom Tod, der sich ins Leben selbst einnistet, so dass ein gewisser "Monismus des Nichts" gegeben wäre, der Gefahr läuft, dass das "Begehren des Todes" mit dem "Tod des Begehrens" identisch wird. Aber lenkt tatsächlich alles Leben zum Tod hin, womit sich ein unzugängliches Jenseits oder Diesseits des Analysierbaren überhaupt ergäbe? Die analytisch-therapeutische Logik, welche hier am Werk ist, dürfte dann eine solche der Substantialisierung des Todestriebes sein, nämlich als

Zerstörung und Selbstzerstörung, Apathie und Gewalt oder Nirvana und Erregungsleere beziehungsweise Auflösung, Entsymbolisierung und Trennung. Es ließe sich dann insgesamt festhalten, dass solche Logik hier die Wiederholung als Tautologie des Diskurses schlechthin wäre (Neyraut 1977). Dabei bliebe allerdings die Frage offen, ob die verschiedenen Manifestationsweisen des Todestriebes nicht wie mythische Wesen wirken, die sich weniger klinisch beobachten lassen als vielmehr einen transindividuellen Kampf anzeigen, der sich bei allen Menschen wiederfindet. Dadurch wäre der Todestrieb eine Art Ursprungssymbol für den metapsychologischen "Apparat der Seele" (Freud), über dessen spekulative Existenz die Psychoanalyse als eine Art Tragik der Psyche wie Ethik verfügen würde, um jedes Übermaß zu verstehen und eventuell zu sublimieren. Es ist dann allerdings immer noch gegenreduktiv zu vertiefen, ob das Leben – verstanden in seiner rein phänomenologischen Selbstgebung seit Husserl (Popa et al. 2014, 17ff., 103ff. und 245ff.) – eine solche Idee des Todestriebes überhaupt zulässt. Dessen Wirklichkeit müsste ja in diesem Leben selbst begründet sein, welches eine Differenz zu sich selbst in seinem immanent affektiven Selbsterscheinen ausschließt. Wenn aber keine ursprüngliche Differenz gegeben ist, lässt sich auch nur von einem ontischen Dualismus ausgehen, wie Freud es stets getan hat, da er antagonistische Kräfte benötigte, um die unbewusste Logik von Topik und Ökonomie energetisch dynamisieren zu können.

Verglichen mit der ursprünglichen Passibilität des Mich fallen solche Antagonismen als konstruierte *Vorstellungen* über ein mythologisierendes Ursprungsgeschehen dahin. Das Primäre ist phänomenologisch nicht das Originäre, auch wenn dieses Primäre sehr früh zu psychischen Verzerrungen führen mag, welche die weitere Existenz eines Individuums beeinträchtigen können. Aber es handelt sich um Verzerrungen im Leben selbst, welche weiterhin eine Modalisierung desselben beinhalten, in der die reine Potentialität des Lebens als die stets gegebene Selbstoffenbarung seiner inneren Veränderung von Freude/Schmerz keineswegs aufgehoben wird. Diese Nicht-Aufhebung des Eigenwesens des Lebens im radikal phänomenologischen Sinne ständig historialer

Selbstveränderung wie auch kultureller "Selbststeigerung" (Henry 1994, 281ff.) bleibt die Grundlage für alle lebendigen Rückverwandlungen von letalen Tendenzen, die daher nicht in einem biologisch oder struktural hypostasierten "Todestrieb" festgeschrieben werden sollten. Jede immanente Modalisierung entspricht einem transzendentalen Vollzug der Subjektivität insgesamt, indem diese dem Leben schon immer unmittelbar als Verlebendigung "zugestimmt" hat, das heißt dem "Realen" einer inneren Lebensselbstverwirklichung ohne Tod, da dieser in keinem Vollzug gegeben ist, insofern letzterer die apodiktische Lebendigkeit jeweils voraussetzt.

Den "Todestrieb" in analytisch-therapeutischer Hinsicht mit Blick auf eine gewisse psychologische Logik des objektal fixierten Begehrens aufzudecken, findet daher seine Grenze an jener effektiv originären Passibilität, die ein solcher Todestrieb nicht zu hinterschreiten vermag, weil sich in dieser originären Selbstaffektion das Leben immer schon leiblich ohne irgendeine Einschränkung bejaht – das heißt ohne Negativität oder Differenz "selbst umschlungen" hat (Henry). Demzufolge kann der Todestrieb weder für die Todesabwehr noch für die Todeszustimmung letztlich herangezogen werden (Kühn 2019 [1], 119–36), da es sich in der äußersten Wahrheitserprobung des Sterbens als Passibilität des Mich um die reine Präsenz des "Lebens des Lebens" (Augustinus, Spinoza, Hegel, Maine de Biran, Fichte, Husserl, Henry) selbst handelt. Begriffe wie Realität, Schicksal, Ananke, Unbewusstes oder Todestrieb sind bei Freud säkularisierte Hypostasierungen eines "negativ Absoluten", das er indirekt benötigte, um seine "Resignation" vor dem Wirklichen in eine sublimierte Ethik verwandeln zu können, welche die "Selbstachtung" aufrecht erhalten möchte, ohne weiter nach deren ursprünglich immanenter Ermöglichung fragen zu müssen.

Darin folgt ihm die neuere Psychoanalyse im postmodernen Sinne insoweit (Goldberg 2001, 49–60; Pirard 2010; Thiberge 2018, 479ff.), als sie eine Logik der Differenz oder Alterität bevorzugt, um die letale beziehungsweise nicht-relationale Negativität der Idealisierungen prägnanter hervortreten lassen zu können. Dies ist heuristisch legitim,

klärt uns aber gerade nicht phänomenologisch über die transzendental lebendige Kraft des Vollzuges selbst auf, mit der sie auch wieder rückgängig gemacht werden können – denn es ist dieselbe passible Kraft, welche sich im Sterben als diejenige des Lebens und unserer selbst erweisen dürfte. Sowohl von ihren tragenden Grundbegriffen her, die sich besonders im Bereich des Unbewussten, Affektiven und Begehrens überkreuzen, dürfte es für Psychoanalyse und Phänomenologie von Interesse sein, ihr Gespräch gegenwärtig zu intensivieren (Gondek und Tengelyi 2011, 260–317; Loch 1989, 57–123; IWK 1996; Heim 1998, 89–105; Bernet 2013). Denn nicht nur die methodischen und epistemologischen Fragen angesichts fragmentierter Existenz heute warten auf Antwort, um die Individuen in ihrer je singulären Erfahrung stützen zu können, sondern auch der umfassendere kulturelle Bereich kann nicht allein den vielfältig präsenten "Todesspiralen" überlassen bleiben (Kühn 2023, 103ff.). Dies nicht aus einer post-postmodernen restaurativen Sicht heraus, sondern gerade weil die transzendental lebendige Subjektivität in der originären Lage ist, auf alle Seinsweisen kreative Modalisierungen im Sinne der nie unterbrochenen immanenten Lebensbewegung zu finden. Dies ist keine Frage von Optimismus oder Pessimismus, sondern eine originär mitgegebene Einstellung zur "Realität", wie sie sich sowohl aus phänomenologischer wie analytisch-therapeutischer Haltung prinzipiell ergibt, der wir zum Abschluss auch in der dekonstruktivistischen Perspektive noch nachgeben wollen.

## 4. Derridas Kritik am Todestrieb als Machtanspruch

Denn insofern Jacques Derrida (Derrida 1980, 196ff. Ders. 1987) der Psychoanalyse einen ungelösten Bezug zu Macht/Autorität vorwirft, der mit dem Todestrieb als "Wiederholung" selbst verbunden sei, um die eigene theoretische Position auf diese Weise zu festigen, bietet es sich an, diesem kritischen Vorwurf detaillierter nachzugehen. Sollte nämlich die zuletzt erwähnte psychische "Logik des Nichts" ihre unbewusst analytisch-therapeutische Macht stützen, dann birgt dies ein unaufgeklärtes Verhältnis zur eigenen Disziplin, das zu erhellen bleibt. Indem Derrida daher besonders an

Freuds spekulativer Schrift "Jenseits des Lustprinzips" zur maßgeblichen metapsychologischen Grundlegung des Todestriebes den Status der Freudschen *écriture* diskutiert, die zwischen persönlichen Mitteilungen, empirischen Beobachtungen und biologischen Theorieelementen ständig wechsele, um die hervortretende Aporie jeweils zu verlagern, legt Derrida zugleich relevante Bezüge auch zu Heidegger wie Lacan offen. Prinzipiell hält Derrida fest, dass einerseits zwar jeder Ursprung bei Freud als eine philosophische Spekulation abgewiesen werde, andererseits jedoch das "Lustprinzip" gerade als eine "*ursprüngliche* Funktion des psychischen Apparates" selbst betrachtet werde. Dies schließt nicht nur ein, dass eine ständige "Übertragung des Grundes" (*fonds*) in die Sprache stattfindet, sondern darüber hinaus der überall präsente "Bemächtigungstrieb" gemäß Freud eine "Quasi-Transzendentalität" der Triebhaftigkeit schlechthin darstellt. Denn diese Bemächtigung wirke sich nicht nur als eine inter-affektive Macht aus, insofern sie alle Affekte und Triebe betreffen soll, sondern zusätzlich impliziere gleichzeitig das beobachtete "Fort/Da"-Spiel von Freuds kleinem Enkel eine nahezu ontologisch interpretierte Dialektik von Entfernen/Herbeiholen. Dadurch gehe diese zunächst rein persönliche Beobachtung Freuds mit der zukünftigen "richtigen" Weitergabe der Psychoanalyse in den 1930er Jahren an die Folgegeneration eine unbewusste Verbindung ein, um die Macht seiner Interpretation der Psychoanalyse zu festigen (Derrida 1980, 380, 406, 420ff. und 483–84).

Dabei steht genau die Kontroverse von Dualismus/Monismus der analytischen Lehre in Auseinandersetzung mit C.G. Jung im Hintergrund, das heißt jene zuvor genannte einheitliche "Bemächtigung", die "ursprünglicher als jede Macht" sei, insoweit darin eine Transzendenz am Werk ist, die eher an Nietzsches "Bejahung des Lebens" erinnere, als die von Freud vorgetragene Hypothese des Todestriebes als einer Rückkehr ins Anorganische stütze. Außerdem wäre dergestalt in dieser allgegenwärtigen Bemächtigungswirklichkeit gedanklich ein Wahrheitsbegriff auszumachen, der die Wahrheit bis zu ihrer "Nacktheit" selbst entbergen möchte, während jede Idealität als

Logik der Signifikanten einen "Schleier" bedeutet. Dadurch idealisiere aber Freud selbst das "wahre Sprechen" (*parole vraie*) als seine innerste persönliche wie analytisch-therapeutische Intention, dass nämlich sein "Sagen-Wollen" als "Deutung" keinerlei Täuschung zulassen will. Auf diese Weise korrelierten dann naturgemäß "Bemächtigungstrieb" und individuelles Wollen des Analytikers als "Herr (*maître*) der Wahrheit" miteinander, da Sprechen (*parole*) und Symptom in einem interpretierten Akt zusammenfielen, wo das bisher "leere Sagen" des Patienten als bloßes Bedürfnis einen "Anruf an die Wahrheit" bilde. Die Autorität eines solch entschleiernden Wahrheitskonzeptes als "Entzifferung" enthalte demzufolge im dekonstruktiven Sinne einen allgemeinen Machtanspruch der Psychoanalyse, der Andere von ebenso gerechtfertigten Symptomdeutungen prinzipiell ausschließe, was eben ein unaufgeklärter theoretischer wie praktischer Hoheitsanspruch bliebe.

Auf dieser Ebene findet dann ebenfalls die kritische Auseinandersetzung mit Lacan als deklariertem Erbe Freuds statt, insofern die Zirkularität der Signifikantenkette analog eine transzendentale Anpassung der Lacanschen Topologie von "Mangel/Loch" beim Subjekt darstelle (Kühn 2019 [2], 264–306). Dadurch gäbe es nämlich so etwas wie einen "Vertrag", der von einem "Loch" (*trou*) zum anderen im subjektiven Signifikanten-Intervall weiterleite, so dass es niemals zu einem "Verlust des Signifikanten" *selbst* käme, der für Derridas grundlegende Texttheorie als "Dissemination" zentral ist. Was bei Freud die "Wiederholung" in Bemächtigung und Todestrieb ausmache, sei bei Lacan daher das "phallische Ich" (*moi phallique*), da der Verlauf der individuellen Bahn (*trajet*) von Mangel zu Mangel als sich entfremdendes "Subjekt" (*sujet*) dessen "Unterwerfung" (*sujétion*) beinhalte. Nimmt man die ausführliche Stellungnahme Derridas zu Freud und Lacan zusammen, dann ergibt sich außerdem eine bemerkenswerte Analogie zwischen der Psychoanalyse und Heidegger. Denn die "ontologische Differenz" von Sein/Seiendem als Ereignis von Entbergung/Schleier macht den Zusammenhang von Buchstabe/Sein selbst aus – bildet mit anderen Worten als Kastration die Wahrheit jedes Seienden. Da solche Kastration

analytisch-therapeutisch zum "Eigenen" (*le propre*) des Individuums führen soll, impliziert das Reale des Mangels im Verhältnis des Subjekts zu sich selbst den eigentlichen "Ort", wo sich dieses Eigene ausspreche. Und hier kann Derrida seine frühe dekonstruktive Kritik am "Phonozentrismus" zum Tragen bringen, dass nämlich die Wahrheit des Signifikanten die "Phonetisierung des Buchstabens (*lettre*)" selbst als Stimme bei Freud wie Lacan darstelle (Derrida 1980, 449–50, 474–75 und 487; 1967; 1979).

Hieraus ergibt sich dann konsequenterweise Derridas abschließendes Verständnis der Psychoanalyse. Sie ist der "ideale Prozess" des "erfüllten Wortes" (*parole pleine*), nämlich die Verwirklichung der "nicht entscheidbaren Singularität" durch die "Bahn" der "Annahme des Begehrens" hindurch, mithin durch die subjektive Einlösung der Kastration. Das erfüllte Sprechen als singulärer Aktvollzug des Patienten, um die Zufälligkeiten der Vergangenheit durch die Kur neu zu ordnen, verleihe ihnen – anders gesagt – den Sinn der kommenden subjektiven Notwendigkeiten, die wenig Freiheit im Sinne des "Realitätsprinzips" einschlössen. Diese "Bemächtigung" bisheriger Wiederholungen ist aber im Grunde gemäß Derrida ein "hermeneutischer Zirkel", nämlich den bis dahin abwehrenden Schirm des Narzissmus zugunsten einer Schuld (*dette*) einzulösen, die der "Verantwortung" verpflichtet sei, was dem Unbewussten im Sinne Freuds als ethischer Aufgabe einschließlich möglicher Sublimierung entspreche (Rath 2021). Mit Blick auf Lacan bedeutet dies parallel die Unsagbarkeit des Signifikanten, womit aber gerade die transzendentale Position des Phallus als herrschende Signifikantenkette etabliert bleibe, und zwar mit der jeweils eigenen Stimme im Zentrum, auch wenn der letzte "Sinn" angesichts des "Realen" durch die *parole pleine* nicht sagbar ist (Till 2013). Bemächtigung und Todestrieb als nie unterbrochene, sich wiederholende Signifikantenkette verbinden dementsprechend in den Augen Derridas Macht und Psychoanalyse miteinander, um nämlich als Durchquerung des je relativen Sinnes dabei an den Anspruch der Wahrheit als Entbergen in deren Nacktheit gebunden zu bleiben. Auf diese speziell inter-subjektive Weise – nämlich zusammen mit der

Übertragung in der Kur – könne solche Praxis dem Selbstverständnis der Psychoanalyse nach von keiner anderen Disziplin übernommen werden, woraus sich gerade auch das ebenso kritische wie problematische analytisch-therapeutische Verhältnis zum philosophischen Denken allgemein seit Freud ergebe. Der Todestrieb als spekulatives Konstrukt ist damit in Derridas post-strukturalistischer Sichtweise aufgelöst, weil er ein Produkt der literarischen wie persönlichen Schreibweise (*écriture*) Freuds darstelle, Wiederholung und Wahrheit jenseits des narzisstischen Schleiers bewusst zu machen, um das Sagen-Wollen als "Deutung" im Sprachvollzug der Kur adäquat zu verwirklichen.

Auch wenn die weiteren postmodernen Infragestellungen der Psychoanalyse nicht so differenziert sind wie bei Derrida, lohnt es sich, sie hier am Schluss mit zur Kenntnis zu nehmen, um einen gewissen Überblick zu gewähren, da sie gleichfalls eine Kritik am Machtaspekt bei Freud beinhalten. So stellt Michel Foucault die Freudsche Lehre als einen orthodoxen Korpus in Frage, weil er die – durch Wissenschafts- und Machtdiskurse – fragilisierten Körper der Individuen einer "Allmacht des Analytikers" in dessen einseitigem Deutungsanspruch ausgeliefert sieht. Zwar habe die Psychoanalyse den Patienten aus moralischen Zwängen freigesetzt, aber zugleich habe Freud "dagegen die Struktur, welche die ärztliche Gestalt einhüllte, ausgebeutet, indem er deren thaumaturgischen Kräfte erweitert und dem Arzt den quasi göttlichen Status der Allmächtigkeit verliehen hat" (Foucault 1961, 535; 1969). Diese Kritik im Namen einer Dekonstruktion omnipotenter Vernunft-, Interpretations- oder Heilungsansprüche gewann etwa gleichzeitig bei Gilles Deleuze und Félix Guattari eine ähnliche Wendung hinsichtlich einer notwendig zu aktualisierenden "Religionskritik", die mit Rückgriff auf Nietzsche den neuen Priesterbetrug attackierte: "Die Psychoanalyse übernimmt die Ausbildung eines neuen Typus von Priester, eines Pädagogen des schlechten Gewissens: es macht einen krank, aber es heilt einen auch wieder." (Deleuze und Guattari 1972, 390; 2005) Bei Jean-François Lyotard ergab sich aus diesen wirkungsgeschichtlichen Betrachtungsweisen der Lehre Freuds – zusammen mit einer

Skepsis gegenüber den "Metaerzählungen" bei Hegel und Marx – ein unmittelbar postmodernes Plädoyer für die Inanspruchnahme der Libido als einer "subversiven Wende": "Man muss das Auftauchen dieser Dispositive [kapitalistischer Produktionsweise] im gesellschaftlichen Körper genauso auffassen wie die Libidobesetzungen des erotischen Körpers: unvereinbar, zufallsbedingt, gleichzeitig, unterbrochen." (Lyotard 1994, 21; Flournoy 2003) Nach dieser Bündelung postmoderner Perspektiven gegenüber Freud und der nachfolgenden Psychoanalyse bis Lacan und darüber hinaus bleibt folglich die kritische Rückfrage an ihren methodischen wie inhaltlichen Allgemeinanspruch der Deutung des Triebschicksals gegeben. Und darüber hinaus ist zugleich aus der Sicht einer radikalen Phänomenologie festzuhalten (Kühn 2020, 52ff.), dass die Frage einer absolut lebendigen Ursprungswirklichkeit als Untersuchungsgegenstand zwischen Psychoanalyse sowie phänomenologischem und dekonstruktivem Denken für die Zukunft offen zu halten ist, um den gewaltigen kulturellen Ansprüchen gerecht zu werden, die sich aus dem unauflöslichen Verhältnis von Trieb/Leben ergeben.

**ANMERKUNGEN**

[1] Es wäre hier für eine umfassende Diskussion das "Urkind" im Sinne Husserls mit einzubeziehen, welches noch keinerlei transzendentalen Erfahrungshorizont welthafter Konstitutionsmöglichkeiten herausgebildet hat, so wie das rein subjektive Leben mithin ebenfalls einem ontisch Primären vorgelagert ist

[2] In diesem Sinne erweiterte Paul Ricœur die Phänomenologie um das "hermeneutische Feld" der Affekte und energetisch-ökonomischen Kräfte als seine Lektüre der Psychoanalyse

[3] Ein erhellendes Beispiel hierfür ist die gegenwärtige Revision des Begriffs des *Autismus* als einer eigenständigen Wahrnehmungsweise.

[4] Für Julia Kristeva artikuliert sich die Gemeinsamkeit von Depression, Melancholie und Todestrieb als Zusammenbruch der biographischen und logischen Sequenz des Begehrens, wodurch der Todestrieb als primäre Diskontinuität von Trauma und Verlust aufträte.

[5] Diese "konservierende" und "potentialisierende" Sichtweise des Todestriebes als "Vitalinstinkt" wurde besonders von Melanie Klein und D.W. Winnicott weitergeführt.
[6] Daher sei hier erwähnt, dass Lacan den Begriff des "primären Masochismus" für überholt hält, denn in seiner Analyse bindet er Todestrieb und Wiederholung an jenen Augenblick, "wo das Begehren sich vermenschlicht", das heißt als "Mord am Ding", in die Verunendlichung des Begehrens als symbolische Ordnung eintritt. Das Schweigen des Todestriebs korreliert daher mit dem Schweigen im Diskurs als Intervall der Signifikantenkette, in die sich das subjektive Leben einschreibt, weshalb Lacan den Todestrieb anerkennt, aber *sprachlich* versteht).

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# The Inclusive Therapeutic Method: Ethical Intertwinings

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**Abstract**

This article proposes an inclusive therapeutic method by which the *self* recognizes itself in its relation to itself, with the other, with the world and with the body. These dimensions make up its existential integrity. When one of these dimensions compromise itself, all the others compromise themselves as well. Thus, in order to achieve an inclusive equilibrium, therapeutic treatment needs to reestablish the dimensions of the *self*. This treatment will seek a possible trigger for the *self* to be able to live spatiotemporally. To make this possible, ethics and therapy intertwine themselves. In other words, the conception of ethics intertwines itself with existential integrity.

**Keywords:** inclusive therapy, inclusive equilibrium, existential integrity, ethics

## Introduction

The proposal of an inclusive therapeutic method will foster an integrity of the *self* by including the dimensions of the *self* in the therapeutic process. The dimensions of the *self* will involve the *self*, the other, the body, and the world. These dimensions make up its existential integrity. When one of these dimensions compromise itself, all the others compromise themselves as well. Thus, in order to achieve an inclusive equilibrium, namely, to provide conditions for human beings to find possibilities to lead their lives, therapeutic treatment needs to reestablish the dimensions of the *self*. The inclusive equilibrium takes place through the reestablishment of something that weakened or broke one of the dimensions of

the *self*. This means that the *self* is capable of relating with itself, with the other, with its body and with the world.

In order to elucidate this reestablishment or weakening/break of the dimensions of the *self*, we will use the metaphor of the *wires*. Somehow, we connect ourselves through wires that make up our *self*. These wires connect our *self* to its own self-relation, to the body, to the other, and to the world. When these wires weaken or break, we left ourselves without the link that enables an inclusive equilibrium. This inclusive equilibrium occurs when we live within our existential integrity as human beings, being able to deal with adversity, problems and trauma. We can say that when the human being has existential integrity, she is equally able to realize herself in her own existence.

When a single wire that connects one of the dimensions of the *self*, which makes up its existential integrity, breaks or weakens, all the other wires weaken or break together. Henceforth, the *self* loses its inclusive equilibrium, to wit, it loses the ability to organize *itself* passively and actively, being unable to interpret its life in a balanced way and with integrity.

Now, if we are able, from therapeutic aid, to reestablish one of these wires again, we can strengthen or even reconnect the *self* to its existential integrity, namely, all the other wires will jointly reestablish themselves to its existential basis. But how can we act therapeutically to achieve such a reestablishment of the *self*, making it recognize itself again as a being capable and transformative agent of its own history?

The inclusive therapeutic method is intertwined with ethics by the fact that we live in the world, where we interact with other people. This means that we need a supportive social structure to lead our lives in integrity. Thus, therapy becomes inclusive to the extent that it finds space-time possibilities of ethical realization. In this regard, the way we respond to the dimensions of the *self*, which constitute existential integrity, will lead us to an existential responsibility. In this context, this article will encourage a responsive attitude that glimpses our responsibility towards existential integrity. Therefore, it will endeavor to propose

that every human being who responds to the *life-world* has existential responsibility and this necessarily leads us to a more just world because such justice provides integrity.

## 1. The self-relation of the self

Foucault reminds us in his book *The hermeneutics of the subject* that for the Greeks/Romans to know yourself (*gnothi seauton*) was not separated from *the care of oneself* (*epimeleia heauton*) (Foucault 2005, 2-4; French 2001, 2-3). In his reading, this period extends through the Socratic-Platonic moment to the Hellenistic-Roman moment. With Christian culture, the *care of oneself* will come to understand itself as a selfish act, and with modernity, there will be a definite separation between *knowing yourself* and *caring of oneself*. In this sense, Foucault raises a question: Why have we throughout history set aside *the care of oneself* to privilege the *knowing yourself*?

For Foucault, in the modern period there was an abandonment of spirituality in its relationship with knowledge. This spirituality characterizes itself by the search, practice and experience through which the subject performs the necessary transformations in herself in order to have access to the truth. Foucault regards spirituality as the pursuits, practices and exercises, taken as purifications, ascetic practices, renunciations, conversion of the gaze, modifications of existence, etc. The abandonment of this spirituality Foucault will call the Cartesian moment (Foucault 2005, 14; French 2001, 15). Henceforth, the pursuit of knowledge is by the very activity of knowledge itself.

In the first Socratic-Platonic moment between the fourth and fifth century BC, according to Foucault, the *epimeleia heautoun* arises in philosophical relations, particularly in the *Apology of Socrates*. This book chronicles the passage from the Alcibiades position of greatness, wealth, traditional family to his desire to rule the city-state. Yet he had not prepared sufficiently to undertake such a task. Thus, Socrates says that one cannot govern others well in rational actions if there is no care for oneself.

In the first and second century BC, for Foucault, it is no longer about what Socrates said to Alcibiades: if you want to rule others, take *care of yourself*. Now it is said: take *care of yourself* and that is all. The philosopher is the one who helps the construction of the subject's relationship with herself, the one who mediates the change from *stultitia* to *sapientia* (Foucault 2005, 135; French 2001, 130), as if she were a doctor who heals and treats a patient. Another important element studied by Foucault is that the *care of oneself* is no longer a transitional element that leads to something else, the welfare of the city-state, or others; it emerges more from a self-sufficient end of the *self*. Consequently, the *self* is the ultimate and only goal of *care of oneself*. For the author, a *techne tou biou* (Foucault 2005, 177-178; French 2001, 171) is given, that is, an art, a reflective method for conducting life, and a technique of life. One identifies here an art of existence with the *care of oneself*. The question that then arises will be, how can I be transformed, converted (*metanoia*) to be able to have access to the truth?

These moments, identified by Foucault, show that it is necessary *to take care of oneself* and, for this, we need to take time to devote to the *self*. Time required being ready for life's events. This time of *self*-preparation is aided by someone who instructs us. If this process of immanent knowledge and care is not sufficiently well accomplished, the *self* will not be in a position to govern anyone, nor will it be able to face the difficulties that life presents. Through this appropriate historical analysis made by Foucault, a question arises: but how do we find the right technique for the *self* to prepare itself for life?

In the wake of Foucault, the inclusive therapeutic method will present several forms so that one can find a way of *knowing yourself*, of *caring of oneself* and to prepare oneself for life. Therefore, the therapeutic process will seek to find a trigger for the *self* to reestablish the wires that have weakened or broken themselves, causing problems in the composition of existential integrity.

The word trigger will be helpful in the sense of liberating the *self* from what causes its imbalance, making it

impossible for it to live with integrity. By these terms, the trigger is a liberation that enables the reestablishment of existential integrity. What can cause this triggering can be a technique, a situation, a spirituality, a contact, a scenario, a practice, anything that causes the *self* to return to its integrity. It is not about choosing anything, but knowing which of these possibilities would the best help in therapy. Thus, in the therapeutic process, it is necessary to talk with the patient, to know their beliefs, their history, and through dialogue, come together to what could make the *self* return to a shared meaning.

Concerning the self-relation of the *self*, one could find means that could trigger its self-esteem, well-being, the will to live, creativity, the critical spirit, and so on. Nevertheless, what could trigger these factors? Various things, such as music, theater, dance, art, work, spirituality, sport, reading, in short, a number of factors that would help the *self* to care for oneself. The choice of a trigger should be discussed between the patient and the therapist so that the patient can choose according to its own possibilities. The choice would engage the patient's empathy to the object of the trigger.

The patient would have an attitude of *taking care of oneself* through something that could reestablish contact with oneself. However, of freeing itself from the repressive bolts that have been forming throughout its history and which causes the *self* to be in a state of imbalance. Thus, for example, phobias, hatred, exacerbated selfishness, depression, acute pride, preconceptions, feelings that cause emotional upheavals, could be overcome through triggering practices, i.e., liberation and reestablishment of the *self*, so that the individual can prepare for the challenges that life presents to her.

In Brazil, there are several cases where, through playful or practical triggers, i.e. projects related to sports, art, music, waste recycling and many other manual practices, many people freed themselves from drugs, from street violence, from deep depression. Thus, they can reestablish their self-esteem; learn to cherish their neighbors in their differences, and to seek not isolation but interest in other people. These triggers cause the *self* to reconstruct its attitude

towards the *life-world*. For example, if someone has problems with her self-esteem, she will certainly have problems in her relationships with others. She will have difficulty exploring spatiality and she will have a world accessibility problem with her body.

With therapeutic help, the individual will be able to reestablish the broken or weakened wire, seeking, through dialogue, a suitable trigger so that she can regain her internal coherence.

The reestablishment of the self-relation of the *self* accomplishes itself when all the dimensions of the *self* are in integrity with one another. Thus, in order to be well it is also necessary to change the lifestyle. Alfred Adler, who worked and conducted research with Freud, points out that it is not just that we change the emotions that cause problems affecting our well-being. They will remedy themselves if the individual changes her lifestyle (Adler 1952, 47). In these terms, the author argues that the treatment of a symptom or a singular expression should correct itself in our entire lifestyle. Adler states that lifestyles are the subject of psychology and the material for research (Adler 1952, 48).

Of course, it is necessary to have internal coherence and to do that, spend time with oneself. For example, we need to be alone with ourselves, reflect on our beliefs, our problems, our joys, but we always have to stylize it in our lives. We need to be alone at certain times, as many times as we need to reflect on our lives, our relationships, our well-being, and our realization as human beings. These moments are fundamental to consolidate meanings, to know and take care of oneself.

Hannah Arendt already stressed thinking as a solitary activity, although not isolated, because when we think we are always in company, even if it is our own (Arendt 1978, (Part I) 185). Arendt will call solitude that human situation in which the individual keeps company with herself. This dualism between the world and me, between me and myself is presented by Arendt by the two-in-one (*eme emauto*) in Socrates, that is, of my dialogue with myself, in which I am simultaneously one and I am plural. Socrates seeks internal coherence, seeking to be consistent with himself (Arendt 1978,

(Part I) 186). For Socrates, while loving the public market, he must return home, where he will be alone, in solitude, in order to meet the other (Arendt 1978, (Part I) 190).

Although we seek to defend the human being in her existential integrity and how she needs to be considered through the dimensions that make up this dimensionality, it is necessary to visualize each part of the *self*, because all have an original presence that help us strengthen the whole of the *self*. Thus, the self-relation of the *self* has its own original presence that dialogues with the integrality of the *self*, intertwining its identity. By these terms, we will all have the experience of being alone at some point, and we need to enjoy this being alone to create consistency with ourselves.

Both the first part of the summary of the law (*love your neighbor as yourself*) and Ricoeur's proposal for self-esteem foster the need for self-esteem (Ricouer 1990, 211). Nevertheless, how to deal with ourselves, our problems, our traumas? Many people cannot solve or find an internal consistency alone. They need the other. In this case, the therapist comes to participate in the process of internal cohesion in order to help the individual to find internal coherence.

In psychotherapy, the process of regaining *self-esteem*, *self-coherence*, and *self-consciousness* is often a gradual journey that involves exploring emotions, thoughts, and behaviors.

*Self-esteem* refers to the value and worth someone attributes to themselves. Low *self-esteem* can stem from negative self-perceptions, past failures, or criticism. Psychotherapy often helps individuals rebuild *self-esteem* through validation, self-compassion, and reframing negative beliefs. For example: a client with low *self-esteem* might constantly criticize herself for past mistakes. A therapist may use *Cognitive Behavioral Therapy (CBT)* (Beck, 2011) to challenge these negative self-judgments. For instance, if the client says, *"I'm not good enough"*, the therapist might ask, *"What evidence do you have that you are not good enough?"* The therapist could help the client identify positive qualities,

past successes, and strengths, slowly shifting her perspective to see herself more positively.

*Self-coherence* is the ability to maintain a consistent sense of *self*, even in the face of challenges. It involves integration of different aspects of the *self* into a unified whole. Therapy can support this by exploring conflicting emotions or identities and working toward reconciling them. As an example: a client who feels torn between her roles as a parent, a professional, and an individual might struggle with *self-coherence*. They might feel like different parts of her identity conflict with each other, leading to confusion or anxiety. A therapist might use *narrative therapy* (White & Epston, 1990) to help the client see how these different roles can coexist and contribute to a richer sense of *self*. The therapist might guide the client in integrating these roles into a more harmonious, coherent narrative, highlighting how each role brings value to her life. Another example is when someone feels disconnected from her true values because of external pressures (e.g., work demands or societal expectations). The therapist might help the client clarify their core values and reconnect with them, which enhances *self-coherence*.

*Self-consciousness* involves an awareness of oneself and one's thoughts, emotions, and actions. In therapy, this often means developing mindfulness or self-reflection to foster deeper insight and emotional regulation. A person who tends to react impulsively to stress might have low self-consciousness about her emotions and reactions. In therapy, they may practice *mindfulness techniques* (Williams et al. 2007) to become more aware of their internal states in real-time. For example, the therapist might guide the client through exercises that encourage pausing before reacting, observing thoughts without judgment, and noticing physical sensations related to emotions. Over time, the client becomes more attuned to her emotional triggers and can respond more thoughtfully instead of reacting automatically. For someone who struggles with self-consciousness in social situations (e.g., feeling excessively anxious about how she is perceived by others), a therapist might explore the roots of these feelings and work on building self-acceptance. The therapist may use

*exposure therapy* (Foa et al. 2007) to gradually help the client face feared social situations, which allows them to build a more realistic and compassionate awareness of themselves.

Therapy not only aims to support the individual in navigating daily life but also serves to address moments of loneliness, guiding individuals toward self-awareness and self-care. Through this process, the individual can discover her ability (*Ich kann*) (Husserl 1952, 345) and the possibility to deliberate, cultivating the necessary *self-esteem* to be more prepared for interactions with others and their environment. As the other is integral to the dimension that constitutes the *self,* a fundamental question arises: how can one live ethically to achieve integrity in her existence as beings who share the same world?

## 2. The otherness of the self

The other that is a problem, but also a solution, the one we hate and love, also gives us the possibility of externalizing feelings, emotions, sadness, joy, hatred and love. The other will always be a challenge that calls us to life or plot our death. The other is in front of us (Merleau-Ponty 2012, 483), insistent, whether we like it or not, she demands answers.

The presence of the other should be a factor of esteem, sharing, healing and not hate or disgust. This reversal of feelings occurs because the other is not viewed with esteem but as a means for us (Kant 2011, 85) to achieve an end of particular interest, or other selfish inclination. In this fashion, the other is not seen as another *self*, that is, that needs existential integrity like anyone else. The relationship between the many selves should be therapeutic, to wit, of sharing, of complicity of meaning.

The other is both a problem and a solution, a figure we love and hate, yet one that enables us to externalize feelings—joy, sadness, hatred, and affection. Always present before us (Merleau-Ponty 2012, 483), the other demands a response, whether we welcome it or resist it. The presence of another should foster esteem, sharing, and healing rather than aversion or disgust. However, this dynamic is often inverted when the other is instrumentalized, treated as a means to an

end rather than recognized as a self with the same existential integrity (Kant 2011, 85). True intersubjectivity calls for a relationship of therapeutic engagement, one of shared meaning and complicity rather than alienation.

Yet, in many cases, individuals struggle to form meaningful connections, leading to isolation and interpersonal deficits. This chronic disconnection, characterized by social withdrawal, loneliness, and impaired social skills, becomes the focus of Interpersonal Psychotherapy (IPT) when patients do not present with acute relational crises such as grief or role disputes (Weissman et al. 2018, 73). Rather than facing explicit interpersonal conflicts, they suffer from an absence of social bonds, which exacerbates depressive symptoms (ibid., 74).

At its core, IPT seeks to reestablish the presence of the other as a force for healing rather than alienation. Therapy works toward alleviating isolation by strengthening existing relationships, fostering new social bonds, and enhancing interpersonal confidence (ibid., 76). This process unfolds through an exploration of past relationships, emotional experiences, and current interactions—including the therapeutic alliance itself (ibid.). Patients engage in role-playing exercises to navigate social interactions, reconnect with past acquaintances, and gradually integrate into social environments. Since failure in social tasks can reinforce self-blame, IPT avoids rigid homework assignments that might increase the risk of treatment dropout (ibid., 77). Instead, therapy validates emotional struggles, reinforces successful encounters, and encourages incremental steps toward interpersonal engagement (ibid.).

Case studies illustrate how this therapeutic reorientation unfolds. Diane, a 23-year-old woman, experienced profound social discomfort, particularly around men, after leaving the structured setting of college. Therapy guided her through an examination of past relationships, role-playing interactions, and gradual social exposure, ultimately leading to improved self-confidence and diminished depressive symptoms (Weissman et al., 2018, 78). Similarly, Bill, a 41-year-old lawyer, faced barriers to emotional intimacy despite

professional success. Through therapy, he recognized patterns of communication shaped by early experiences with his mother, leading to greater self-awareness and improved relational competence (ibid., 79). Interpersonal deficits highlight the fundamental paradox of human relationships: the other, who can be both a source of alienation and of healing, is indispensable to our existence. IPT operates within this tension, seeking to shift the experience of the other from one of absence to one of meaningful presence. However, given the chronic nature of social isolation, some individuals may require alternative or complementary interventions. The success of IPT often hinges on its ability to validate experiences, mitigate self-blame, and gradually reintroduce the other as a necessary companion in the process of healing.

However, a fundamental issue arises: the pursuit of healthy interpersonal relationships may be rendered ineffective if the broader social structure is fundamentally flawed. According to John Rawls, society should recognize principles of justice that entail advantages in a well-organized society for the formation of a collective *self* (Rawls 1971, 255) whose good is in reflective equilibrium (Rawls 1971, 20) with such principles. These principles establish themselves through rational reflection (Rawls 1971, 11) by which equity, freedom, and equal opportunity would benefit all. Rawls was concerned that these principles rest not only on pure abstraction, but also on that they objective themselves in social life, where everyone worked for the mutual benefit and rational stability of justice. Thus, if people reflected on issues of inequality, they would see how much they are detrimental to a collectivity and, consequently, to each individual; but if they aimed their actions and interests at seeking greater opportunities, they would realize the enormous advantages it would bring to themselves and to all (ibid., 60-61).

One thing to note in Rawls is that the question of a well-organized society and the advantages of justice are indispensable factors for the well-being of all. For the human being to have a healthy life, society needs to be healthy. Of course, these factors are not decisive, because there are people with an ability to lead their lives in such a way that they can

face great adversity. However, imagine the person who has no job and is in great economic difficulty, who sees her family in need, her children not having access to education, health, leisure, and so on. Going further, imagine places that live in extreme poverty, high levels of violence, abuse of all sorts, without access to anything we can understand that can afford the least dignity for people. How to be healthy in a sick environment? Living in an environment where the other is a death threat is desperate for the formation of the integrity of any human being. This situation of social inequality can crumble the integrity of the *self* and shatter its dignity.

From the moment the other is a threat, something is wrong in our beliefs or in society. Adler already stressed how important it was to prepare the individual to cooperate (Adler 1952, 9) by helping others. For the author, this would bring numerous benefits to society; including society itself should provide conditions for more opportunities for all. This would reduce crime and other social injustices (ibid., 237).

If we have problems in our relationships with other people, or those problems come from social issues, we will probably have problems in our interaction with the environment and our body may even be involved in all sorts of dangers due to the injustices.

The wire that breaks with another person inhibits our actions of solidarity and corrupts the pursuit of social self-realization. According to Axel Honneth, in order to have a state of solidarity, it assumes itself that each individual is in a position to esteem each other (Honneth 1995, 128-129). In this regard, Honneth sees in asymmetrical relations a prerequisite for self-realization and social fulfillment. In this respect, esteeming each other asymmetrically means seeing each other in the light of values that allow each other's skills and traits to appear significantly in social praxis. For the author, individuals would seek recognition, since one cannot love without the participation of the other, have rights without the other, nor be a human being without the other. The struggle for mutual recognition, without losing essential traces of our individuality, builds the foundations of self-realization, thus forming a hypothetical endpoint of the good life (Honneth

1995, 168-169). In a way, self-realization is social realization. Thus, only when people recognize themselves as having affective needs, as subjects who have rights, who have singularities and abilities, contributing to ordinary life, through a shared horizon of values, can them then understand themselves as realized individuals (Junglos 2019, 38).

The ideas and proposals of the good, of good life, impregnate themselves with idealisms that are religious, moral, political, and economic. The proposal of an inclusive therapeutic method attaches itself to such a conception of good, but to an embodied ontology that already, in its existential integrity, makes the *self* an *accomplice of meaning* (Junglos 2014, 179-194). Accordingly, a proposal of the good, or the good life, which harms the existential integrity of the human being, comes only from heteronomous sources. In other words, from forged ideas, created in order to protect, feed the interests of particular groups and all sorts of determinisms. Therefore, our proposal for inclusive therapy will not stick to advantages, principles, or cooperation (Rawls and Adler), but it will see that justice must be therapeutic, that human beings must find space and time to realize themselves in a social self-realization. We would say that the idea of the good, of good life, must be in *inclusive equilibrium* with existential integrity, that is, from an embodied ontology, of which the subject, the other, the world, the body can respond to the appeals that claims its differences, which claims to participate, which claims its recognized rights.

Justice must be therapeutic to be inclusive, aiming at existential integrity. From then on, any conception of *doxa* that is lacking in an embodied ontology, that is, that represents an ontological deficit in its integrity, is doomed to its own ideologies. If, by chance, it has relations to an inclusive proposal, it is only by chance, it is only in conformity due to a coincidence; its source is heteronomous, of one dimension, and does not correspond to integrity.

Perhaps we should ask, are our religion, our ethics, our morality, and our politics in inclusive equilibrium with existential integrity? In other words, do our beliefs consider the excluded, the suffering, the wanting to be recognized, the

sick body, and the insane and polluted world? If not, it is just a truth that comes from outside and that hurts the human being in her existence.

The human being responds to her surroundings, to people, to herself, wants to live through integrity and, to that end, becomes a responsive being. Waldenfels argues that we are responsive beings *per se*, and as such, we need to justify our responses. For the author, even not answering is already an answer (Waldenfels 2000, 336). In this sense, a responsiveness demands our attitude. However, we should not act in favor of collective integrity because of the advantages or because of any particular interest, nor because of immutable principles, whether they derive themselves from human nature or coming heteronomously. Our understanding of inclusiveness emanates from the very integrity that esteems the other in her differences (Honneth), aims at the internal coherence of the human being, emanates from the structures that allow one to realize herself in space and time, that is, that a human being can find place and have the time necessary for its self-realization in society.

Responsibility does not confine itself to our individual duties and obligations. It has to do with the integrity of our experience; specifically, it has to do with our responsive attitude toward it. From this perspective, inclusive responsibility does not guide itself by rules assumed in a heteronomous way, nor by immutable principles, but through social self-realization. The appeal to advantages is very restricted, as we can see advantages while we are under their benefits. However, sometimes the struggle for public justice, for public recognition is made of blood, tears and terrible losses. Many of the achievements of those who struggled to gain space and time for social self-realization have done so for future generations. Hans Jonas, Heidegger's student and friend of Hannah Arendt, already pointed out that our responsibility should not only lie with the past, or with a present, but with the future of our planet and the people who will inhabit it (Jonas 1979, 88-108). Talking about the planet, the world we live in, how does it help in the constitution of our existential integrity?

## 3. The worldliness of the self

Human beings do not live outside the world and even if they did, they would live through another world, but never without a world. It is in this world that all of our experiences occur. In such terms, and in the wake of Husserl, we live in the *life-world* through which all our experiences realize themselves. It is through the *life-world* that the sciences derive their epistemic objectivity, but it is through their own dynamics that the sciences transform their dogmatism. The *life-world* is not a concept, but the opposite, a horizon, a ground, a gift, a foundation, a pre-given (Steinbock 1995, 87-116). In Husserl's own words: "The world is the open universe, the horizon of the termini, the universal field of what exists in which all praxis is presupposed and continually enriched by its results (Husserl 1976, 146)".

The Stoic doctrine of the Hellenistic period, already saw a certain ordered pedagogical vision in the world, that is, the world was the place where we would learn about our ethics, our reason and our soul. Nature was the source that gave us the optimum of what we would need to know. Thus, for the Stoics the purpose of human life would be to live in conformity with nature (White 2016, 139). In a way, phenomenology, with Husserl's early efforts, seeks to make the human being again consider the world as a pole, as a substratum of knowledge. However, Husserl goes beyond Stoicism, he seeks to see, also, in the world itself, in this substratum, through this pole, the constitutive source of meaning. This is because, for Husserl, the world is a substrate not only through its nature, but also through all lived experiences, and he coined the term *life-world* in order to express it. In other words, for the Stoics, nature is there, ahead of us, it is necessary just to copy it, learn from it. For Husserl, nature, or the world, is the place of experience, of the constitution of meaning (Husserl 1976, 187). Nevertheless, in Husserl, although meaning implicates itself within the world, the subject is the only one who can endow meaning (Husserl 1976, 175). Husserl moves from stoic determinism to the constitutive life that carry itself out jointly with the world.

In the wake of Husserl, Heidegger will also regard the human being as the sole endower of meaning. Thus, although *being-in-the-world* (*Dasein*) is a hermeneutic being and seeks to be authentic, constituting itself through the world, it is ultimately the only one that can give meaning (Heidegger 2010, §24, 107–110). In such wise, the meaning of things in the world is given by the way *being-in-the-world* handles them (Heidegger 2010, §12 53), uses them. Before any theoretical basis, the meaning of things in the world involves dealing with things in their manuality. In Husserl and Heidegger, there is no solipsistic being, that is, there is no isolated human being without a world, since the world is a condition of possibility for the person. Nevertheless, the human being is the only one capable of giving meaning.

Merleau-Ponty goes beyond the constitution of meaning *in* and *with* in Heidegger and the implicit constitution in Husserl, thus radicalizing the constitution of meaning, now involving a complicity of meaning. By way of explanation, now human beings are not the only endowers of meaning; there is no sense living in the world, therefore, without sharing, without intertwining; the perspective is that meaning is made in an incarnate form. The world also gives meaning, has its own significant originality.

We are beings who inhabit here, who constitute experiences here, who participate here, who meet other people, who feed here, who breathe here, but this does not give us any privilege, it only increases the responsibility for creating a time and a space of inclusion, where creation can find the necessary equilibrium for its realization. We cannot take a piece of this world, isolate ourselves, and say that here I give the orders. No one lives without contact with other people, not in a healthy way, or without a world that lacks integrity, that is, where a *self* finds itself crumbled. Our responsibility is to build a world where creation can take place, where society works for a future in which we can continue to dwell, build experiences, meet people, feed, and breathe.

Therapeutic responsibility is one that enables us to gain existential integrity. Of course, it is clear that this inclusive therapeutic proposal involves politics, ethics, that is,

a proposal for society. Hannah Arendt already emphasized that the redemption of the will cannot be mental, it redeem itself in action (Arendt 1978, 89). Accordingly, there is not integrity in a society that makes an asymmetrical inclusion policy unfeasible, that does not recognize the rights of those on the sidelines. In the book *Inclusive Hermeneutics*, we read:

Inclusive hermeneutics does not see justice as an obligation but as an achievement of humanity itself in its intertwining with the *life-world*. In this sense, as long as there are those who sleep on the dying streets without a home, those who die in hospitals without access to treatment. Who are beaten to death by their sexual orientation, who receive a stray bullet while enjoying a space that should be common to all, who has her body abused, who has her life enslaved, who has her creativity suppressed, and who has her life diminished without being able to live it. Therefore, as long as there are those who are excluded, we cannot be proud of any right, but only say that we enjoy privileges that everyone should have (Junglos 2019, 224).

Martín-Baró (1998) critiques mainstream psychology for its complicity in maintaining social structures that perpetuate oppression. He argues that traditional psychological theories often fail to account for the socio-historical determinants of human character, instead universalizing psychological constructs without considering their contextual variability. This omission results in psychological frameworks that reinforce the *status quo* by attributing individual traits to innate or fixed characteristics rather than recognizing their formation within specific socio-political conditions. As an alternative, Martín-Baró proposes a *liberation psychology* that critically examines the ideological underpinnings of psychological science, reorienting it toward addressing structural injustices and serving the needs of marginalized populations (Martín-Baró 1998, 43).

Central to Martín-Baró's argument is the conceptualization of character as a socio-historical construct rather than an isolated psychological entity. Drawing from etymology and critical theory, he defines character as a structured set of dispositions that regulate an individual's

interaction with their environment, shaped through historical and cultural determinants (Martín-Baró 1998, 42). Rejecting both biological determinism and purely social constructivist approaches, he posits that character emerges from the dialectical relationship between individuals and their socio-political conditions (ibid., 44). Moreover, he examines the role of key social institutions—including the family, education, and moral systems—in shaping psychological traits that reinforce passivity, dependence, individualism, and hypocrisy, all of which serve to sustain existing hierarchies (ibid., 65-70). By uncritically adopting typologies that obscure these socio-historical dynamics, psychology risks becoming an ideological tool rather than a means of emancipation.

Martín-Baró (1998) ultimately calls for a psychology that moves beyond its traditional theoretical constraints and engages in a praxis-oriented approach aimed at social transformation. He argues that psychological research and practice must be grounded in the lived realities of oppressed communities, fostering critical consciousness rather than passively reinforcing dominant ideologies (ibid., 54-55). *Liberation psychology*, in this sense, challenges reductionist and depoliticized models by advocating for an emancipatory framework that empowers individuals to resist oppression and reclaim agency over their psychological and social conditions. Through this perspective, psychology ceases to be a neutral discipline and instead becomes a tool for collective liberation, actively contributing to the dismantling of structural inequalities.

Our redeemed actions, or attitudes, which realize themselves through the activity of the mind, must be in equilibrium with this existential integrity, with the clear intention of creating a society that is a space and time of realization. Therapeutic responsibility is through our response to existential integrity, that is, how we respond and justify it. This responsibility to the *life-world*, in its existential integrity, summons us to a future that truly finds this space and time we long for. And the other dimension of the *self*, the body, which gives us access to the world, how does it constitute our integrity?

## 4. The Corporeality of the self

In his work, *Phenomenology of Perception*, Merleau-Ponty attests that the body is our general means of having a world (Merleau-Ponty 2012, 147). Thus, my own body (*Leib*) is always mine or others, an immediate experience and an access to experience, while the physical body (*Körper*) is a body, presenting itself to external observation and dealing with outsiders (Waldenfels 1980, 37). The body itself is not only our general means of having a world; it is at the same time our anchoring in a world (Merleau-Ponty 2012, 146). Through our own body, we have a world and belong to a world. The body itself is within the world as the heart is in the organism (ibid., 209).

Influenced by the perspectives provided by this phenomenological tradition, Thomas Fuchs considers subjectivity as essentially embodied, that is, the body is not merely the content of the object of consciousness, but, as a lived body, becomes the constitutive basis of the subject itself. Hence, we experience all our feelings, thoughts, perceptions and actions as subjective corporeal beings and at the same time as physical beings (Fuchs 2018, 77). Even for Arendt, when, by thought, we transcend the world of appearances, it does not mean that we come out of appearances, but that we can free ourselves from dogmatic appearances assumed by a social group, enabling political implications that can be redeemed by our actions.

For Fuchs, we cannot say that we are, as a living organism, autarchic, but, differently, we can say that we are a self-organized (Fuchs 2018, 84) living system that is always in dependence on the environment. The very metabolism of a living organism is its primary connection to the environment (ibid., 89), by which it necessarily interacts through a life-enhancing ecosystem of exchange. Several factors attest to this dependence, from biotic to abiotic factors. The living organism, in this respect, is in constant exchange with the environment.

This idea of the interdependent relationship between body and environment is echoed in Gallagher's framework of

intermodal perception, which posits that sensory modalities are intrinsically interconnected from birth. This challenges traditional empiricist views that perceive perception as an experience-dependent construct developing through isolated sensory inputs. Instead, Gallagher (2006) argues that perception is fundamentally embodied and intermodal, with sensory modalities such as vision, touch, and hearing dynamically interacting to shape perceptual experience from the earliest stages of life. In this view, newborns, as demonstrated by their ability to recognize their mother's voice and imitate movements, exhibit early integration of sensory cues (Gallagher, 2006, 171). These findings suggest that sensory modalities do not operate in isolation but function within an integrated perceptual system, reinforcing the embodied nature of perception.

In this context, the intermodal nature of perception has significant implications for rehabilitation strategies. Traditional rehabilitation models often emphasize isolated sensory training, but clinical cases suggest that an integrative approach leveraging multisensory input yields better outcomes. Patients recovering from sensory deficits benefit from therapies that enhance intermodal connections, such as tactile-auditory training for the hearing impaired or visual-motor exercises for individuals with restored vision.

Fuchs, in his studies on the nature of the brain, attests that the brain is not an isolated organ that produces its own world within the skull and, on that basis, sends signals to the body. On the contrary, it is a body of regulation and apprehension for the whole organism. For the author, the body is the true actor in the field: its homeostasis and its relationship with the environment are crucial for the formation of an incarnate subjectivity. There is an interaction, between the individual and the organism, which connect and influence each other in constant circular feedback loops (Fuchs 2018, 124).

In Fuchs' view, the brain incorporates itself into the body and links to the environment through its various interactions, mainly as sensorimotor. For the author, because of its high degree of plasticity, the brain can incorporate the

organism's learning history from its earliest intrauterine stages of life; developing epigenetically into an organ that is complementarily structured in relation to the environment in which the individual finds herself (Fuchs 2018, 139). In this fashion, all our experiences, perceptions, and interactions with the environment continually change our neural structures throughout our lives. This plasticity is adaptive to the environment and carries the learning history, so that the individual can interact in an original way with her environment.

If we were going to use Hannah Arendt's stage metaphor, we would say that all individuals live their lives within this world as if they were on a stage. The stage is common to all who are alive, but it appears different for each species (Arendt 1978, Part I) 21). We have our own originality, because our experiences form our own lifestyle; we live in interaction, we feel, express and build different perspectives. The structure of our organism is common to the other organisms of our species, we step on the same planet, but we will never be determined in our experiences, because there is an internal / external dialogue that takes place in complicity, constituting and transforming meaning. Nevertheless, we carry a blame because of our unauthenticity, that is, we can never completely avoid the *publicness of the they* (Heidegger 2010, § 27 125), or get rid of appearances (Arendt).

Merleau-Ponty notes that this reality is present in our own body, since it has always had a traditional perception, namely a style of perception, due to its own pre-personal, cultural and historical existence. Therefore, when we come across an object, or person within the world, we already have a preconception about the encounter, before any linguistic conceptualization we can make. In the following ways, a pure encounter (Buber 1970, 63), as Martin Buber intended, devoid of any experience, does not fit the perceptual structure of the human being. However, the originality of the event that encompasses, for example, the encounter may displace our preconceptions and pretensions. There is an original presence at the meeting. However, not without style, without culture, without the tradition of those whom we meet. Merleau-Ponty

expresses the relational body, consciousness and world in the following words:

> Consciousness is being-towards-the-thing through the intermediary of the body. A movement is learned when the body has understood it, that is, when it has incorporated it into its 'world', and to move one's body is to aim at things through it; it is to allow oneself to respond to their call, which is made upon it independently of any representation. (Merleau-Ponty 2012, 140).

There is no one body, then consciousness and after that a world in the constitution of the *self*; they intertwine mutually, share meaning. The *self* constitutes itself in this existential integrity. The human being neither is in front of her body, nor behind; is the body itself. In Merleau-Ponty's words: "I am my body (*Je suis mon corps*) (Merleau-Ponty 2012, 151)". This intertwining between body and consciousness is clear in the Merleau-Ponty expression *reflexive body* (ibid., 210), which, in turn, anchors itself in the world.

As it is through the body that we are anchored in this world, its imprisonment, or anything affected by it that impairs the access to experience, inhibiting or making the integrity of the *self*-unfeasible, equally affects its other dimensions. In such wise, I cannot constitute internal coherence if the marks of injustices are present on my body, or if they restrain it from to realize itself spatially.

As inclusive therapy provokes an attitude of integrity, the body becomes essential in therapeutic practices. Along these lines, the body with its marks, with its style, with its expression builds its own identity. Here it is not just about medicating the body, but directing it to its integrity, that is, seeking triggers that enable the body to interact with itself, with the other and with the world.

Fuchs reports a case of a 38-year-old patient from Heidelberg Clinical Center, where he coordinates a group of researchers (Fuchs 2006, 116). This patient was anancastic, scrupulous and had difficulty making decisions. It was proposed that he learn to ride a bicycle, for the first time in his life, and it turned out that, such late learning made him able to connect with a floating surface while maintaining balance.

The research pointed out that he was able to transfer this equilibrium situation to other areas of life and to overcome its constant oscillations. For Fuchs, a neurosis is thus not only a disorder of mental balance, but also a disorder of natural mobility and the ability to be open to certain situations.

The body, equally, leads us to meet the other in this world. Through it that we have the forms of interaction that restore the integrity of the *self*. The body is the first to come on the scene and the last to leave the scene. In therapeutic practices, it is the agent of healing possibilities, for it is through it that we are medicated, it is through it that our attitudes are redeem themselves and it is through it that we realize ourselves in space and time; it will always be on the scene until the curtains close and the lights go out.

## 5. Final considerations

This work clearly proposes the idea of an existential integrity that makes up what we call the *self*. This existential integrity may compromise itself, requiring an inclusive therapeutic method that will once again integrate the weakened or broken wires that comprise it. These wires connect us to each part of the *self*, to wit, to the self-relation of the *self*, to the other, to the world, and to the own body. When these wires weaken or broken themselves, therapeutic help needs itself to restore the integrity of the *self*. Thus, we seek to demonstrate that this therapeutic aid need not confine itself to a single proposal, but it carries out through a dialogue that takes place between patient and therapist. In this dialogue, we will look for a trigger that will connect the weakened or broken wire of the *self*, restoring its existential integrity. Therefore, the choice of a trigger should discuss itself between the patient and the therapist so that the patient can choose according to its own possibilities. The choice would engage the patient's empathy to the object of the trigger.

However, how can we integrate the weakened or broken wires if the society we live into is unfair? The inclusive therapeutic method reveals its intertwining with ethics, that is, how to achieve existential integrity if we do not have what to eat, what to drink, education, health, accessibility, and so

on. In other words, if we do not have the slightest dignity? The inclusive therapeutic method seeks the integrity of the *self* and does not aim for a well-organized society in which people cooperate when they see advantages (Rawls and Adler).

The inclusive therapeutic method has an idea of ontologically embodied good, that is, based on the parameters of existential integrity. Thus, the idea of good does not come specifically from a religion, from an institution in general or from the law, but from the very integrity of the *self* that is existential, that is, it is intertwined in the self-relation of the *self*, to the other, to the world and to the own body. Thus, it would be necessary to know whether religions, laws or institutions in general do not suppress this *self,* whether they exclude others, whether they do not care for nature or do not provide accessibility for everyone.

The dimensions of the *self* that make up the integrity of the *self*, need to be in inclusive equilibrium so that if one of them weakens or breaks all the others compromise themselves as well. As we live into a world with and through our own body, with and through our subjectivity and with and through other people, such dimensions intertwine themselves; calling us to an existential responsibility. In this way, inclusive therapeutic treatment fosters responsibility towards the *life-world*, that is, we need to respond therapeutically to the integrity of the *self*. In other words, we need to create space and time of realization for humanity now and in the future (Jonas). Every human being who responds to the *life-world* has existential responsibility and this necessarily leads us to ethics, politics and institutions in society.

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# The Hermeneutics of Weakness: The Case of Ethical and Political Discourse

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**Abstract**

The article examines the concept of weakness within the framework of the phenomenological and hermeneutical approach. Two research questions are posed: 1. What is weakness as an experience of the subject? 2. How does our understanding of weakness influence our ethical and political conceptions? First, the article provides a characterization of the phenomenon of weakness, using phenomenological methods. The author explores how weakness can be understood and how it differs from other, related notions (e.g., vulnerability). Weakness will be defined as a lack or serious limitation in agency – in the ability to act. Next, the author investigates how the concept of weakness has been historically incorporated into European ethical and political theory, drawing on hermeneutic methodology. Writings from the history of European philosophy that are representative of their respective eras were analyzed, focusing on how they illustrate the relationship between weakness and agency, as well as the political and moral consequences of this connection. This incorporation occurred primarily through the notion of weakness of the will, and secondarily through the neoliberal discourse of empowerment, viewed as a means of overcoming one's own weakness. Judith Butler's writings are an important point of reference in this case. In conclusion, the article argues for the necessity of new ethical and political attitudes toward one's own weakness.

**Keywords:** weakness, phenomenology, hermeneutics, strength, power, vulnerability, will

## Introduction

The experience of one's own weakness is one of the key aspects that define the human condition. Contemporary philosophy is devoting more and more attention to the analysis of phenomena such as vulnerability (Goodin 1986; Fineman 2008; Hutchings 2013; McKenzie, Rogers & Doods 2014),

fragility (Nussbaum 2001), and precariousness (Butler 2004; Butler 2009). However, an in-depth philosophical analysis of the category of weakness is still lacking. This article seeks to fill this gap. The category of weakness will be analyzed here using hermeneutic and phenomenological methodologies.

I intend to start from the experience of the subject who discovers their own weakness. The analysis of the many manifestations of this weakness will aim to capture the essential properties of this phenomenon. It should be noted, however, that in this work—although I draw much of my methodology from Husserl's work—I reject his belief in phenomenology as a purely descriptive field. This is due to the specificity of the very problem of the phenomenon of weakness: any attempt to conceptualize weakness immediately casts it into normative categories, describing it as something fundamentally negative, harmful, and even dangerous. While such phenomena (semantically close to weakness) as tenderness, vulnerability, and even transience and mortality can be presented in a neutral way and can even become objects of affirmation, weakness appears to consciousness as something inherently negative from the outset: something to be fought against. For this reason, the phenomenological study of this phenomenon cannot rely solely on the (impossible) descriptive and theoretical-cognitive approach but must take into account an important normative dimension.

At the same time, in this essay, I proceed from the hermeneutical conviction that any human experience remains largely conditioned by cultural forms and representations, such as language in the first place. The understanding of weakness (including the self-understanding of one's own weakness) will therefore always be culturally mediated, as well as normatively conditioned—primarily due to the number of negative cultural connotations associated with this concept. For this reason, I will allow my phenomenology to be somewhat contaminated by hermeneutic and genealogical methods, which will show the pedigree of European perceptions of weakness[1] .

The essay is divided into three main parts. In the first subsection, I intend to describe the category of weakness, taking inspirations from phenomenological methodology. This

will primarily allow me to define what weakness is and how it differs from other, similar phenomena. In the second part, I turn to the hermeneutical approach. I would like to show that European philosophy has privileged the category of strength at the expense of neglecting the category of weakness. The analysis aims to uncover something akin to a genealogy of the concept of weakness. As will be shown, it primarily emerges in the context of ethics (mainly due to its inherent connection with the concept of will). This tradition largely translates into what, according to Heideggerian hermeneutics, should be called the prejudices of the subject – the not always conscious, preliminary, unverified knowledge of the subject. In the final part, based on the concept of Judith Butler, I would like to consider the political implications, primarily related to the dominance of the liberal vision, and thus the strong and agentive subject. According to my main thesis, this rejection of weakness as one of the inherent and inalienable characteristics of the human subject's structure has contributed to the false vision of humanity. This has significant political and moral consequences.

## 1. Polyphony of weaknesses

Classical phenomenology – especially Husserlian phenomenology – has often been criticized for privileging the perspective of the agentive, active subject, capable of directing their will, realizing their will, using their body as a tool, and assigning meanings. This viewpoint increasingly faces opposition, even from within phenomenology itself (see Levinas 1971; Caputo 1993). More and more authors recognize the necessity of turning toward the other side of subjectivity – toward passivity, fragility, mortality. However, most studies seem to focus on the category of vulnerability (Levinas 1971; Godin 1986; Ricouer 2001 and 2009), which – as I will show in this subsection – differs from weakness. There is little discussion of weakness within phenomenology. A notable exception is the work of John D. Caputo, associated with Christian theology and the philosophy of religion, written from a phenomenological perspective. Caputo explores the possibility of moving away from the vision of an all-powerful absolute

toward a weak God. The image of this new vision of divinity is Jesus on the cross – a figure that reveals human passivity, loneliness, physical suffering, and powerlessness. According to Caputo, the figure of Jesus also unveils the intertwining of strength and weakness – the exhausted body of Jesus possesses a unique ability to impose a moral obligation. Confronting weakness becomes, for the theologian, the main impulse for the subject to take responsibility for the Other. In this chapter, I am, perhaps, somewhat influenced by Caputo's reading (especially in his attempt to overcome the binarity between weakness and strength); however, I would like to develop a secular vision of weakness, primarily experienced from the perspective of the first-person lived experience.

When considering the category of weakness, it is important to first note the vast range of contexts in which this concept is incorporated. Weakness can be understood as physical frailty (for example, when one is unable to lift a certain weight), as a lack of energy to act (for example, when enduring an illness). At the same time, it can also refer to political and social situations (such as a lack of authority), as well as to an individual and volitional context (weakness of will, weakness of character). This notion can express contempt (as in the patriarchal and oppressive expression "weak gender") or pity and mercy (as in the moral imperative to care for the weak). In many languages (for example, in French or Polish), weakness can be linked to the feeling of falling in love (e.g., "*mieć słabość do*" in Polish, "*avoir un faible pour*" in French), associated with a strong and involuntary attraction to someone. All these contexts reveal the phenomenon of weakness from different perspectives: embodied, affective, normative, and political.

The phenomenon of weakness can be examined from both an objective and a social perspective. In the first case, we focus on general determinants and criteria, which are also visible from a third-person perspective. A doctor might observe that a patient is weak and interpret this as a symptom of a larger problem. A trainer might identify who is capable of completing more demanding exercises requiring strength, and who needs gentler exercises. On the other hand, weakness can also be viewed from the perspective of social constructivism.

Here, we can observe that certain social groups (such as women, children, and people with disabilities) are considered weak, while others (particularly men) are expected to be strong. Weakness can therefore be an important category for critical theories. While both perspectives are valid and legitimate, phenomenological methods allow us to focus on the more relevant dimension of the individual: the experience of one's own weakness.

Weakness manifests itself to the subject primarily as a feeling of lack, associated with a deep sense of impotence and powerlessness. Conceived in this way, weakness necessarily involves thinking about its opposite, that is, strength. Weakness represents precisely a certain breach in the sense of one's own strength; it is a breakdown of strength. This breach leads to an inability to realize one's own will: one's decisions and desires. I feel the weakness of my body when I am unable to lift the weight of the barbell I would like to lift. I feel the weakness of will when I can't keep the New Year's resolution I made. The weakness of a political organization (e.g., a political party) comes from its inability to put its program into practice. Examples could be multiplied. It is worth noting that weakness remains a relational category and depends strictly on our positioning in relation to other objects (for example, a barbell), people, or political institutions. Even the case of weak will, seemingly purely immanent, remains entangled in the space of the world in which, ultimately, this will is realized. The will is formed in the midst of and in relation to society. Similarly, power, authority, and self-mastery can also be considered relationally.

It can be seen, however, that the essence of weakness remains the feeling of loss (or at least a significant limitation) of one's agency—the inability to act. Thus, vulnerability remains distinct from the related phenomena of fragility and precariousness. Vulnerability (from the Latin *vulnus* – wound) means being exposed to the possibility of harm, and therefore it is rather related to the impact of external factors over which I have no control (Huthings 2013, 25; Doods 2014, 182; Goodin 1986, 112). Weakness, meanwhile, can result from internal factors as well. Moreover, weakness does not necessarily

(though it can) involve experiencing harm. Fragility, on the other hand, like vulnerability, is not related to will but concerns the possibility of being broken. Fragility can be attributed to more than just beings with a will (it can describe, for example, objects) and can be seen as positive. It can be associated with some conceptions of beauty as something fragile and unstable (for example, in the case of porcelain). Precariousness, on the other hand, I understand, following Judith Butler, as a characteristic of the human condition that indicates our social interdependence from each other. Precariousness means that "life requires various social and economic conditions to be met in order to be sustained as life" (Butler, 2009, 14).

The conceptualization of weakness as the inability to carry out one's own will also affects the understanding of the concepts opposing it. Phenomena in opposition to weakness are primarily strength, power and autonomy. In the first case, strength refers to the ability to resist external factors, as seen in the example of a strongman who can hold a heavy object despite the resistance of gravity, or in the case of a person with strong character, who is able to withstand a tragedy without breaking down. If strength draws attention to external factors, the category of autonomy focuses on intra-subjective factors. This is because autonomy is primarily the ability to manage oneself and does not refer to the ability to manage others. Moreover, as we will see in the next chapter, autonomy in the history of philosophy has been strongly associated with the inner life of the subject and means primarily the ability to manage oneself, to make free decisions. Power, on the other hand, I understand after Hannah Pitkin as "something-anything-that makes somebody able to do, capable of doing something." (1972, 276). In this sense, power seems to be the most complete opposite of weakness. This is because the concept of power refers both to my inner life and ability to manage myself, as well as to my relationship with non-subjective reality. Equally important is the emphasis on the category of action, which, as has already been shown, is also the fundamental for thinking about weakness.

It is precisely this strong connection between weakness and action that has led to the phenomenon of weakness being

linked to normative thinking, including, above all, ethical thinking. For while weakness has been valorised negatively, its opposites – power, agency, strength, autonomy – have been (with minor exceptions[2]) valorised decidedly positively in the history of European culture.

## 2. Weakness in ethical tradition

A similar perspective was already present in classical Greek philosophy. The ancient discourse on morality, though varied, praises the human ability to control one's own passions, exercise self-control and consciously cultivate virtues. Man is seen as an agent, capable of shaping his own destiny. The possibility of self-governess is surprisingly linked to the idea of fate, another key element of the Greek worldview. In a world determined by the whims of the gods, how can man defend his agency? This theme, addressed primarily in Greek poetry and dramatic works, was perhaps most effectively explored by Plato. In *The Republic,* the philosopher presents his own myth: the story of Er, a simple soldier who was given a glimpse of the afterlife. The climax of the story occures just before reincarnation, when the souls are confronted by the Moirai, particularly by Lachesis – the personification of necessity. At this moment, the dead are given the opportunity to choose their future fate from among an infinite number of scenarios. Their decision will determine the course of their lives in the next incarnation. Before the souls embark on this task, however, they hear a piercing warning:

Hear the word of Lachesis, the daughter of Necessity. Mortal souls, behold a new cycle of life and mortality. Your genius will not be allotted to you, but you choose your genius; and let him who draws the first lot have the first choice, and the life which he chooses shall be his destiny. Virtue is free, and as a man honors or dishonors her he will have more or less of her; the responsibility is with the chooser-God is justified. (Plato 2012, X, 617E)

*The Myth of Er* confronts people with their own agency. They are the ones who must decide and consciously choose their future fate. They become almost fully responsible for what will happen to them after they are reborn. The gods, fate, necessity

and the Moirai spinning the threads of human life – none of them are to blame, only man can be held accountable. Plato seems to intertwine warning with hope here. The one who loves virtue enough and makes it the basis of his choice can hope for a good and peaceful life. However, if he is blinded by the passions, if he forgets virtue and mindlessly throws himself at a seemingly favourable fate, he will be punished. As the prophet proclaims:

Even for the last comer, if he chooses wisely and will live diligently, there is appointed a happy and not undesirable existence. Let not him who chooses first be careless and let not the last despair. (2012, X, 619B)

Plato's vision is an attempt to reconcile the idea of fate with human agency. However, his myth is not just a reflection on the human condition. It is, first and foremost, a moralizing story, urging one to lead a rational and ethical life, the most important determinant of which will be the love of ethical courage – virtue. It is virtue that becomes the foundation for making the right choice. The one who sufficiently loves moral courage, who recognizes its true value – this one will be able to live virtuously. It seems that action in Plato's view is indeed, to some extent, determined, but not by the Moirai or fate; rather, it is determined by the individual, capable of choosing between virtue and passion. This is how human strength manifests itself in Greek philosophy: as the ability to choose a virtuous life. Weakness will primarily be seen as the inability to achieve a good life, as an internal powerlessness to control one's own will. It is something pitiable, something that must be overcome.

Conscious choice is also a key element in Aristotle's philosophy. According to *Nicomachean Ethics,* morality concerns those acts that are dependent on the will – that is, actions in which man is the cause of movement: the cause of action and change in the world. Acts independent of the will can at most evoke pity, but never moral condemnation. Therefore, at the center of ethical reflection is human causation and decision-making. Aristotle argued that the object of moral evaluation should be the very moment of making a choice—*prohairesis*. It should be emphasized that *prohairesis* is strongly linked to both reason and action. The moral choice,

according to the Greek philosopher, must always be preceded by a process of rational thought ("A rational man is at the same time a man of good character" (Aristotle 2004, 1152a)), focused on choosing a valuable goal that motivates human conduct. At the same time, *prohairesis* is the moment of finalizing this thought process, the ultimate decision about what means I will use to achieve my superior goal. A person may not always have control over how their resolve will translate into actual events in the empirical world, when our choice is exposed to other external factors beyond our control. However, the decision itself is a sufficient expression of my freedom and agency. Oedipus had no control over the consequences of his choices; he could not know all the circumstances, but he chose, nonetheless.

In Greek philosophy, man's strength is attested to by his permanent ability to choose virtue, and, another important theme of the *Nicomachean Ethics,* his ability to self-construct his moral character. Aristotle (2004) described virtue in terms of a permanent disposition, *hexis.* To act virtuously on a regular basis was to develop a permanent disposition that allows an individual to make good, i.e. ethical, choices in later life. However, one who acted immorally developed a predisposition to act against morality. Man is, in a way, guilty of his own character. His strength and agency are thus directed towards the inner life. Even if, in external life, we cannot fully control the consequences of our actions, at least we have the ability to master our weaknesses and train virtue[3].

> Now if it is in our power to do noble and shameful actions, and the same goes for not doing them, and if, as we saw, being good and bad consists in this, then it is in our power to be good or bad. (2004, 1113b)

Man is powerful because he can reasonably shape his moral character and rise to goodness. The thought of weakness appears here primarily in the context of evildoers, uncontrollable individuals who succumb to their passions and emotions (gr. *pathos*). These individuals remain afflicted by weakness of will, *akrasia*, which leads them to act against their own reason. Although a person with a weak will is able to make a rational thought and choose a resolution in accordance with his virtue, he is unable to act in accordance with his own choice.

Although at the level of rational thought he knows what he should do, at another – practical – level, emotions overshadow the truths of reason. Aristotle recognizes the paradox of the human soul, which can simultaneously know and not know, choose reasonably and unintelligently.

> Again, human beings can have knowledge in another way besides those that have been mentioned. In the case of having knowledge without using it we see a different kind of having, so that one can in a sense both have and not have it – for example, if one is asleep, mad or drunk. Now this is the condition of people under the influence of the ways they are affected; for spirited feelings, sexual appetites, and some other such things clearly alter our bodily condition as well, and in some people even produce attacks of madness. (2004, 1147)

Emotions become a factor that weakens human strength and the ability to master, denying the power of the human mind. Man, deprived of his *rationale*, approaches the condition of an animal, determined by his own nature and the forces of biology. He resembles a drunken or insane person, who possesses, to some extent, a darkened consciousness and blended self-awareness. Hence, the discourse on force often looks suspiciously at the affective sphere, finding here the cause of enslavement and guilt, and in extreme cases even seeing in emotions an element that threatens humanity itself.

The paradigm of thinking about morality in terms of force, already present in ancient Greece, finds its culmination in the Age of Enlightenment[4]. However, the Age of Reason makes some fundamental changes in the understanding of the main goal of the philosophy of morality. The ancient paradigm of thinking about virtue, which was eventually incorporated into Christian theology and marked the main development of ethics for centuries, is replaced here by an attempt to seek a universal moral law. This has its anthropological consequences. The model of a free man, consciously shaping his own virtues, is here transformed into the model of an autonomous subject, reasonably discovering a universal moral law. This conceptual change is not merely cosmetic. Freedom of decision-making becomes autonomy: the ability of reason to empower itself, to self-determine[5]. Instead, man is described as a subject: the ruler of the objectified world, the causal creator of his own perceptions. His mind is described in terms of the conditions of

possibility of the appearance of the external world, which in some cases even leads to idealism.

Enlightenment philosophy, contrary to repeated accusations, is as much a manifestation of human power as of human limitations, a belief in reason and scepticism about human cognitive capabilities. The problem is not that Enlightenment philosophy failed to recognize the limits of human reason, but rather that awareness of these limits was strangely combined here with a belief in power. This can be seen especially in the writings of Kant (1996a). Although the German author recognized the limitations of human reason (if only its lack of access to the thing itself), his scepticism disappears almost completely as soon as the author turns to ethical reflection. On the ground of the metaphysics of morality, Kant attempts to develop a pure ethical theory, devoid of any contamination that empirical reality might bring (1996a, 4:426). In a way, Kant repeats Aristotle's move. Two premises are relevant here: first, man cannot have full control over the external world and, second, he should not be held responsible for what he could not control. It follows that morality, or at any rate the discourse on obligation and guilt, must necessarily focus on the inner life.

> Hence everything empirical, as an addition1 to the principle of morality, is not only quite inept for this; it is also highly prejudicial to the purity of morals, where the proper worth of an absolutely good will – a worth raised above all price – consists just in the principle of action being free from all influences of contingent grounds, which only experience can furnish. (Kant 1996a, 4:426)

Kant will focus on describing human reason, capable of discovering a necessary and universal moral law, expressed in the form of an imperative. In place of virtue and the formation of one's character, there will be a logic of duty and an attitude of respect towards universal principles. I am particularly interested in the Kantian category of autonomy (Gr. *autós* – one's own, *nómos* – law), or the ability of reason to impose laws on itself. A moral subject retains its autonomy if its conduct remains guided by respect for the law that the subject has given itself, by the power of its reason. Any other motives relegate man to heteronomy, dependence of himself on external

influences. The subject of Kantian ethics is a subject isolated from the external world, which could disturb his freedom and induce him to act against reason.

> Autonomy of the will is the property" of the will by which it is a law to itself (independently of any property of the objects of volition). The principle of autonomy is, therefore: to choose only in such a way that the maxims of your choiceb are also included' as universal law in the same volition. (Kant 1996a, 4:440)

Here morality becomes even more firmly tied to the power and might of reason. One even becomes obliged to act solely out of respect for the rational moral law. Any additional motivations connected with the external world, but also with unintelligent inner experiences (emotions, passions) are presented almost in terms of an obstacle to a truly moral life. While an action coming out of motives other than pure duty to obey an imperative may be in accordance with duty and in this sense may be legitimate (as in the case of the merchant who does not cheat for the fear of punishment), it does not testify to the subject's true morality. This is because its strength becomes contaminated by the weaknesses of the soul.

Kant also mentions the weakness of the will on the ground of his considerations of radical evil (Vujošević 2019). He recognizes that in addition to persons who consciously deny moral obligation, there are also weak subjects. The weak subject, unlike the vice subject, wishes to act in accordance with the moral law and knows what action remains in accordance with the categorical imperative. Nevertheless, he does not find the moral law motivating enough to be the sole motivation for his action.

> the frailty (*fragilitas*) of human nature is expressed even in the complaint of an Apostle: "What I would, that I do not!". I incorporate the good (the law) into the maxim of my power of choice; but this good, which is an irresistible incentive objectively or ideally (*in thesi*), is subjectively (*in hypothesi)* the weaker (in comparison with inclination) whenever the maxim is to be followed. (Kant 1996b, 6:29)

The Enlightenment tradition represented another milestone in the development of ethics. Thinking in terms of causality and autonomy led to the emergence of another great European tradition – liberalism and, historically related to it,

utilitarianism. The belief in the autonomy of human reason was also imprinted by nihilists like Stirner and Nietzsche, who described man as capable of creating and demolishing values. All these currents placed the subject of causality at the centre of their reflection. Many of these positions even introduced a political and moral imperative to strive for empowerment. This imperative permeates European culture very strongly today.

Probably, I could list many more ethical currents, in which the power of human reason becomes the basis for setting the rules of good, moral behaviour. However, I will stop here. A story about the history of philosophy always puts in the limelight what particularly shaped the thinking of its author. This says more about me than about the history itself. For my argumentation, it is crucial to recognize that in classical European philosophy, the category of weakness was primarily related to the internal life of the subject, and to a lesser extent, to the influence of the external world. This primarily concerned situations where the moral subject is unable to direct their will appropriately or is unable to act in accordance with their own good will. Ethics, in various forms, aimed to increase the control of the individual over their own will. Naturally, discoveries such as the unconscious, the influence of power, or historical forces shaping our will complicate this framework and challenge the possibility of exercising full control over oneself. Nevertheless, ethical theories continue to focus on the potential for expanding this domain. From European thought emerges the moral imperative to combat one's own weakness.

The second important space inextricably linked to thinking about agency and action remains political thought. In the next section, I will proceed to discuss this aspect based on Judith Butler's critique of neoliberal discourse. The choice of this author is because her philosophy perfectly demonstrates the social consequences of the rejection of vulnerability in European culture.

## 3. Judith Butler and weakness in political discourse

If ethical discourse has withdrawn its focus on the interior as a space over which control can be exercised, so political-social discourse, by its very nature, has had to turn to

the possibility of controlling external factors. If in ethics, power is expressed as resistance to extrinsic factors that could potentially undermine one's will, so political discourse turns to social relations. A similar understanding of power was expressed by Max Weber in his definition of power as "the probability that one actor within a social relationship will be in a position to carry out his own will despite resistance" (Weber 1978, 53). Power in this context therefore refers to the practical realization of chosen goals. In this context, empowerment will mean the process of strengthening social groups by providing them with tools, a political environment aimed at increasing their ability to achieve individual goals. This demand has become particularly relevant to liberal thought, with a particular focus on liberal feminism.

The focus on agency and power that accompanies European culture conceals a particular vision of the human condition and, perhaps even more interestingly, the human psychology. Judith Butler, drawing on the tools of psychoanalysis, described this phenomenon through the mechanism of denial and displacement. According to the American philosopher, a person does not want to accept the haunting thoughts of his own weakness, vulnerability to injury, his own mortality. All these elements are repressed, pushed into the unconscious, into what we do not want to accept. The mind, defending itself against the awareness of impending illness and death, not only rejects its own weakness, but even projects it onto others as part of the projection mechanism (Butler 2009, 178). The effect of displacement is a falsified vision of my strong, causal Self and the weak, wounded and mortal other. Butler brilliantly shows the political consequences of adopting such a division, which are irresistibly linked to the vision of human (and perhaps interspecies) relations. This is because the philosopher shows the tendency to essentialize the victim, to view him solely through the prism of his essence, or weakness (Butler 2009, 179). Cultural patterns show the victim as helpless, incapable of defence, but at the same time as morally pure, innocent, incapable of sin. This makes the discriminated lose the right to resist – they are literally stripped of their weapons. On the other hand, all traces

of abuse of violence as a gesture of defence are somehow justified by the very sanctity of the victim.

There is an apparent paradox here of weakness, understood as the inability to realize one's own will. In classical ethical discourse, weakness appears primarily as a weakness of character and is conceptualized as in the first rank an obstacle to the realization of virtue or moral law. On political grounds, on the other hand, weakness remains primarily associated with belonging to an oppressed group, deprived of political rights and the possibility of equal participation in social life. This state is admittedly undesirable, but at the same time allows one to achieve a kind of status of sanctity and purity.

Butler aimed the blade of her critique first at the neoliberal theories that have formed contemporary political discourses. It is in this philosophy that recognition of the power of human reason takes on political significance. Liberalism sees human weakness and vulnerability as a problem to be solved by resorting to various strategies of empowerment of the subject. It looks for rational means by which people could increase their autonomy, freedom and self-reliance. This is particularly evident when liberal politicians and politicians begin to refer to the issue of discrimination and emancipation. Their solutions usually include the so-called provision of development opportunities. Behind this is the belief that a rational subject will be able to manage his or her own life and take full responsibility for his or her fate, as long as he or she is not hindered by an undemocratic legal system. In the liberal sense, a just society means a system in which people are free to make decisions about their own lives to the extent that this does not infringe on the freedom of others. Liberal discourse, on the other hand, completely ignores the issue of interdependence that inevitably exists between people and also between non-human entities. The scheme of this philosophy becomes almost Kantian: dependence on Others is a threat to autonomy, considered the highest value. Therefore, it is necessary to get rid of this dependence, reject it, throw it into the trash garbage can of the unconscious.

Psychoanalysis teaches, however, that what is unconscious does not thereby become less real. Thus, rejecting

one's weakness, vulnerability and dependence does not mean that one will automatically become stronger, more powerful and freer. Sooner or later, weakness and what, following Butler, can be called precariousness will haunt us, and we – unprepared – will have no mechanisms to deal with it. I am referring to both the more obvious political and social mechanisms and the less obvious psychological mechanisms. Thinking in terms of strength, independence and autonomy makes a person fully responsible for his situation, including his material situation. Poverty is thus a punishment for insufficiently rational financial decisions – a punishment that is deserved and therefore does not require the support of systemic, public welfare. At the same time, it can lead to a psychologically dangerous blaming of oneself for all supposed failures. The problem is that the world remains much more complex. My situation depends both on my decisions and on things over which I had no or only minor influence (see Butler 2009, 30-31). The weakness I am so eager to reject can remind me of its existence at any moment: through illness, an unfortunate accident, a minor mistake...

## 4. Conclusion: beyond the binary scheme

Repeating somewhat the themes of the introductory chapter, weakness means the inability to practically realize one's will in the world. The opposite of weakness is, in the first place, power, and the similar categories of strength and autonomy. European culture has defined weakness as an originally negative phenomenon, an obstacle to be overcome. Especially today, in the neoliberal reality, the subject is influenced by the imperative to strive for em-*power*-ment, to enhance oneself and gain full control over one's own life. The rigid, binary opposition between fundamentally bad weakness and desirable strength has the effect of imposing challenges on the individual that he can never fully meet. In some cases, this can even lead to serious psychopathological problems associated with a lack of acceptance of one's own limitations (see Bizarri 2023, 52). What we need, therefore, is an anthropological theory that allows us to accept weakness as an indispensable part of the human condition, without falling into its affirmation.

Ethical and political theories that abandon thinking in terms of individual agency and autonomy risk falling into the other extreme – into a paternalistic attitude (see Conoly 2013). It is impossible to agree on a concept that would deprive human beings of the ability to take conscious actions and take responsibility for their own decisions.

Instead, a certain solution could be the conceptualization of man as a being interdependent on Others and on external reality. For the error of the concepts discussed so far lies not in the mere affirmation of human agency through strategies of empowerment and autonomy (for these are necessary), but rather in the conceptualization of power and weakness in an extremely individualistic manner. Weakness, meanwhile, remains a relational category, closely linked to our location in a network of relations with other entities. If weakness consists in the inability to realize one's own will, then we can see that the conditions for realizing and even shaping this will often have a social and institutional nature. This does not entail extreme determinism, but only the observation that autonomous decisions are made and then enacted in an actual world filled with relationships. Hence, the quest for a real increase in human strength, autonomy and real empowerment of the subject first requires recognition of our dependence on the network of relationships. Only by accepting our weakness as a part of the human condition will it be possible to think through institutional, political, educational and social solutions to reduce the subject's weakness where needed or beneficial.

**NOTES**

[1] The present research could certainly be expanded to include comparative comparisons of the image of weakness in other cultures, with particular emphasis on Far Eastern culture. However, due to a lack of relevant expertise, I limit myself to European writings.

[2] What I have in mind here is first and foremost a particular tradition present in Christian theology and philosophy, which should be traced back to the writings of Litter (and the theology of the cross he promoted), which today is reflected, for example, in the theology of the weak god by John D. Caputo (2006). This current emphasizes and affirms God, revealed in the form of a weak, mortal body, dying on the cross. For authors working in this tradition, weakness is also a manifestation of strength. For example, the Other

appearing to me as weak has a special power to impose moral obligations on me. So this is an interesting example of thinking aimed at breaking down the binary opposition between weakness and strength.

[3] Martha Nussbaum in her classical book *The fragility of Goodness* has pointed out that Greek philosophers, including primary Aristotele and stoic tradition has spoken about the phenomenon of human fragility and the exposure on the moral luck. However they still claimed (inspired by Socrates) that the good person cannot be harmed meaning that all that matters for a good life – virtue – can not be destroyed by external factors. (2001, xiii-xxiv)

[4] The question of the will was obviously one of the critical theme for the middle age and early modern philosophy. In those eras, vast majority of European philosopher tried to elaborate the concept or the free will and virtue in the reference to both tradition: Greek philosophy and Christian religion. The concept of perfecting ones own character and streathen one's own will was therefore linked to the moral imperative of the obedience towards God. (For further examination of these topic see Saarinen 1994, 2011).

[5] For the genealogy of the notion of autonomy in modern philosophy see: Shneewind 1998. .

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# Book Reviews

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# Needed Body: From Self-Liberation to Ethical Society

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Valentina Antoniol and Stefano Marino, *Foucault's Aesthetics of Existence and Shusterman's Somaesthetics: Ethics, Politics, and the Art of Living*, London, New York, Dublin: Bloomsbury Academic, 2024, 206 pages.

**Keywords**: Aesthetics of Existence, Body, Michel Foucault, Richard Shusterman, Somaesthetics

Michel Foucault and Richard Shusterman are undoubtedly two of the most influential philosophers of the twentieth and twenty-first centuries, and this is no accident. Alongside phenomenologists, they brought the idea of the body and its importance to the center of philosophical inquiry after a long period of time when the body was profoundly neglected in our Western philosophical tradition. They did so through their original philosophical approaches – such as creating a framework for interpreting ancient ethical-ascetic practices, as seen in later Foucault's philosophy of the aesthetics of existence, or creating a vast interdisciplinary framework for reconsidering the body and its importance in Shusterman's somaesthetics. Thus, dedicating a book to an important part of these philosopher's legacy, was an exceptional idea, and readers interested in either Foucault's or Shusterman's works should be grateful to the editors, Valentina Antoniol, a researcher in political philosophy at the University of Bari "Aldo Moro," and Stefano Marino, a professor of aesthetics at the University of Bologna.

Their intellectual offspring is titled *Foucault's Aesthetics of Existence and Shusterman's Somaesthetics: Ethics, Politics, and the Art of Living*. It was published by Bloomsbury Academic in 2024. The edited book contains nine comprehensive chapters from nine notable authors who are leading personalities in their fields of interest: Philippe Sabot, Arianna Sforzini, Daniele Lorenzini, Martin Jay, Vincent M. Colapietro, Richard Shusterman, Chris Voparil, Barbara Formis, and Leszek Koczanowicz (listed by their respective chapters). The editors wrote the introduction, and I would like to emphasize that one of the chapters was written directly by Richard Shusterman, to whom the book is dedicated.

The book begins with the editors' 'Introduction,' which is titled the same as the book itself. This is a standard and effective way to pique the reader's interest and encourage them to delve into the texts. The introduction is clear and explanatory. Taking into consideration Foucault's aesthetics of existence and Shusterman's somaesthetics, it introduces the book, stating that it "is the first study specifically devoted to the development of rigorous critical comparisons between the theories and works of these two important contemporary philosophers. The present volume aims to fill a gap in the existing international literature, and it is in this direction that the essays presented here have been developed, confronting the thoughts of Foucault and Shusterman and offering innovative possibilities for the development and deepening of the themes investigated" (p. 16).

The editors are honest with their words, and filling the gap in existing literature is certainly the reason why this book is important for those interested in the subtle connections between ethics, politics, and aesthetics in the thinking of Foucault and Shusterman. Regarding the book's comparative nature, it is important to note, that not every chapter is written in a comparative manner. Some studies are devoted primarily to Foucault's legacy, while others focus primarily on Shusterman's work. Readers interested in comparisons must be prepared to read carefully, because they must sometimes take on this task themselves. However, this is an important and valuable part of the book, because it invites readers to actively

think alongside the chapter authors and draw their own comparisons. I see this as an invitation for readers to participate in and fully engage with the comprehensive philosophical discussions delivered by the authors of the book chapters. Moreover, the editors took helpful steps toward engaging readers, particularly through the thoughtful ordering of chapters and the creation of an interesting and meaningful book structure. Although it is not explicitly acknowledged, the book is divided into thematic parts. The first four chapters are primarily devoted to the Foucault's aesthetics of existence. Of course, Shusterman's somaesthetics is mentioned in them, but not dominantly. The reverse is also true, as the last four chapters are primarily devoted to or inspired by Shusterman's philosophical legacy. Finally, I see the fifth chapter of the book, directly in the center, as a bridging chapter, connecting the first four chapters with the last four.

My intention here is not to provide brief summaries of each chapter, but rather to highlight some significant connections that I discovered while reading and that might not be apparent at first glance. I would like to emphasize points that align best with the title of the book, particularly the subtitle: *Ethics, Politics, and the Art of Living*. I admit that my approach will probably lead to the necessary simplifications of the complex intentions of authors, but I believe interested readers will quench their thirst by reading and analyzing the book for themselves.

As I mentioned before, we can divide the book into two parts, with a bridging chapter between them. The first part consists of the following texts: 'Aesthetics of Existence: From Foucault to Stirner, via Baudelaire' by Philippe Sabot; 'The Body at the Limits of Subjectivity. For a Philosophy-Performance as Political Aesthetics through the Thought of Michel Foucault' by Arianna Sforzini; 'Pleasure, Scandal, and the Body: Foucault on Somatic *Askesis*' by Daniele Lorenzini; and '*Leib*, *Körper*, and the Body Politic' by Martin Jay. Some recurring topics emerge from these chapters, and it is interesting that each author approaches them from a unique analytical standpoint. Sabot's analysis is based on the "discussion" between Foucault and Sartre on Baudelaire's

dandy figure and Stirner's concepts of *Eigenheit* and *Einzige*, Sforzini's analysis is rooted in the "discussion" between Foucault and Butler, with a particular emphasis on the concept "agency". It is also connected to feminism, queer studies, and philosophy performance. Lorenzini's chapter compares two different types of *askeses* found in later Foucault's work: Greco-Roman and Cynic *askeses*.

Although they are very different in context, all three chapters can lead their readers to the following conclusion, which has value not only for our intellectual or theoretical understanding, but also for our self-knowledge. The conclusion is that our body can serve as a tool for our liberation and that, through our bodily practices, we can disrupt the established power structures inscribed in our bodies. While this is not new knowledge, the different contexts, in which the authors work demonstrate its merit. More importantly, these chapters emphasize the creativity and experimentation involved in using our bodies, as this experimentation creates from body a space of freedom, that is necessarily political. This topic is present in the first chapter, where Sabot writes about homosexual relationships; the second chapter, where Sforzini writes about creative performance; and the third chapter, where Lorenzini writes about the plurality of possible *askeses*. Each chapter demonstrates and invites us to consider further contexts, in which we can experiment with our bodies in order to free ourselves from what Foucault called '*biopouvoir*'.

Although I placed the fourth chapter, '*Leib*, *Körper*, and the Body Politic' by Martin Jay, in the imagined section alongside the previous three due to its focus on Foucault's ideas, it shares some significant similarities with chapter five, 'Care of the Social Self as Embodied' by Vincent M. Colapietro, which acts like a bridge between the two sections. I would like to highlight these points from an ethical perspective, bearing in mind that both chapters consider completely different contexts of interpretation. While Jay elaborates on the concept of the Body Politic through the phenomenological distinction of the *Leib*/*Körper*, introducing the idea of the political body as an analogous to *Körper*, Colapietro connects Foucault's aesthetics of existence and Shusterman's somaesthetics to Dewey's

pragmatism. Despite their different frameworks, both chapters contribute an important idea to the discussion: the ethical and social nature of the philosophies to which the book is dedicated.

I cannot say with certainty whether the editors intentionally ordered the chapters in the way that I see it. Nevertheless, the order works very well. If we view either Foucault's aesthetics of existence or Shusterman somaesthetics as tools for liberation from biopolitics, as suggested by the first three chapters of the book, this could lead to the misleading presupposition that the aim of these philosophies is to disconnect their followers from the social context, providing a framework for individualized, unrooted or unanchored existences. Whether it is Jay's political metaphor, leading to the conclusion that the political body should contain even those its parts that could be considered 'pathological' or Colapietro's analysis of the socially situated subject, it is clear, that the individual's desire for freedom and the suggested bodily experiments are never conducted in a vacuum, and that the individual's art of living can have an immersive political impact.

The ethical and political implications of bodily experimentation are emphasized even more in the final four chapters of the book. These are: 'Somaesthetics and the Philosophical Life' by Richard Shusterman; 'Somaesthetics, Foucauldian Aesthetics of Existence, and Living Ethically as White' by Chris Voparil; '*Aphrodisia*, *Eros*, *Charis*: Holistic Bodies and the Stylistic of Reciprocity' by Barbara Formis; and 'The Body Must Be Defended: Somapower and the Women's Strike in Poland' by Leszek Koczanowicz.

In Shusterman's chapter, we delve deeper into the realm of somaesthetics. However, the connection to the philosophies of Foucault and Hadot remains evident, particularly in the notion that philosophy can and should be perceived as a way of life or as an art of living, as it was in the ancient times. But the idea that philosophy must be embodied in everyday life and brought to life through our bodily practices in order to improve the aesthetic, ethical, individual, and social quality of life is still undervalued in their philosophies. This concept is changing in Shusterman's consequent approach. The last three chapters

offer concrete suggestions on how to integrate philosophy into our everyday lives, aiming not only to improve our personal lives, but also our societal conditions. For example, Voparil's original contribution is based on an analysis of how somaesthetic practices can make us more mindful of how whiteness is embodied in everyday life. Alternatively, we can find Formis's comprehensive analysis of the Greek concepts such as *aphrodisia*, *eros*, and *charis*. This analysis leads to the issue of reciprocity in sexual relationships. Koczanowicz's chapter, the final one in the book, effectively demonstrates how the body, or soma, can exert power in public demonstrations through agency and the creative uses in public spaces. This was evident in Poland following the ban on abortion. The recurring topic in these last four chapters symbolically connects them into one imagined section. They offer not only theoretical analyses, but also practical examples of how we can create a more ethical, inclusive and open societal space through something that seems very intimate at first glance (and often is): our bodily or somaesthetic practices.

After this brief insight into the book's content, we can conclude that its title is perfectly aligned with its subject matter. Having read it, we can clearly see how the art of living, even if we reduce it to the practice of freedom, will necessarily lead to the co-creation of a social and political environment of which the individual is always an integral part. The book reminds readers that, if we want to change our environments philosophically, this cannot be achieved without bodily practices, despite the fact that for thousands of years we have thought it could be done without them. I particularly like the Koczanowicz's idea of somapower, which creatively bridges Foucault's concept of biopower and Shusterman's somaesthetics. It clearly implies that, in the similar way that power is inscribed in us through our bodies, we can also create forms of counterpower using the same tool. I think this idea is implicitly present throughout the book, creating its inherent seal.

In conclusion, I would recommend this book to any potential reader. It is a book we need. It is not just another contribution to philosophies that have had and still have an

enormous impact on our thinking; more importantly, it could inspire us to create better conditions by using one of the strongest tools for creativity, morality and resistance that we already possess: our own body.

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